Action Research Project

An investigation exploring what method of delivery learners undertaking a L3 Award in Education and Training find most engaging

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Table of Contents

Introduction

For the purpose of this action research, the area of my teaching practice that I intend to explore is the use and effectiveness of online learning approaches in comparison to traditional face-to-face delivery models for internal teaching qualifications.

At present, I am responsible for the internal teaching and assessment of a variety of Assessor, Quality Assurer and Teaching qualifications, including the L3 Award in Education and Training course, at Company X to our delivery staff. Delivery of these internal learning programmes to date have very much been in line with objectivism (teacher-centred) models of learning, with the primary focus being the course content and how this will be taught to learners.

My "learners" for this course are full time, employed peripatetic Tutors/Assessors of our apprentices completing apprenticeship programmes in a work-based learning context. My learners spend a majority of their working time visiting their apprentices in their place of work to undertake teaching, learning and assessment activities with them. Due to this working arrangement, scheduling classroom based teaching sessions is very difficult and often problematic as Tutor diary commitments often clash with planned lesson times. The nature of my learners working patterns also has an impact on timely success. Although *overall* success rates are very high, some learners fail to complete their learning programme within agreed timeframes owing to their work commitments. Upon reflection of this issue, I would like to trial a different delivery method (online learning) that is more learner-centred (constructivism model of learning) and see if learners find this approach more engaging.

Action Research question

In light of the above comments, the question that I wish to explore and investigate using action research is:

> **What model of delivery do learners find most engaging for the Level 3 Award in Education and Training?**

Anticipated benefits of completing this Action Research

I believe action research into this topic will benefit my teaching practice, Company X and my learners in the following ways:

Benefits to my teaching practice

1. Opportunity for me to develop my skills and capabilities of designing and publishing online learning courses
2. Opportunity to apply teaching and learning theories to my teaching practice and assess their effect
3. Opportunity to design courses using different methods that learners find more engaging

Benefits for Company X

1. Increase in the timely success of the Level 3 Award in Education and Training qualification delivered internally to teaching staff
2. Increase in the number of skilled teaching staff with the ability to design and deliver simple training sessions for learners

Benefits for learners

1. Improved learning experience and outcomes as a result of course design that delivery that meets their needs and expectations
2. Increased learner satisfaction and motivation
3. Development and enhancement of general ICT skills

Overview of Action Research

The initial concept of action research was developed by Lewin (1948) and was not originally intended for education according to Waters-Adams (2006). It was not until the mid-1970s that the concept was applied to education as a result of the work and research of Stenhouse (1975). Stenhouse (1975, pg. 142) proclaimed that "curriculum research and development ought to belong to the teacher" and that "… it is not enough that teachers' work should be studied: they need to study it themselves".

Stenhouse's comments indicate the succinct differences that exist between regular 'research' and 'action research' and introduces the notion that action research involves self-reflection by the practitioner undertaking the research.

Various definitions of action research exist, McNiff (2002, pg. 6) explains that 'action research' is a form of self-reflective practice undertaken by the practitioner and that the idea

of self-reflection is key to the process and that 'empirical research' on the other hand is concerned with a process whereby "researchers do research on other people". McNiff goes onto say (2002, pg. 6) "Empirical researchers enquire into other people's lives. Action researchers enquire into their own. Action research is an enquiry conducted by the self into the self…", similarly, Lawson (2009, pg. 2) defines action research as "… investigating an education situation, context or challenge and using what we find out to improve things".

Lawson (2009, pg. 2) goes on to state the key differences between research and 'action research' as:

- a desire to *improve* things (such as practice or outcomes) is the core motivation
- the researcher is *part* of the situation they are investigating
- the process of carrying out the research is as *important* as the results

Whitehead, cited in Waters-Adams (2006) offers an alternative perspective of the action research process:

- I experience a problem when some of my educational values are negated in my practice;
- I imagine a solution to my problem;
- I act in the direction of the solution;
- I evaluate the outcomes of my actions;
- I modify my problems, ideas and actions in light of my evaluations

The action research process is often referred to as a cycle (Plan – Act – Observe – Reflect), Lawson (2009, pg. 5) provides an account of what happens at each of these stages:

1. Plan

   During this stage of the action research cycle, the researcher needs to plan their research in terms of the question(s) and/or changes they want to investigate. The research also needs to think about what methods they will use to undertake their research and how they will ensure their research remains ethical. An action plan will also be developed to ensure that the research is conducted in a logical and structured manner.

2. Act

   At this stage of the action research cycle, the researcher implements their research plan.

3. Observe

   The researcher collects data from a variety of sources that may be quantitative and/or qualitative ensuring that they have consent from participants.

4. Reflect

   During this stage of the action research cycle, the researcher will analyse the data they have collected and reflect on what this data means. Key to the success of the research is for the researcher to remain objective, involving others, such as colleagues, can help to ensure that objectivity is achieved.

The action research cycle does not always stop at the reflect stage however. Sometimes, as a result of the research conducted, the researcher may wish to undertake an additional cycle, and so on as shown below in figure 1.
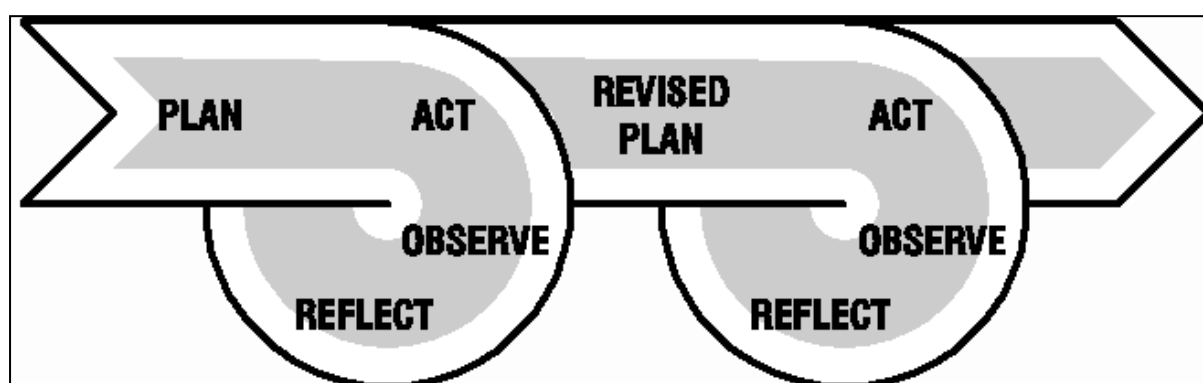
Figure 1: Action research cycle (Source: http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/3292g1.gif)

Given that my study is concerned with improvements of *my personal teaching practices* and will be *undertaken by myself* this confirms that action research is an appropriate method of study.

Literature review

For the purpose of this action research I have read and identified key ideas, issues and solutions that have been researched in the past. Based upon the results of this review, I was able to identify where there are gaps in existing knowledge and formulate a hypothesis.

E-learning is a constantly evolving phenomenon owing to ongoing technological and software developments. These changes present both opportunities and challenges for teachers wishing to exploit it for educational purposes and learners who need to engage with these types of courses.

The benefits of e-learning are well documented. It has been found that learners appreciate the degree of flexibility that e-learning offers in terms of access to course resources, communication and Tutor feedback and that this curriculum context was particularly appreciated by those in employment (full and part-time) whilst studying. It was also identified that learners reported high levels of engagement and enjoyment when they were given greater control of their learning. This would support the idea that implementing andragogy types of learning and using constructivism models of learning would promote learner autonomy and engagement. (Creanor, et al., 2008).

O'Regan, K. (2003) found that learning is enhanced when using technology so long as: the technology is reliable and accessible; learners benefit from clear support and guidance on the correct and proper use of virtual learning environments; no assumptions are made of learners ICT skills and capabilities; sites and resources are maintained and current and where possible, online learning and communication is augmented with face to face meetings. O'Regan's latter point may suggest that a blended learning approach is more effective and engaging than one that is solely distance learning.

Rivera and Rice (2002) performed interesting research which compared the outcomes of a course delivered using three different formats: classroom, a combination of classroom and e-learning (blended) and standalone e-learning. The execution of this project was somewhat flawed but data that was of keen interest was the mean average examination scores achieved by learners in the three different groups: 74.85, 73.35 and 73.97 respectively. This would suggest that all three approaches are as effective as each other given the nominal range of 1.5.

Research by Professor Goodyear (2003) established that a majority of learners enjoy and approve of e-learning experiences and that a very small minority don't. Those who were unhappy with the experience often encountered difficulties and challenges engaging with the resources and materials. Success of e-learning is centred on the selection and good use of e-learning resources and course design. This highlights the importance for those designing e-learning courses to be sufficiently skilled and knowledgeable. In summary, if learners are to fully embrace and enjoy e-learning they need to have a positive experience.

Research and investigations have also highlighted the potential pitfalls of e-learning when it is used ineffectively. Hara, N. and Kling, R. (1999) highlighted the importance of technical support and Tutor competence in relation to the use and application of distance/e-learning. To be successful, adequate arrangements need to be in place to support learners with technical difficulties they may have and Tutors involved in the delivery of these learning programmes need to have appropriate skill and experience in using e-learning.

Based upon the literature I have reviewed, it would appear that learners find e-learning engaging and enjoy the flexibility of this ever developing style of delivery so long as its execution is well managed. It has also been demonstrated, from a small scale study, that learner attainment is nearly identical between distance learning and traditionally classroom delivered courses. This literature review has also highlighted the potential pitfalls that exist with this style of delivery and that those facilitating these courses need to have adequate skill and knowledge to manage e-learning programmes if learners are to remain engaged and motivated with it.

Methodology

In order to conduct this research and answer my action research question I needed to decide which research methods I was going to use. Research methods can be considered as either 'qualitative' or 'quantitative'. I used a mixed method approach to this research by combining quantitative and qualitative research methods so that I was able to investigate my topic as broadly and in-depth as possible.

This approach will allow me to collect and analyse data from different sources and in different ways and in turn to triangulate the findings. Triangulation will allow me to compare how similar, or dissimilar, the responses are from each of these methods and will give

greater credibility and confidence to my findings. Where there is no correlation between findings this may help me to identify further areas for research.

Qualitative research

Merriam, cited in Lawson (2009) defines qualitative research as:

"Qualitative research is interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world".

Qualitative research requires the researcher to interpret data that is personal, often complex and that is in a non-numerical format. The researcher will explore people's feelings, thoughts and emotions about a particular view or topic. This research approach allows for topics to be researched and investigated in depth and for the researcher to further explore individual's responses and comments.

As I am keen to establish what model of delivery that learners find most engaging, I will conduct learner interviews using a selection of structured, semi-structured and unstructured questions. This will allow learners to discuss their thoughts and preferences and allow me to question these further. I will interview a small random sample of learners who completed their L4 Award in Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) qualification with me last year along with an equal sized sample from those currently enrolled and undertaking its revised equivalent, the L3 Award in Education and Training (AET). These interviews will either be conducted face-to-face or by telephone and will be recorded so that I can refer back to them when analysing my results and findings.

The benefits and advantages of using interview as a research method is that it will allow me explore the topic in depth. I will be able to gather learner thoughts and opinions as expressed by them and, where need be, question them further around their responses to ensure complete and full understanding. The 'structure' and 'direction' of the interview will be more dynamic too and dictated by the learners' contributions and responses to the interview questions.

The potential disadvantage to using interviews as a research method is that they are very time consuming and as such I will need to conduct these using a small sample, I intend to interview 6 learners out of a potential total of 18. When conducting interviews I will need to remain aware of my bias and opinions and ensure that I do not allow this to influence the

interview in anyway. Care also needs to be taken to ensure that questions posed during all interviews are clear and unambiguous.

Presentation of qualitative research findings

The interviews that I have developed include a series of structured, semi-structured and unstructured question types. To display these findings I will use a combination of direct quotes from interviewees and tables to help the reader understand the number of interviewees giving a particular response.

Quantitative research

A definition of quantitative research is offered by Aliaga and Gunderson, cited in Lawson (2009) as:

"Quantitative research is explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based methods (in particular statistics)."

Using quantitative research methods, the researcher will collect and review data that is impersonal, factual and in a numerical format. This research approach allows for topics to be considered more broadly than the qualitative approaches.

With regards to quantitative approaches, I will conduct an online questionnaire of all of last year's PTLLS and this year's AET learners to establish what model of delivery they prefer for an introductory teaching qualification. The questionnaire will make use of a variety of question types including: open questions; closed questions; multiple choice questions and Likert scale questions. This combination of questioning styles will allow me to better ascertain and assess learner preferences.

The benefits to using a questionnaire in my action research is that I can obtain information and views from a larger number of learners, my aim is to achieve a 100% response rate. Learners may be more open and honest with their opinions when completing a questionnaire as they are anonymous. The design and nature of the questionnaires in general allow for easier statistical analysis of the information that has been obtained.

Several key limitations of questionnaires that I must be mindful of include: the potential for low response rates; inability to explore unclear responses given within the questionnaire and potential for questions to be misinterpreted.

Presentation of quantitative research findings

The questionnaire that I am using requires respondents to demonstrate their preferences to a small number of questions by selecting a response from pre-defined options. These results will be best displayed using pie charts where I intend to show a proportion of respondents to a category or bar charts where I wish to show the number of responses received for each category. My questionnaire included some open ended questions (qualitative) and these results will be displayed in a format as described above for 'qualitative research'.

Research plan

I have produced a Gantt chart (see appendix 1) to illustrate how I am going to perform my research and the timescales involved.

In essence, I have two groups of learners that I will be undertaking research activities with:

Group 1 (PTLLS 2014)	Group 2 (AET 2015)
Achieved their L4 PTLLS qualification last year and this course was taught face-to-face using a teacher-centred approach. I will undertake interviews with three random learners from this group to gauge their experience of this learning model approach and ascertain their thoughts and opinions about online and blended learning approaches.	This group will be commencing their L3 AET in March 2015 which will be delivered online using a learner-centred strategy supported with remote Tutor support. As with group 1, I will undertake an interview with three learners that will focus on their experience, to date, of the learner-centred model of delivery for the L3 AET course and capture their thoughts and opinions about face-to-face and blended learning approaches.
I will provide both groups of learners with a questionnaire that contains identical questions to identify what model of delivery that learners find most engaging for the L3 AET.	

Ethical considerations

In order to ensure that my work is ethical I will seek and obtain consent from all those who partake in the research. I will explain to learners how the data and information that they provide me with will be used along with details of how it will be presented and reported at the end of the research. I will also ensure that learners understand that their personal data and responses will be reported anonymously and stored and used in line with Data Protection Act (1998) principles. Learners will be reminded that they have the right to withdraw their consent and responses at any point during the research process. Throughout the duration of

this research I will remain honest by ensuring that that I am accurate and open about my findings whilst being respectful to the views and thoughts of those involved.

Permission for this research has been sought and consequently approved by my line manager, the Operations Director at Company X, and I will ensure that I conduct this research within the agreed scope of this approval.

Key findings

In line with my action research plan, learner views were captured using questionnaires and interviews over a three week period (W/C 23/03/2015).

Questionnaires were created online using Survey Monkey and sent to a total of 18 past (n = 8) and current (n = 10) learners. Of the 18 questionnaires sent 12 were completed yielding a response rate of 66.6%. In addition to questionnaires, a total of 6 interviews were conducted with 3 past and 3 current learners. The responses from both research methods have proved to be extremely beneficial in assisting me in identifying what models of delivery learners will find most engaging for the L3 Award in Education and Training.

Questionnaire results

Below are details of the questions asked of learners and details of their responses:

Q1. At present, teaching, assessor and quality assurance qualifications at Company X are delivered via a series of scheduled classroom-based lessons and attendance is mandatory. Portfolio building and assignment writing takes place outside of these lesson times alongside existing work and personal commitments. Did/do you find this style of delivery engaging?

Responses:

Answer choices	No. of responses
Yes	10 (83.33%)
No	2 (16.67%)
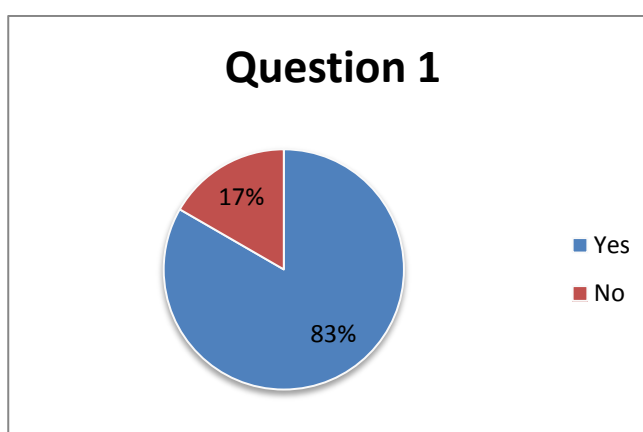
**Q2. What's your reason for choosing the response above (question 1)?**

Answer choices	Respondents comments
Yes	*I like that I can talk face to face with someone and get clarification straight away if there are things I don't understand*
	I prefer face to face teaching as you are focused solely on that teaching
	Yes, it was very engaging and we were able to ask questions as we went along. Once the internet issues were resolved, the webinars were effective.
	Good to have interactive class environment
	I find I learn better when face to face with the teacher - it also prompts me better to ask questions and not worry if they sound silly. It would be helpful if parts of the assignments could be done during lessons to avoid hassling the teachers outside of this?
	I feel that it gives clear teaching towards the qualification, with a suitable amount of time to complete the written assignments around my own personal schedule.
	It was good to be with others and share on ideas and have resources that were explained through workshops
	I found the workshops where we discussed concerns with the group and supported each other really useful and beneficial. I did find it hard to motivate to myself in my own time to write the long unit though
	This suits me as I feel the sessions are in depth and cover a lot with resources and sign posting so I then go away and know what I need to do.
	This suited me perfectly because there was a good mix of practical activities in the session along with being able to talk to the tutor face to face and ask questions as and when they arose. It then gave opportunity for reflection and further research privately to ensure I had understood everything and could tackle the assignments with confidence. The nature of our work meant I could fit this into times when a visit was cancelled and to progress in my career I fully expect there to be an element of private study in my own time.
No	*Paul used a range of resources in his delivery to engage the team*
	Difficult finding time to balance work commitments and requirements of course.

Q3. Which of the following delivery approaches (model of delivery) would you prefer for a teaching qualification?*

Answer choices	1st Preference	2nd Preference	3rd Preference
Classroom based approach	4 (33.33%)	6 (50.00%)	2 (16.67%)
Blended learning based approach	6 (50.00%)	6 (50.00%)	0 (0%)
Distance learning based approach	2 (16.67%)	0 (0%)	10 (83.33%)
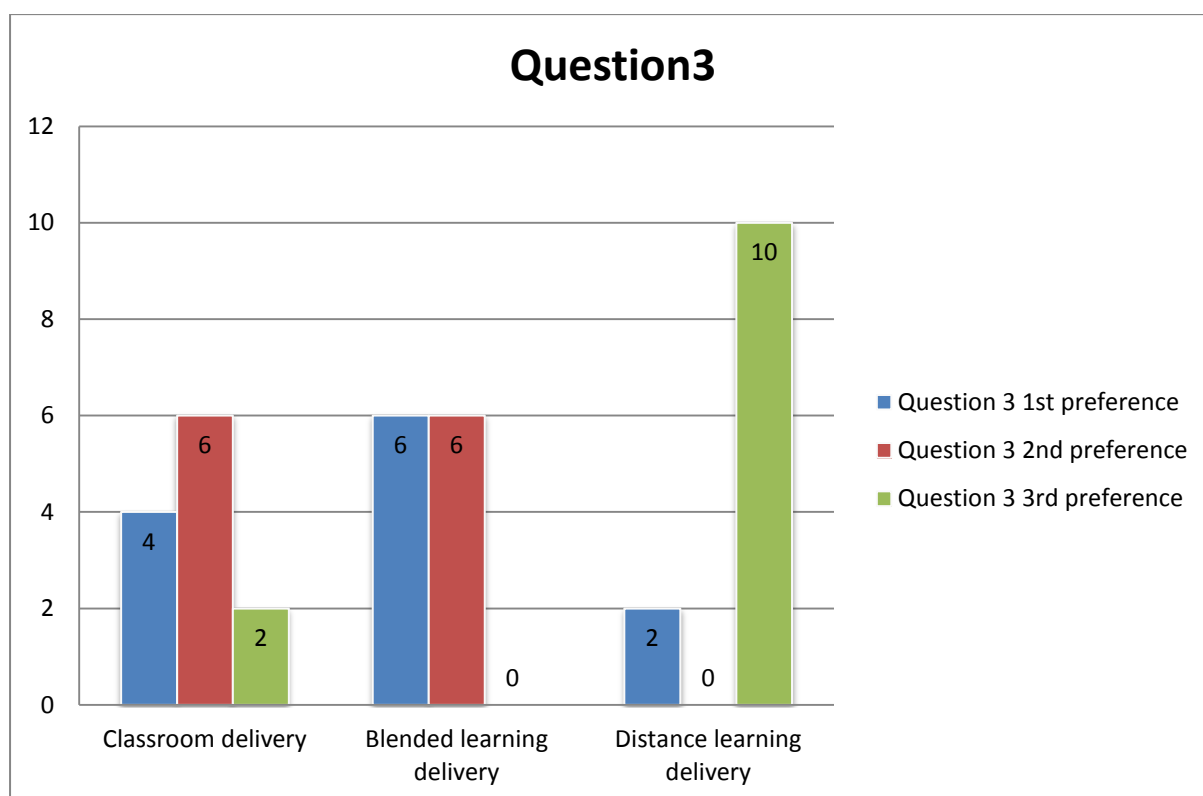
* Note: Respondents were given definitions of the terms 'classroom learning', 'blended learning' and 'distance learning' delivery models in order to answer this question.

Q4. Which learning approaches (model of learning) would you prefer for a teaching qualification?*

Responses:

Answer choices	No. of responses
Andragogical	10 (83.33%)
Pedagogical	2 (16.67%)
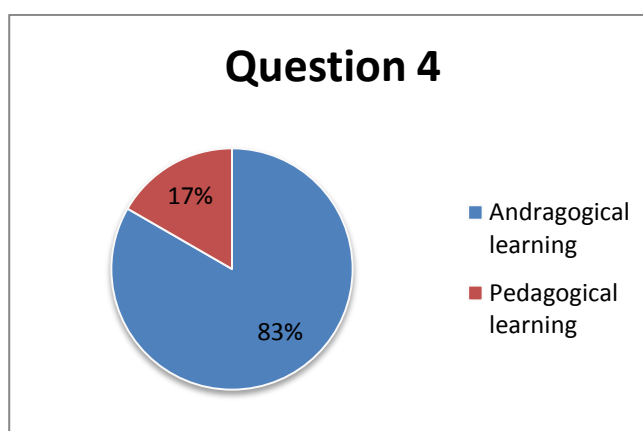
* *Note: Respondents were given definitions of the terms 'pedagogical learning' and 'andragogical learning' in order to answer this question.*

Q5. What's your reason for choosing the response above (question 4)?

Answer choices	Respondents comments
	I think teachers should facilitate learning as opposed to lead and direct it. I learn more when someone gives me initial information on a topic and then I need to go away and research it further.
	I zone out if I'm sat listening to someone all of the time and I prefer to be able to have ago or talk things through with people.
	Pedagogical can be covering what you already know/ wastes time better spent doing own research
	I learn better with direction at the beginning. I find resources like assignment handbooks really useful. Direction gives me motivation. And working to deadlines is something that I favour.
	This accounts for differentiation and flexibility
	To learn how to engage students to take on their own responsibilities for their work.
Andragogical	*I think learners need to take more control of their learning and not be dictated to - I feel they learn and understand better*
	I like to be involved, I like to ask questions and feel I learn from discussions and sharing experiences rather than being talked at or a session that is completely teacher led.
	I would choose this for myself as I feel I would learn best this way. In our job roles there are busier periods of the year and so I may not be able to give the commitment I would like to at this time but could do extra in quieter times. This applies for home life also, I know for myself I have months which will always be extremely busy for me so might choose to work on something less theory based during those periods as committing to study and research might be difficult but have quieter times when this would be more manageable. I also think that when you are shown the whole course content and understand what is required of you from the beginning, you can fit this into your role and build up as much naturally occurring evidence as possible.
	(one respondent skipped this question)

Pedagogical	*I would like a mix of both but as there is plenty of time to learn on the job, I would like the initial teaching to be about being led by the expert and learning a lot from them. This said some hands on sessions would mean that the learner is able to snow their commitment and properly get involved in the teaching aspect.*
	Because the I know what is expected of me and am able to complete tasks given in order to achieve teacher qualification

Interpretation of questionnaire results

The results of my questionnaire provided a useful insight into what past and current learners preferences are in terms of delivery models for an initial teaching qualification.

Interestingly 83% (n = 10) of respondents reported that they found the current model of delivery for initial teaching qualifications engaging a response that I was not expecting. Given that these respondents are in full time Tutor posts and many fail to submit assignments and complete their course by set target dates I was expecting a majority of respondents to report that they did not find this model engaging. To make further sense of this trend I have analysed the responses given to question 2 whereby respondents justified their response to this question. Of those who reported a positive preference to this question, many cited a preference for having face-to-face contact with me as the teacher and being able to ask questions as and when throughout the session and get immediate answers and clarity. Respondents also enjoyed being amongst their peers and liked being provided with resources (i.e. handouts) to support them with their learning and assignments. Some learners reported challenges with completing assignments in their own time and one suggested having additional classroom based sessions dedicated to the writing of their assignments for the course.

When presented with different delivery models for the initial teacher training course, the model that attracted the highest first preference was blended learning (n = 6) followed by classroom learning (n = 4) and distance learning (n = 2). Distance learning was the most common third preference with 10 responses. This suggests that learners still wish to have physical contact time with me as their teacher and their peers but would prefer to make use of a virtual learning environment (VLE) to access additional course content and learning resources. This is something that does not currently happen as all resources used as part of our initial teacher training courses are physical and somewhat 'traditional' in the form of textbooks and handouts.

When given descriptions of pedagogical and andragogical models of learning and asked to select their preference for an initial teacher training course, 83% of respondents (n = 10) selected a preference for an andragogical approach. This would further support learners' choices to question 3 and indicates that most learners are wishing to be more autonomous and in control of their learning and require me as a teacher to be more facilitative than directive. Question 5 asked learners to justify their response to this question and respondents stated that they prefer the teacher to take on a facilitative role and give initial advice and guidance. Many said they learn more as a result of their own research and reading and like having greater control of their learning.

Interview results

As part of the email sent to all respondents for the questionnaire, learners were asked if they were prepared to participate in a one-to-one interview to discuss how to make my initial teacher training course more engaging. A total of six interviews were conducted with past (n = 3) and current (n = 3) initial teacher training learners.

To commence each interview, I asked interviewees to tell me about themselves and their academic achievements so I had a better understanding of the interviewee demographics. The findings from this initial question are shown below in table 1.

Highest academic achievement (QCF level equivalent)	No. of responses
Level 2	1
Level 3	1
Level 4	1
Level 5	0
Level 6	3

All interviewees stated that they did not consider themselves as having an additional learning need and that they had no prior teaching experience prior to commencing their initial teacher training courses.

Interpretation of interview responses and data

During interviews, interviewees were asked to describe their experiences of compulsory and post 16 education. Many described their experiences of school as being one where the teacher was very much in control of the pace and direction of learning. They did what they

were told to do. Some described that some of the teachers' time and attention was spent on managing classroom behaviour, much to the detriment of the rest of the class and impacted their learning. When describing their experiences of post 16 education (i.e. 6th form, college, university, etc.), interviewees described a big cultural change and that the role of the teacher had significantly shifted from one of control and management to one of support and facilitation. One interviewee described her experience of the difference between compulsory and post 16 education by saying "... in school control was split 80:20 in favour of the teacher, whereas in college this changed to 20:80 in favour of learners." All interviewees had better learning experiences in their post 16 education as opposed to compulsory education and suggested that this was because their motivation levels were increased as they were studying courses and qualifications that they wanted to do and that the style of teaching used in this sector promoted and increased learner autonomy and they were learning new things for themselves. This preference for an andragogical learning type correlates with my questionnaire findings.

Some (n = 2) of the interviewees had completed distance learning courses before, with the Open University, and said they found this model of delivery very useful. Both interviewees commented on the quality of the VLE used, resources provided and very much liked the fact that they could plan their study time around existing parental and work commitments.

When discussing the concept of distance learning with all interviewees, 2 stated that they did not like the thought of learning remotely. Interestingly, these same people had the lowest academic achievement levels of the group (level 2 and 3). They also reported their IT skills as being average which could be a further indicator as to why this style of delivery did not appeal to them.

To conclude the interview, interviewees were asked "How can the delivery of the L3 Award in Education and Training be made more engaging?" All interviewees described a model of delivery whereby learners came together, physically or virtually, to be inducted on to the course. They saw my role as the teacher as being one of describing the course content and advising what they needed to do in terms of how and by when. As part of the induction process they wanted to be introduced to the online resources that have been developed for the course and shown how to access and make use of them. Following this initial induction a majority of learners (n = 5) said they would be happy to undertake the study on their own using a VLE. Many stated their preference for this was so that they could plan their study time around existing commitments in terms of work and home. All learners said that they would also want some face-to-face contact time with me as the teacher and thoughts varied

from scheduled classroom sessions for the whole group through to the ability to book one-to-one tutorial sessions to review progress and give support.

Conclusion

As part of my action research project I have attempted to answer the question "What model of delivery do learners find most engaging for the Level 3 Award in Education and Training?"

My research has highlighted that although 83% (n = 10) of learners find the current model of delivery for my initial teacher training courses to engaging, when faced with the possibility of having access to further resources and content on a VLE, this is something that they are very much interested in and would like to see moving forward.

The term 'model of delivery' was deliberately applied loosely to this study as I wanted to establish what model of learning learners find most engaging as well a delivery model that suits their current commitments best.

In relation to learning approaches learners reported a greater preference to the concept of andragogical learning and very much liked the idea of having greater autonomy and control over their learning experience. Many said this approach allowed them to learn at a pace that suited them so they could choose an appropriate amount of time to spend on learning topics as opposed to having this controlled and dictated by a teacher and lesson plan. Respondents to the questionnaire and interviewees described that my role as a teacher for this course needs to be one of facilitation as opposed to one of control, further confirming learners would find an andragogical approach most engaging.

In terms of a delivery model, the model most favoured by respondents to the questionnaire was 'blended learning' (n = 6) followed by 'classroom learning' (n = 4). Having reviewed the rationale for these choices and interviewed respondents further, learners state that they would like to see a delivery model that is initially teacher-led in a classroom (or virtual environment as suggested by some interviewees) for the purpose of induction and introductory themes and topics followed by access to an online VLE whereby all necessary resources and materials could be accessed. Many felt that this approach, supported with a VLE, would allow them to undertake their study at a time and pace that suited their individual learning needs and work/personal life commitments.

Although learners appear to be happy working alone for most of the course duration, respondents to the questionnaires and interviewees said they would like opportunities to work and interact with myself as the teacher and fellow peers on the course. When questioned further about these comments, interviewees suggested that these interactions need not only be in person (i.e. classroom activities and action learning sets), but could also be online by means of webinars or forums.

Review of hypothesis and existing literature review

My research appears to support my original hypothesis which was based upon my literature review that *"... learners find e-learning engaging and enjoy the flexibility of this ever developing style of delivery so long as its execution is well managed."* 83% of questionnaire respondents showed a preference for a blended style of learning which would see greater use of technology and e-learning resources as opposed to traditional classroom based lessons.

With reference to my literature review, my research appears to compliment Creanor et. al. (2008) who suggested that learners like the flexibility that e-learning can offer the degree of control it gives them. Responses from the questionnaire but more so from the interviewees demonstrated that learners are happy to engage with e-learning materials and resources so long as it is correctly introduced and appropriate support and guidance is provided by the teacher which reaffirms the findings of O'Regan (2003). To avoid the pitfalls of e-learning it was suggested by interviewees that e-learning materials will need to be easy to use and navigate which supports both Goodyear's (2003) Hara and Kling's (1999) findings. This illustrates the importance of not rushing this transition but investing proper time and resource into the following recommendations to ensure that the launch of a blended learning approach is as effective and more importantly, engaging as possible.

Recommendations

As a result of my research findings, I make the following recommendations for the design and delivery of future initial teacher training courses, such as the L3 Award in Education and Training:

1. Blended learning delivery model

   Review and redesign this course content and structure to make greater use of learning technologies and create a VLE on Moodle to implement a truly blended learning approach.

2. Induction

   Commence learners on the revised blended learning version of the L3 Award in Education and Training but conducting an induction session online by means of webinar or if diary commitments of learners permit, a classroom session. The induction needs to address usual induction objectives but most importantly show and demonstrate the VLE to learners so that they fully know and understand how to access the online resources and use them to best effect.

3. Andragogy model of learning

   Design resources and activities that promote a learner-centred approach and ensure that I and fellow teachers on the course adopt this approach in our teaching and support of learners. Learners want teachers on this course to take on facilitative and supportive roles – not to control and dictate.

4. Tutorials

   Offer all learners the opportunity to book remote or face-to-face with their teacher for the course as often or as little as they like so that they can get additional support if need be and review their progress to date on the course.

5. Reviews

   The L3 Award in Education and Training will last for 8 weeks and teachers should plan at least 1 review meeting ideally half way through (at 4 weeks) to review the learners progress to date and agree and individual action plan to ensure timely achievement of the award.

6. Action learning sets/Forums

   Create forums with Moodle that allow learners to discuss and share ideas and experiences. Explore the possibility to running physical or online action learning sets where learners can share their teaching related problems with their peers and try out their suggestions and ideas to see if they notice any improvements.

Evaluation of Action Research project

I am very happy with how my action research has gone. I identified an area of my practice and performance that was of real issue and concern for me. Action research prompted me to undertake a literature review on my topic and address my problem in a structured and logical way. As a result of my research I have been able to assess the views and opinions of several current and past initial teacher training learners and identify what could be done to make the course more engaging for them.

I believe my strengths in this research have been my ability to remain objective throughout, from the design of my questionnaire and conduct of interviews through to the interpretation of the quantitative and qualitative data that I have collected. I am fortunate that my respondents are members of staff and by taking time to explain the process of action research and my reason for choosing my topic, believe this encouraged them to give open, honest and frank responses to my questions. I think I made effective use of technology and am pleased that I was able to construct and distribute a professional looking Survey Monkey survey – something I have limited experience of doing.

I have faced several challenges whilst completing this research. Firstly, the concept of action research was a new notion for me so it has taken me some time to understand the concept and apply it correctly. I have very limited experience in conducting research and I particularly struggled with designing both my questionnaire and interview questions. I found it difficult to design an assessment tool that was short enough to promote a decent response rate but sufficiently detailed enough to provide enough useful data to help address my action research question. I think this is an area that I could further develop and would be keen to explore further training opportunities in relation to this. I would also be keen to explore training opportunities that will allow me to interpret and manipulate both quantitative and qualitative data in a more deep and meaningful way.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Action Research Gantt chart

Task	W/C 02/03/2015	W/C 09/03/2015	W/C 16/03/2015	W/C 23/3/2015	W/C 30/03/2015	W/C 06/04/2015	W/C 13/04/2015	W/C 20/04/2015
Identify action research question	■							
Undertake literature review	■	■						
Establish questionnaire content and create on Survey Monkey		■	■					
Establish interview questions and organise face-to-face or remote interviews with three PTLLS learners			■	■				
Establish interview questions and organise face-to-face or remote interviews with three AET learners					■	■		
Send survey to all PTLLS and AET learners				■	■	■		
Write up and analyse interview responses						■		
Write up and analyse interview responses							■	
Produce final action research report							■	■

Required resources:

- Telephone
- Digital voice recorded/Dictaphone
- Survey Monkey
- Meeting room to conduct interviews

Appendix 2: Survey Monkey questionnaire design

Dear colleague,

I am currently undertaking an action research project aiming to identify how learners would prefer the delivery of future teaching qualifications to be and what models of delivery they would find the most engaging.

To support me in this research project I would be most grateful if you could spare a few minutes to complete this short questionnaire. The next page provides some information concerning ethics and confidentiality.

Many thanks in advance for your support.

Paul Estall
Training & Quality Manager

Confidentiality
As part of this questionnaire you will not be asked to disclose any personal information and your responses are therefore completely anonymous. The responses that you provide to the following questions will only be used to identify which models/methods of delivery learners would prefer for teaching qualifications.

Right to withdraw/refuse
Completion of this questionnaire is not mandatory. If you do complete the questionnaire, you reserve the right to request your responses be removed from this research at any time. If you wish to exercise this right, please contact Paul Estall.

Previous experiences
At present, teaching, assessor and quality assurance qualifications at Company X are delivered via a series of scheduled classroom-based lessons and attendance is mandatory. Portfolio building and assignment writing takes place outside of these lesson times alongside existing work and personal commitments.

1. Did/do you find this style of delivery engaging?

> Yes
> No

2. What's your reason for choosing the response above?

Delivery models
There are three approaches that I am currently exploring for the delivery of future teaching, assessing and internal quality assurance qualifications:

Classroom based delivery:
Learners would be required to attend a series of regular lessons at Company X in Twickenham. Outside of the classroom, they would be responsible for building portfolios of evidence and writing assignments. Learning resources would be in the form of books and the internet.

Blended learning delivery:
This delivery approach combines traditional classroom delivery (as described above) with the use of e-learning.

Learners would be required to attend a series of mandatory classroom-based lessons at Company X to learn key topics and some course content and resources (PDFs, PowerPoint slides, videos, podcasts, etc.) would be delivered using a virtual learning environment (VLE) such as Moodle, accessible via e-Track. The use of a VLE would allow learners to take greater control of their studies/learning outside of the classroom.

Distance learning delivery:
For this delivery model, all course content and resources (PDFs, PowerPoint slides, videos, podcasts, etc.) would be published on a VLE such as Moodle, accessible via e-Track.

Learners would be inducted onto the course by means of a live webinar which they can access from any location and shown how to access and make use of the resources.

After their induction, should learners require additional help and support with their studies they can access their Tutor remotely by telephone and email or by arranging a 1:1 visit. In effect, this delivery model would allow learners to take full control of their studies choosing when and where they study.

3. Based upon the definitions provided, which of the following delivery approaches would you prefer for a teaching qualification?

Classroom-based approach   [select preference]
Blended learning approach   [select preference]
Distance learning approach   [select preference]

Types of learning
Two distinct types of learning exist and they are known as:

Pedagogy
A teacher dominated learning situation as typically used in schools. Whereby the teacher does all or most of the talking, dictates the pace of learning (or rather the pace of teaching!) and learners are rather passive – doing what they are told to do.

Andragogy
A learner-centred learning situation whereby learners are treated as adults. Learners have greater control of their learning and it becomes more self-directed as learners choose what they would like to focus on how and how. Learning becomes an active process in which the learner is able to participate fully.

4. Based upon the definitions provided, which of the above learning approaches would you prefer for a teaching qualification?

Pedagogical model of learning
Andragogical model of learning

5.What's your reason for choosing the response above?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your input is much appreciated.

Regards,

Paul

Appendix 3: Interview questions

1.Tell me about yourself: previous qualifications, teaching experience, learning needs difficulties?

2.Describe your experience at school and how you found the typical teacher-centred approach of learning?

3.Describe your experience after school (i.e. FE/HE) and what differences you noticed in delivery?

4.Did you prefer school or non-compulsory education and Why?

5.Have you completed a distance learning course before (i.e. OU) and how did you find it?

6.How would you rate your IT skills? Would this put you off doing a distance learning course?

7.Given that you undertake courses in addition to your full time teaching role, what can be done to make course delivery and design more engaging?

Appendix 3: Interview questions