

# Knowing Demographical Challenges of Adult Learners: A Vital Tool for Administrators in Managing Adult Learning Programmes in the Public Technical Universities of Ghana

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## Abstract

This study sought to investigate demographical challenges confronting part time management studies students at the Ho Technical University of Ghana and also ascertain how these demographical challenges affect these adult students. Coffield & Moseley (2022) indicated that now many educators want to create equal opportunities for adult learners in every social setting but stated that, despite this paradigm shift, much has not been achieved in policy formulation and implementation to include adult learners with demographical demands in the plans of tertiary institutions. The findings of the study will significantly, help stakeholders such as faculty, administrative and technical supporting staff in the development and implementation of the part time management studies programme of the Ho Technical University of Ghana once they have a better understanding of the demographical challenges of adult learners. The descriptive survey design was used for this study to gather information from a large sample of people relatively quickly and inexpensively. The design takes cognizance of both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data were collected through the interview which was categorized and organized thematically in NVivo version 12 by QRS International. The quantitative data were generated by a questionnaire, summarized, and analyzed using the XLSTAT package. The findings of the study on the demographical challenges confirmed characteristics that played roles in either the participation or the success of adult learning activities. The result of the study showed that demographical challenges impeded the progress of adult learners

in the part time management studies programme at the Ho Technical University of Ghana. The study recommends that administrators of this programme should create E-learning platforms with options of choosing from either regular sessions, sandwich programmes, or distance arrangements to make adult learners choose a session of the programme that may be suitable for them from the comfort of their offices, homes and to be done at their convenient times. The study also recommended that it is important that administrators of the programme train personnel and faculty of Ho Technical University on the practice of e-learning and adult education techniques to make it efficient and effective.

### Keywords

Adult, Learners, Faculty, E-Learning

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## 1. Introduction

In recent times, tertiary education has become important the world over as the main tool for viable development in every society [Wolter \(2012\)](#), as a result, every higher educational institution including some in Ghana is designing adult friendly programmes and systems by setting up distance, evening, weekend and sandwich learning programmes to enable adult learners to have the opportunity to access tertiary education and also to reduce the pressure on their main campuses. One may, however, argue whether stakeholders realize the demographical challenges these adult learners face apart from other social commitments also being the larger part of the working class, in upgrading themselves for the current web of technological efficiencies and effectiveness. To cope with this drastic world demand for change, the government of Ghana also over the last five years upgraded polytechnics in the country to university status to award higher degrees. Thus, offering past students largely adult learners to come back for top up programmes for either a year or two to acquire first and second degrees either through regular sessions, sandwich programmes, or distance arrangements.

This study is centered on what selected demographical factors affect adult learners in public Technical Universities of Ghana and how administrators of these programmes help to mitigate these challenges confronting the adult learners.

[Mintz \(2022\)](#), in his write up “Moving beyond the standard definitions of who is an Adult?” gave 3 definitions of an adult as follows:

- Child’s definition: Someone who is older, authoritative, decisive, and doubt-free.
- Post-World War II definition: Someone who is married, has children, and, if male, supports his family and if female, cares for her family.
- Legal definitions: A person who can drive at 16, vote and serve in the military at 18, drink at 21, rent a car at 25 and is legally responsible for their actions.

Mintz (2022), also noted that what needs to be associated with adulthood is maturity, caring, responsibility for himself, reliability, experience and responsibility for others. He also said, what distinguishes adults from those who are younger is that adults live not for themselves alone, but for those who depend on them, whether these are their children, a partner, aging parents, friends, or co-workers. However, these adult learners apart from these dependencies have their demographical challenges such as age factor, marital status and gender that may act as challenges apart from the social and other responsibilities that impeded them as adult learners.

Mokibelo & Seru (2020) argue that socio-cultural factors largely account for the high unemployment rate in the United Kingdom. Mokibelo & Seru (2020), generalize this assertion that students from the University of Botswana are similarly affected by these sociocultural factors.

Ryu (2022) argues that time, age and money are obvious challenges that prevent adult learners from achieving their educational goals. For Ryu (2022) adult learners are “commuters”, married, full time workers, have children, do household work, and care for children before involving in school work. Finding out if the outcome of Ryu’s research affects all adult learners irrespective of location will be in the right direction.

Most adult learners in the developing world find learning very difficult to either enroll, follow or complete various learning programmes due to demographical and institutional challenges (Kokkos, 2015). The effort to continually investigate what these challenges are and how they could affect adult learners is therefore worth pursuing.

Various demographical factors such as the age of the learners, socioeconomic activities and occupation affect the participation of adults in learning programmes, Adeshina & Idowu (2013) concluded that funding and creation of adult learning centers better at shorter distances and it creates more access. It thus helps adult learners with these demographical challenges to participate in learning programmes.

It is therefore important for administrators of adult learning programmes to know the demographical challenges of adult learners as a vital tool for managing adult learning programmes in the public Technical Universities of Ghana. The purpose of this study has therefore looked into how these demographical factors affect these adult learners as they embark on further studies.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Adult formal learning is on the increase due to the rise in technological knowledge how thereby compelling most adults, especially those in the working class to return to the classroom to develop themselves for efficient and effective performance. However, one cannot gross over the fact that these adult learners as per their characteristics have a lot of duties that will challenge and impede their learning. Identifying and ascertaining some of these challenges, how they affect adult learners and how they can be addressed in the future is, therefore, worth researching. This study sought to investigate demographical challenges con-

fronting part time management studies students at the Ho Technical University of Ghana and also investigate by ascertaining how these demographical challenges affect these adult students.

#### **Related Research Questions**

What are the demographical factors confronting part time management studies students at the Ho Technical University of Ghana?

Do demographical challenges affect adult students' part time management studies students at the Ho Technical University of Ghana?

#### **Significance of the study**

Once stakeholders, including faculty, administrative staff, and technical support staff, have a better understanding of the challenges faced by adult learners, the study's findings will be extremely helpful in the development and implementation of the part-time management studies program at the Ho Technical University of Ghana. The study's results will also be used as a template for further research and as the foundation for fresh theories and further investigation.

## **2. Literature Review**

According to Mintz (2022), adults have challenges, duties and obligations in a way that children, adolescents, and most twenty-somethings do not have. He concluded that these responsibilities make the lives of adults more stressful and demanding than at any other stage of life and said it is these duties such as marriage and children that capitalize life with meaning and purpose in adults.

According to McClusky (1970) cited by Ojala, M. (2022), the period of adulthood is one of growth change, experience, and integration where the adult tries to balance between the amount of energy available and activities that can be indulged into at any point in time. McClusky (1970) concluded that, for an adult to play their roles, they need energy or the power of life. From this point of view, an adult is a person who qualifies to act as such according to the specification of any society he or she finds him/herself.

Johnston (2020), an adult learner is a mature person who is not a regular or traditional student and who is involved in any form of formal learning.

Peters (2010) defined *education as an activity that takes place in many diverse venues and is intended to develop knowledge, understanding, valuing, growing and caring.*

Burns (2020) says distance learning is a generic term that includes a range of teaching and learning strategies referred to as corresponding education or corresponding study at a further level.

The question then arises; what is adult education or adult learning? Kapur (2019) said Adult education is the process of organizing educational programmes for adults.

Distance Education started around 1728 as distance learning and was used to teach students how to write in shorthand through lessons sent to their homes

weekly through their mail. Throughout the 1700s and 1800s, distance education allowed anyone to gain valuable job skills even if they lived well away from major centers of education and commerce. Al-Worafi (2022), Merriam & Bierema (2014), said adult learners are a different group of people aged 25 and older with a wide range of cultural and educational backgrounds, abilities, responsibilities, and experiences. Adult Learners return to education for personal or professional reasons. A mature person who is not a regular or traditional student and who is involved in any form of formal learning.

Adult Learning is a formal, non-formal and informal learning event that adult does after a break after leaving formal learning or training. Thus, education does not end at the acquisition of knowledge (Herawan et al., 2016).

With this definition, the part-time management studies students at the Ho Technical University of Ghana qualify as adult learners who are in school to acquire knowledge to perform their roles in society.

The psychologist also defines an adult as someone self-sufficient and responsible for her or his own decisions. Psychology also hypothesized that *adults have challenges, duties and obligations in a way that children, adolescents, and most twenty-somethings do not have.*

John Locke said, man, is born with a vacant mind without innate ability called *Tabula Rasa*, that we fill with “ideas” or learning through experiencing the world using the five senses for a man to function and use as his supervisory ethics in life. Thus, learning aids the adult to alter and manage the surroundings.

The National Center for Education Statistics, USA wrote that, adult learners normally do not either enroll or complete postsecondary education at the proper time and so do part-time courses once they become independent of their parents and financially sound. However, they are permanent employees as well as students, have demographical challenges such as age, marital status, gender, and dependent relatives, and are normally single parents without high standard school diplomas.

In reviewing the demographical challenges of adult learners such as age, marital status and gender, Ryu (2020) also said time, marriage and money are obvious challenges that prevent adult learners from achieving their educational goals. Ryu (2020) said adult learners are “commuters”, married, full time workers, have children, do household work, and care for children before involving in school work irrespective of their gender. This according to Ryu, if not handled properly, can be most challenging to adult learners and may even cause them to drop out. According to Ryu, the percentage of adult learners who spend time on responsibilities outside the class is as follows: “employment—68%, housework—85%, childcare—41%, adult care—23%, and homework and internships—17%”. Again, the inability of adult learners to obtain financial assistance or do any meaningful financial planning due to the above other financial related responsibilities according to Ryu is a second major challenge that can prevent adult learners from succeeding in any learning opportunity. Zemke (1984) argues that physiologically, as one advances in age the body goes through a lot of physical changes

and this impedes learning speed and other activities like completing assignments on time and doing presentations.

Coffield & Moseley (2022), now many educators have shifted their focus to “equal opportunities” or “inclusion” in every social setting. Ecclestone however, stated that, despite this paradigm shift, much has not been achieved in policy formulation and implementation to include adult learners with other demographical demands in the plans of tertiary institutions. According to Ecclestone, the relationship between education as the force for social justice, supporters of student-centered curricula, and vocational training are some of the reasons for this policy’s neglect to cater to adult learners. Deductively, these challenges are more predominant due to poor income levels, limited counseling, facilities and multiple household problems related to extended family.

According to Glick (2005), education serves as a platform for teaching skills, knowledge, and the philosophies of social norms suggest that, higher education is the key to survival in this circular world. Busher & James also revealed that non-traditional women engage in degree programmes to improve themselves, their vocation, family, self-worth, and to know more about things around them. Tan (2021) contends knowing new things in the world are fast changing in the economy, information systems, and technology; some jobs have been eliminated, vocations faced out, some altered, and new standards raised. This development according to Tan coupled with other societal factors has forced many adults mostly in the formal sector to return to school. Cross iterated that some spouses encountered challenges relating to unstable marriages, broken homes, and inability to attend to children and these can disrupt school life and pose serious challenges to learning which can affect these adult learners negatively.

Loeng (2020) says, knowing that adult learners have a lot of social and demographical challenges, another alternative way forward to help adult learners is to help organizations to develop ways of encouraging their employees to learn by developing internal promotional programmes and making them aware of learning avenues by supporting them at times and places that are congruent with work schedules, including working with organizations to establish education extension centers at or near work locations. Indeed, despite the general challenges of adult learners, gender also plays specific roles in challenging adults depending on their gender as males or females. Appiah-Kubi (2005) observes that in developing countries such as Ghana, females largely bear the burden of household responsibilities making it very difficult for them to embrace wholly other responsibilities such as pursuing further education. In traditional Ghanaian society, due to a combination of socio-economic reasons, females marry earlier and this has its responsibilities (Appiah-Kubi, 2005). Marriage is a load according to McClusky (1970) in his S-O-R Differential Psychology Theory. Because of the traditional supremacy role of men in a spousal relationship, women often avoid schooling, and even if they pursue continuing education, they are challenged

more because of the extra burden of childcare (Muheirwe, 2019).

As noted by Kara (2019), it was estimated that there has been a 65 percent increase in enrollments of students at 35 years and older. Kara (2019), said this variation and irregularity is because they mostly continue *their education* with *their work* and *family responsibilities*. With all these in mind, evidence of demographical challenges for adult learners who are disrupted in their responsibilities due to their marital status. Age is a key determinant regarding adult teaching and learning goes by ages and stages, and depending on a person's age, learning could be challenging (Knowles, 1984).

With these definitions and explanations. I also see adult learners as any formal, non-formal, and informal learning events that adults do after a break in learning after leaving any form of learning or training. In sum, it is logical to presume that all of the demographic characteristics of the adult learner listed by the various writers in the literature also apply to adult learners in Ghana. Indeed, due to a combination of socioeconomic, demographic, and institutional challenges, most adult learners in the developing world find learning very difficult. This contextually means that stakeholders should exert a lot of effort in removing barriers that impede adult learning.

### 3. Methodology

A descriptive survey design was used for this study. According to Wang & Cheng (2020), a survey permits the researcher to gather information from a large sample of people relatively quickly and inexpensively. The design takes cognizance of both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data was collected through face-face interviews using an interview guide which was categorized and organized thematically. The interview data were transcribed and preserved as qualitative data for thematic analysis in NVivo version 12 by QRS International to establish the meaning of the data. With that, the qualitative data were extracted manually from the transcripts in the NVivo application and summarised into various themes. A survey design was also adopted to collect data for quantitative analysis by a closed-ended self-administered questionnaire designed, summarized, and analyzed using the XLSTAT package.

#### **The population and sampling of the Study**

According to Saunders et al. (2015: p. 151), a study population is “the full set of cases or units that the sample is drawn from”. Robson (2002) says the population is the total set of entities from which decisions are made. In this study, the population was part time management studies students at the Ho Technical University of Ghana. The total population for this study is estimated at 200 made up of level 300 and 400-degree Top Up part time management studies students at the Ho Technical University of Ghana.

The part time management studies students at the Ho Technical University of Ghana were chosen because of the age bracket that qualifies them as adult learners.



A sample is a smaller group or subset of the population in such a way that the knowledge gained is representative of the total population under study. The sample is essentially a selection from the population (Robson, 2002). The sample size of the study was seventy five (75) made up of 45 males and 30 females because males dominated the 2 classes sampled in conjunction with the recommendation by Sarantakos. According to them a sample size of 1/3 is ideal to represent a population.

First, the number of respondents from each class was proportionally determined. Second, the quota sampling technique which is a procedure in which the researcher sets a quota of respondents that are chosen from specific population groups, defining the basis of selection was employed. In this study, the specific groups were the gender of respondents. Thus, the number of males and females from each level was chosen proportionally.

Finally, a stratified simple random sampling technique, using the lottery method was employed to select the final respondents for the study. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select all three (3) Heads of Department, the Dean, and the School Officer of the faculty because, in the judgment of the researcher, these categories of respondents had the specific information needed regarding the study and seen as knowledgeable regarding the subject matter under investigation.

Lakey (2010) intimated that most adult learners are self-financed either through loans, spousal support, and often limited parental support or with the bearing of children, these collectively posed a problem for the adult learner in terms of learning ability, attending lectures, and doing home assignments.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

These analyses focus on selected demographical characteristics which act as challenges to adult learning situations. The selected demographical features are; age, gender, marital status and number of children.

##### Age Distribution of Student/Learners

Age is a key determinant regarding adult learning. Learning goes by ages and stages, and depending on a person's age, learning could be challenging. Table 1 provides data on the ages of learners.

**Table 1.** Age distribution of student/learners.

Age	Frequency	Percentage
26 - 30	13	20
31 - 35	26	40
36 - 40	19	29.23
41 and above	17	10.77
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field data, 2022.



The data in **Table 1** shows that out of 75 respondents majority, 26 (40%) were between the ages of 31 - 35 years. This was followed by another set of respondent, who were between the ages of 36 - 40 years and these constituted 19 (29.3%).

The revelation in the data that 69.2% of the learners fell between the ages of 31 - 40 years means that they were all proceeding to their middle-age level of 50 - 60 years by Ghanaian standards. Within this period and the context of the educational ladder of Ghana, it means that they should have long since completed their professional training.

In an interview session regarding age related challenges a male student noted:

*My age has been a challenge in pursuing this programme. I feel weary of learning these days as compared to previous years when I was in my twenties and could memorize a lot. These days learning is difficult for me.*

A female student observes:

*Nowadays, I sleep a lot in class because it appears I am always tired even before the class starts and so cannot concentrate.*

Again, regarding age as a challenge a head of the department observes:

*Nowadays, there are frequent reports that the students/learners sleep a lot in class. Facilitators report that they appeared always tired during facilitation.*

The School Officer also noted:

*We have gotten problems with virtually all the learners in this program. Many of them always appear weak and weary. Even checking their result is problematic.*

Deductively are infers from the data age as a demographical factor posed challenges for the learners. Zemke argues that physiologically, as one advances in age the body goes through a lot of physical changes and this impedes learning speed and other activities like completing assignments on time and doing presentations. Merriam & Bierema (2014), said adult learners as a different group of people aged 25 and older with a wide range of cultural and educational backgrounds, abilities, responsibilities, and experiences.

### Gender Representation of the Respondents

Most often than not, gender defines developmental tasks and gender roles with various responsibilities. This is also true for learning. **Table 2** provides data on the gender of learners.

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**Table 2.** Present the gender of respondents.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	19	27.65
Male	56	82.35
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field data, 2022.

The data in **Table 2** shows that males were the majority in terms of the student population accounting for 56 (82.3%) of the total respondent. The females accounted for 19 (17.6%). Understandably this revelation is not surprising. Indeed, traditionally females have more gender roles with various responsibilities than men. It is only in recent times that males are helping to perform some female roles in Ghana.

When asked the sort of challenge they faced because of their gender, a female respondent pointed out.

*My greatest challenge in this programme is combining home responsibilities, and working responsibilities with learning responsibilities, really find it difficult to do my assignment and even attending some of the weekend lectures.*

Another female asserted:

*I have a nurturing baby at hand and there is no one to assist so sometimes I bring the baby to school to the shock of my colleagues and the facilitators.*

A male respondent had this to say:

*My only challenge is that at times the females in the class portray that they are the only ones versed in gender roles and various responsibilities but we point to them that we the guys have a lot at hand. These perceptions normally leads to many unnecessary arguments.*

This finding of the study confirms **Ryu (2020)**, findings that adult learners are “commuters”, married, full time workers, have children, do household work, and care for children before involving in school work irrespective of their gender. The responses from the students also show what happens in Ghanaian society and confirm **Appiah-Kubi’s (2005)** findings that in developing countries such as Ghana, females largely bear the burden of household responsibilities—making it very difficult for them to embrace wholly other responsibilities such as pursuing further education. This is especially true for child rearing, where unwritten norms place the responsibilities largely on the women.

### **Marital Status of the Respondents**

**Table 3** provides data on the marital status of adult learners.

The data in **Table 3** show that more than half, 39 (52.2%) of respondents were married compared to 29 (43.2) who were not married and Seven (4.48%) were widows. The literature proved **Kara (2019)**, findings of demographical challenges for adult learners who are disrupted in their learning due to the challenges

**Table 3.** Marital status of the respondents.

<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Married	39	52.24
Single	29	43.28
Widow	7	4.48
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field data, 2022.

experienced by these adult learners vary depending on their age, gender and marital status.

Again analytically, it could be said that the majority of those who were married were females because in traditional Ghanaian society, due to a combination of socioeconomic reasons, females marry earlier Appiah-Kubi (2005). This does not mean that males were not married, but that is because more men in Ghana often marry after school life. The implication is that majority of the single respondents were males.

Regarding the challenges respondents face relative to their marital status while pursuing the education programme, a female student commented:

*I do not have total freedom in pursuing this programme. I do not have enough learning time and time for my assignments. I am responsible for almost all of my house chores including bathing and taking care of the children.*

Another female versed out:

*As a woman, I sometimes feel disturbed when I have to leave my assignment as a student to go home to cater to my husband and the children.*

A male student who was married noted:

*My main challenge in pursuing this course is that I have to contend with my marital responsibilities. I have a wife and children and I must always be at home in time to cater to them because my wife doesn't understand that classes end at 8 pm and yet I sometimes get home after 11 pm with the excuse of doing assignment and having group discussions.*

There are many truisms in the data containing the responses of adult learners, marital responsibilities combined with other responsibilities are bound to limit the full potential of anyone struggling to excel. As indicated by Muheirwe (2019), because of the traditional supremacy role of men in a spousal relationship, women often avoid schooling, and even if they pursue continuing education, they are challenged more because of the extra burden of child care.

**Table 4** provides data on the number of children of adult learners.

From **Table 4** it is seen that only 70 responded and out of the 70 respondents 34 (55%) had 3 - 5 children, 15 (18.75%) had no children and 21 (26.5%) had more than 5 or more children.

The findings of the study confirm Mintz's (2022), conclusion that adults have challenges, duties and obligations in a way that children, adolescents,

**Table 4.** Number of children.

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
None	15	18.75
3 - 5	34	55
More than 5	21	26.25
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field data, 2022.

and most twenty-somethings do not have. He concluded that these responsibilities make the lives of adults more stressful and demanding than at any other stage of life and said it is these duties such as marriage and children that invest life with meaning and purpose in adults.

As iterated by [Cross \(1981\)](#), some spouses encountered challenges relating to unstable marriages, broken homes, and inability to attend to children and these can disrupt school life and pose serious challenges to learning which can affect these adult learners negatively. All of these have implications for how learners finance their education. [Lahey \(2010\)](#) intimated that most adult learners are self-financed either through loans, spousal support, and often limited parental support or with the bearing of children, these collectively posed a problem for the adult learner in terms of learning ability, attending lectures, and doing home assignments.

## 5. Findings

Analytically and in summing up the discourse on the demographical challenges of adult learners, it can be said that adults experience a gradual decline in physical and sensory capabilities. Adults pass through a set of developmental phases, from young adulthood to middle life and subsequently to old adulthood. The net effects of this gradual decline are a gradual decline in learning capabilities, stress, and anxiety. These together with job pressure, marital issues, child care and financial problems affect the learning achievement of adult learners.

The focus is on strategies needed to mitigate the demographical challenges adult learners encountered in pursuing their programmes, compared with reviewed literature, which conforms to the findings of this study. Indeed, the majority 40% of the respondents were between the ages of 31 - 35 followed by the age range of 36 - 40 recording 29.23%. As noted by the National Center for Education Statistics in 1985 and 1996, it was estimated that there has been a 65 percent increase in enrollments of students at 35 years and older and this has been confirmed. This was very important as an indication that education is life-long and learning can take place anywhere, anytime, and anyhow no matter the age of the person.

About half of them were married, while 29 percent were single and 4.4% were widowed. The findings implied that the majority of the respondents combined married "load" and schooling at the same time, Marriage is a load according to [McClusky \(1970\)](#) his S-O-R Differential Psychology Theory. The theory, therefore, confirms that the responsibilities attached to marriage such as caring for children, spouses, the home, and other related activities as recorded among others in the findings were among the most serious challenging issues that affected the academic performance of adult learners especially the females negatively.

The demographical challenges confirmed characteristics that they played a role in either the participation or the success of adult learning activities, especially as the time for learning is concerned.

## 6. Conclusion

The utilization of adult learning to increase access as the world's population soars has dawned on humanity. Education in today's context means spreading education over a larger geographical space in giving a greater portion of humanity, especially its adult segment skills and knowledge required for national development and integration.

Today, the nation Ghana is on the move with the promise of total development, and an important measure of this forward movement will be educating its citizenry. In this context, adult education in all its forms must be given the needed attention. Although the expression of the top up degree programme at the Ho Technical University brings about demographical challenges for adult learners, it must be given immediate attention to time and distance through technology by administrators of all adult learning programmes in the public Technical Universities of Ghana.

## Recommendation

The result of the study showed that demographical challenges impeded the progress of adult learners in the part time management studies programme at the Ho Technical University of Ghana. The study recommends that management of this programme should be done by creating E-learning platforms with options of choosing either regular sessions, sandwich programmes, or distance arrangements to make adult learners choose a session of the programme that may be suitable for them from the comfort of their offices, homes and to be done at their convenient times. It is also important to train personnel and faculty of Ho Technical University on the practice of e-learning to make it efficient and effective.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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