



Research Article

**RE-IMAGINING TRANSFORMATIVE STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE AND ENGAGING ONLINE LEARNING: PERCEPTIONS OF FACULTY MEMBERS IN UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA**

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**Abstract**

With the fast shift to online learning, mastering effective digital teaching methods has become crucial for educators. Studies in Kenya show that many faculty members still lack the skills needed for online teaching. This study looked at faculty perceptions after a webinar attended by 138 participants that aimed to improve online teaching practices. The webinar focused on three goals: assessing views on effective teaching methods for virtual learning, exploring faculty understanding of constructive alignment in online course design, and identifying areas for further professional development in online teaching. Feedback from a post-webinar survey with 100 participants showed high satisfaction. Sixty percent rated the session as excellent, while 40% rated it as very good. Participants reported that the webinar significantly improved their understanding of online teaching, especially regarding engagement strategies and the use of collaborative tools to encourage interaction in virtual classrooms. They also noted the importance of constructive alignment as a way to connect learning outcomes, teaching methods, and assessments in online education. Despite these improvements, respondents pointed out the need for more training in advanced topics like online assessment methods, instructional design, practical applications of constructive alignment, and integrating interactive tools such as gamification, quizzes, and collaborative platforms. These findings highlight the increasing demand for professional development that gives educators the skills to create more engaging and effective online courses. While webinars serve as a good starting point for online teaching, ongoing training in specialized areas is vital for meeting faculty needs and boosting student engagement and success in virtual learning environments.

**Key Words:** Online learning; constructive alignment; online pedagogy



### **Introduction:-**

The shift to online learning, hastened by the COVID-19 pandemic, has changed educational practices around the world (Carter et al., 2020). Educators now need to create engaging and interactive learning experiences in virtual settings (Anderson, 2020). In Kenya, like in many other countries, the fast adoption of online learning has forced higher education institutions to rethink their teaching strategies to ensure quality and effectiveness. This change requires understanding online teaching methods and using tools that encourage student engagement and retention in digital spaces. Research shows that professional development for faculty is crucial for building these skills and helping educators adjust their teaching for online settings (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Clark & Mayer, 2016; Archambault et al., 2022).

Online pedagogy includes various teaching methods and technologies that support digital learning. Good practice involves understanding the unique aspects of virtual environments, selecting the appropriate teaching strategies, and applying frameworks such as constructive alignment. Constructive alignment, developed by Biggs (2014), stresses the importance of ensuring that learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessments are connected to improve student learning. In online education, this framework becomes vital for designing courses that make up for the lack of in-person interaction and promote meaningful learning experiences.

One major challenge in online education is keeping students engaged. Research shows that interaction between instructors and students is the best predictor of student success, more so than engagement among students or with the content (Clark & Mayer, 2016; Martin et al., 2018; Sun & Chen, 2016). Engagement helps close the gap between students and instructors, builds community, and enhances the learning experience. Tools like discussion boards, quizzes, gamification, and collaborative platforms are key to fostering interactivity. Assessment also comes with unique challenges in online settings, including worries about academic integrity and making sure assessments align with online learning goals. Methods like continuous assessment, project-based learning, and formative quizzes often work better online than traditional exams (Biggs & Tang, 2011).

Professional development Programmes, such as webinars and workshops, are crucial for giving educators the digital teaching skills they need. A recent webinar for Kenyan faculty focused on online pedagogy, constructive alignment, and engagement strategies. Participants gave positive feedback, with many emphasizing the importance of ongoing professional development to refine their skills and keep up with changing educational technologies (Clark & Mayer, 2016). Faculty also suggested additional training in advanced areas like instructional design and practical uses of digital tools, showing awareness of the continuous learning necessary to meet the demands of online teaching (Anderson, 2020). In Kenya, faculty have increasingly shown interest in using online learning tools, recognizing their potential to create lively and participatory virtual classrooms. Studies suggest that when educators receive training in digital engagement techniques, they can significantly improve student motivation and participation (Anderson, 2020). For faculty in Kenya, implementing these methods is particularly challenging due to limited resources and technology.



The COVID-19 pandemic led to a sudden move to online education, disrupting traditional teaching practices, especially in fields that rely on collaboration (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2021; Al Freih, 2022; Hoffmann & Dudjak, 2012; Nechita et al., 2023). In Africa, and particularly in Kenya, this shift was complicated by limited access to digital resources and training (Lwoga & Komba, 2020). The pandemic highlighted significant gaps in online teaching skills among faculty (Njoroge & Atina, 2022). As online learning becomes more common, there is an urgent need for structured and effective training to improve engagement, assessment, and instructional design practices. Recent studies confirm that many Kenyan educators struggle with online engagement and applying frameworks like constructive alignment (Mugendi & Kathuri, 2023). While webinars are increasingly used for professional development (Kim & Bonk, 2022), one-off sessions do not adequately address the complex challenges of online teaching. Faculty often report needing more specialized and ongoing training in online assessment, instructional design, and interactive digital tools.

Although online education can increase access to learning, its effectiveness is often limited by poor instructor training and a lack of engagement strategies (Lwoga & Komba, 2020; Mugendi & Kathuri, 2023). The 2023 webinar on online pedagogy provided not only essential knowledge but also feedback from participants who highlighted the need for ongoing, structured professional development to tackle the complexities of virtual teaching. Faculty pointed out a need for deeper training in areas like constructive alignment, gamification, and collaborative platforms. The ongoing presence of these gaps stresses how important faculty perceptions are for the success of online education. As Basar et al. (2021) and Mallinson & Krull (2013) point out, perceived behavioral control affects educators' beliefs in their ability to teach effectively, which strongly affects teaching practices. Faculty experiences, challenges, and insights play a crucial role in shaping whether online learning environments are engaging and pedagogically effective.

This study examined faculty members' views on webinars as a strategy for developing skills in online teaching. It specifically examined faculty needs, challenges in using webinars for professional development, and strategies needed to improve online teaching practices. By exploring these perceptions, the study aimed to identify areas for improvement and suggest professional development approaches that match faculty needs and expectations. The objectives of this study were to;

1. evaluate perceptions of faculty members on effective pedagogical approaches suitable for virtual teaching environments.
2. explore the understanding of faculty members on the application of constructive alignment in online education.
3. assess faculty perspectives on areas requiring further professional development in online pedagogy.

This study is guided by two theories, namely the Constructive Alignment Theory by Biggs (1996) and Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) by Venkatesh et al (2003), in constructivist learning theory, which provides a framework for effective online learning. It emphasizes the importance of learner-centered approaches that encourage interaction, critical



thinking, and engagement (Kim & Bonk, 2022). Constructive alignment theory advocates for alignment between learning objectives, teaching activities, and assessments to support meaningful learning (Mugendi & Kathuri, 2023). The framework integrates the concepts of digital pedagogy, student engagement, and continuous professional development, as well as addressing the need for online learning skills in African higher education, particularly in Kenya (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2021; Lwoga & Komba, 2020). Constructive alignment theory guided this study since one of the study objectives was to assess faculty understanding and application of **constructive alignment** in virtual education. Faculty members' understanding of Constructive alignment affects their online teaching and engagement with students, which eventually affects the quality of learning. The UTAUT theory offers a clear framework for understanding how people adopt and use technology. It identifies four main ideas that impact behavioral intention and usage, namely: 1. *Performance Expectancy*, which refers to how faculty believe that online teaching strategies and tools will improve their teaching and help students learn better, 2. *Effort Expectancy* that focuses on how easy faculty think it will be to use online teaching strategies and digital tools, 3. *Social Influence*, whose interest is in how much peers, institutions, or professional networks affect faculty attitudes toward using online teaching methods, and 4. *Facilitating Conditions*, which is the extent to which institutional resources, training, and support help in the effective use of online teaching strategies. UTAUT theory is useful in this study, since one of its objectives was to evaluate faculty perceptions of effective pedagogical approaches for virtual teaching environments. This means the study was interested in the faculty's views on whether transformative strategies, like constructive alignment, collaborative tools, and gamification, actually enhance student engagement and learning results, their confidence in using these strategies, noting differences in digital skills and comfort with technology, any impact of institutional leaders or peers on use of virtual learning environments, and their access to technology and supporting infrastructure.

## Methodology

This study used a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. This approach allowed for the simultaneous collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, which were analyzed separately and then combined for interpretation. The quantitative part measured faculty perceptions from a large sample, while the qualitative part offered deeper insights into how faculty members understood the use of constructive alignment in online teaching. Interpretivist research philosophy supported the study since the main aim was to assess the perceptions and understanding of participants on the variables of the study.

The target group included 138 university faculty members who had taken part in a webinar on online learning pedagogy. Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire sent via Google Forms right after the session. The questionnaire featured both closed-ended Likert-scale questions and open-ended ones. The closed-ended questions gauged faculty satisfaction with online teaching strategies. The open-ended questions looked at participants' understanding of constructive alignment in online education and identified areas where more professional development was necessary. The face, content, and construct validity of the questionnaire were confirmed through expert review, while reliability was enhanced through piloting and expert evaluation. The study adhered to voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and do-no-harm ethical considerations.



A total of 100 faculty members completed the questionnaire. The data were analyzed using both numerical and descriptive methods. We used percentages to summarize satisfaction ratings. The open-ended responses were analyzed thematically to identify faculty views on constructive alignment and training needs. Combining numerical trends with narrative insights gave a clear view of faculty perceptions and priorities for professional development (Kim & Bonk, 2022; Njoroge & Atina, 2022).

### Findings

The study showed a high level of satisfaction with the webinar. Sixty percent of respondents rated it as excellent, while forty percent rated it as very good. Participants mentioned that the webinar provided valuable insights into online teaching and laid a solid foundation for improving their teaching methods in virtual settings. Several respondents felt more confident in applying the concepts discussed and valued the relevance of the topics. Faculty emphasized the importance of constructive alignment as a key framework for online teaching. They pointed out that aligning learning goals, teaching methods, and assessment strategies helped ensure consistency and improved learning outcomes. As one participant noted, constructive alignment *“brings coherence between what we want students to learn, how we teach, and how we assess. This is even more important in online teaching, where engagement can easily be lost.”* This highlights the value of teaching frameworks in creating effective online course designs.

Participants confirmed that the main topics in the webinar, namely, Online Pedagogy, Online Assessment, Constructive Alignment, and Collaborative Tools, were well understood and directly applicable to their teaching. One respondent suggested: *“Allocate more time to the following topics in future webinars: Online Pedagogy, Online Engagement, Online Assessment, Constructive Alignment, and Collaborative Tools.”* Another participant mentioned: *“Future training should focus on Setting Online Assessments, Instructional Design, Gaming, and Development of Quizzes.”* These comments show that while faculty appreciated the introductory material, they saw a need for deeper, more practical exploration of these areas.

The survey also revealed gaps in advanced skills. Faculty requested more focused training on how to design authentic and interactive online assessments like case studies, project-based tasks, and formative evaluations, since these were seen as better than traditional exams in virtual settings. Additionally, respondents pointed out the need for more attention to online engagement techniques, including interactive discussions, collaborative platforms, and gamification strategies. As one participant said, *“We need more strategies to keep students actively engaged in the online space. Sometimes they log in but don’t participate, so we need to learn tools that make participation more meaningful.”* Another important area was instructional design, which participants viewed as essential for developing effective online courses. Respondents believed more time should be spent on how to combine teaching methods with technology to create interactive and student-centered designs. This aligns with their interest in gamification and quiz development, both of which are considered practical tools for improving participation and motivation.



Overall, the post-webinar survey showed that while introductory webinars provide a strong starting point, they are not enough to tackle the complexities of virtual teaching. Faculty participants strongly indicated that ongoing and advanced professional development is necessary. They recommended more sustained and specialized training programs focused on authentic assessments, student engagement, and innovative instructional design. This feedback highlights the increasing demand for strategies that go beyond basic training and equip faculty with the advanced skills needed to create effective, engaging, and thoughtfully designed online learning environments.

### **Discussions**

These findings match broader research in digital teaching. They suggest that well-organized professional development programs help faculty improve their skills in online education (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2021). Faculty members appreciate constructive alignment and want more training in engagement tools. This reflects the challenges of online teaching, which need not only tech skills but also a solid understanding of teaching methods. This is especially true in Kenya, where both digital infrastructure and teaching expertise are still growing (Lwoga & Komba, 2020).

The results support the idea that single training events like webinars, while helpful for raising awareness, do not fully prepare faculty with the skills needed. There is a clear need for ongoing professional development that steadily covers both basic and advanced topics. These include instructional design, online assessment methods, and active teaching techniques. Kim and Bonk (2022) highlight that ongoing training is vital for faculty to keep up with the changing digital learning environment.

The need for deeper training in authentic assessment, gamification, and instructional design points to a global shift in higher education towards student-centered online learning. Research shows that effective use of digital tools can lead to deeper learning and greater engagement (Clark & Mayer, 2016; Martin et al., 2018). For Kenyan universities, this presents both a challenge and an opportunity. Limited resources might hinder quick adoption, but focused training efforts could help faculty create more engaging courses that meet students' needs in online environments. Moreover, these findings reflect the wider African higher education situation, where faculty often struggle with issues like bandwidth, digital access, and lack of institutional support (Njoroge & Atina, 2022; Mugendi & Kathuri, 2023). In these environments, professional development should focus not only on teaching methods but also on training on using low-bandwidth tools and adaptable teaching strategies to promote inclusivity. By investing in ongoing professional development, universities can close gaps in teaching skills and digital readiness. This enables faculty to apply effective online teaching strategies that enhance learning results.

Overall, the study emphasizes the need for well-planned, scalable, and context-aware training programs. These should empower faculty to handle the complexities of online teaching. Closing these gaps through focused initiatives will not only improve online education quality in Kenya but also support the broader African goal of increasing access to engaging higher education through digital means.

### **Recommendations**



To enhance online teaching effectiveness and support continuous faculty development, it is recommended that educational institutions, especially in Kenya and similar contexts, implement a structured, multi-stage professional development programmes focused on digital pedagogy. This should include the following:

1. **Regular, Modular Training Sessions:** Establish a series of ongoing training sessions, each focusing on different aspects of online teaching. These modules should cover advanced online assessment strategies, instructional design principles, practical applications of constructive alignment, and tools for engagement, such as gamification and collaborative platforms. This structure allows for depth in each area, addressing the need for more specialized and hands-on learning, as noted by faculty.
2. **Blended Learning Model:** To accommodate various learning needs and constraints, the training should use a blended format combining synchronous sessions (e.g., webinars) with asynchronous learning resources. This setup enables faculty to learn at their own pace while still participating in interactive, real-time discussions.
3. **Mentorship, Peer Learning Networks and Communities of Practice:** Creating a mentorship Programme or peer network would facilitate knowledge sharing among faculty, enabling those with more online teaching experience to support colleagues. Such networks could be reinforced by communities of practice where faculty can exchange ideas, troubleshoot issues, and collaboratively explore new technologies and strategies.
4. **Evaluation and Continuous Improvement:** To ensure training programmes remain relevant and effective, institutions should implement a feedback and evaluation mechanism, enabling faculty to suggest improvements and report on the impact of training on their teaching. Regular updates to the curriculum based on feedback will maintain alignment with evolving pedagogical needs.
5. **Institutionalize Online Pedagogy:** Professional development in online teaching should be a required part of faculty induction and ongoing training. Including this in institutional policy will help maintain its effectiveness and long-lasting influence.

## Conclusion

As online education becomes a key part of higher learning, especially in Africa, where digital challenges remain, strong training in online teaching methods is essential. This study emphasizes the need to equip faculty with the skills and knowledge necessary to create interactive, engaging online learning experiences. While introductory webinars offer a useful starting point, they do not fully address the diverse and complex needs of educators working in digital teaching environments. Findings from the Kenyan faculty webinar showed high satisfaction levels. Participants reported a better understanding of constructive alignment, online teaching methods, assessment, and collaborative tools. However, they also pointed out the limits of one-time training sessions and the need for ongoing, in-depth professional development. Constructive alignment emerged as a particularly valuable framework that helps faculty connect learning outcomes, teaching methods, and assessments. Additionally, participants identified important gaps in advanced instructional design, real-world assessment methods like case studies and projects, and engagement strategies such as gamification and collaborative platforms.



These insights reflect broader research, which consistently indicates that faculty expertise in online education grows through structured and ongoing professional development rather than one-off sessions (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2021; Kim & Bonk, 2022). In Kenya and the wider African context, where digital infrastructure and teaching skills are still developing (Lwoga & Komba, 2020), such professional development is crucial for ensuring both the quality and accessibility of online learning. The study concludes that effective and engaging online education requires a multi-stage, continuous professional development framework. Universities and policymakers should invest in building reliable digital infrastructure, encouraging communities of practice for peer learning, and incorporating online pedagogy into faculty development policies. By doing this, they will empower educators to master advanced teaching methods, raise academic standards, and boost student engagement in virtual environments. Ultimately, these investments will help close existing skill gaps and significantly enhance accessible, high-quality online education in Kenya and across Africa.

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