

# **Blogging as an e-Learning Tool in Tertiary Communication Institutions in Ghana: An Exploratory Study**

**Hillar Addo<sup>1</sup>**  
**Yaw O. Gyau<sup>2</sup>**

## ***Abstract***

*This study investigated blogging as an e-learning tool and the level at which it is becoming a medium for teaching and learning in communication tertiary institutions in Ghana. The study considered four theories; e-learning/online learning models; constructivism, interactivism, and connectivism to provide a context for the use of instructional technology, focusing on communication training institutions in Ghana. Using a quantitative methodology, the study adopted multi-stage sampling procedure to respond to three propositions: 1. Students who have blog sites are more comfortable with lecturers who use blogging as an e-learning tool for teaching and learning. 2. There is a significant positive relationship between students with blog sites and Communication training institutions that consider e-learning as a teaching and learning platform. 3. Having a blog site influences the career development of students from Communication training institutions. Findings were that; tutors and learners casually use e-learning tools, majority of students and lecturers in communication training institutions in Ghana would appreciate utilising e-learning tools for the delivery of various learning modules, but it is sparingly, casually and occasionally used. The study also provided a new model within the context of active patronage of e-learning tools and blogging for teaching and learning in tertiary institutions in Ghana.*

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Hillar Addo is a Senior Lecturer and Vice President Academic (Pro-VC) of the Leadership University College of Applied Sciences (LUCAS College). Formerly, lecturer at the Department of Information Technology Studies at the University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA). He pursued his Masters in information studies in 1999 at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. Dr. Addo pursued and obtained his PhD in Information Science from the University of Pretoria in South Africa in 2013 and worked in the Education Development Sector at SchoolNet Africa in South Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Mr Yaw Odame Gyau is currently a senior lecturer at the Ghana Institute of Journalism. He is a former Head of Advertising Department and holds an M.Phil in Education from the Open University, Malaysia and an MA in Advertising from the University College of Kensington, London. He has attended and presented a number of research papers in both Ghana and abroad.

**Keywords:** E-learning, Constructivism, Connectivism, Interactivism, Blogging, Blogs, New Media, Tertiary Education

## **Introduction**

A general problem in Ghana from the perspective of communication students and in the view of the researchers of this study is that, both tutors and students in tertiary institutions are caught in an *e-divide* and need to be trained and equipped with nascent skills. As the world evolves into the digital age, training of communication students has also evolved but has not seen much research to provide a context to this envisaged reality in Ghana. E-learning has become a household concept, and, blogs and e-learning tools are perceived as key tools contributing to the vibrancy of the online community, helping students to create a digital identity, and thus develop stronger linkages with people (Gotts, 2006). E-learning can be used by lecturers to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of educational interventions in the face of the social, scientific, and pedagogical challenges. It has gained popularity in the past decade; however, its use is highly variable among universities (Marfo and Okine, 2010). This research investigated training of communication students using e-learning technologies.

Objectives of the study were, to; determine the state of e-learning for teaching and learning in Communication institutions in Ghana, examine the e-learning tools used among communication students in tertiary institutions, determine the creation and patronage of blogging as an e-learning tool in communication programmes in tertiary institutions and present a way forward in e-learning.

Institutions used for the research were: the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ), Jayee University College (JUC), African University College of Communications (AUCC) and Christian Service University College (CSUC).

## **Literature Review**

### ***1. E-learning, Blogs, Journalism and the Digital Divide***

Almost every organisation in the developed world has become completely dependent on networks of telephony and computers. When they break down, the organisation simply stops working. At the societal and global

level, it is obvious that media and social networks reach various people or markets in the farthest corners of the world. The Internet and new media tools facilitate this phenomenon, as new generations of mobile or fixed telephony are fully digitalized and integrated adding text, picture or video (van Dijk, 2006).

According to Ventimiglia and Pullman, (2016), in today's world, college/university graduates come into contact with a quickly evolving range of technologies and have access to a wealth of information. Students can be more successful after graduation if they are digitally literate—having learned how to identify and create digital solutions, adapt to new tools, and discover more effective and efficient ways of doing things in their fields. The term blog originated from the blend of the term “web log” and, the web provides the opportunity for people to easily set up their own blog and share their thoughts. Blogs are usually found in written formats to express a subject, issue or opinion that can be conveyed to an audience for a wide range of purposes, including personal, business, work and sharing news stories (Ashraf and Lakhtaria, 2011).

Researchers of this paper hold the view that tertiary institutions mandated to train students to become professional journalists and public relation practitioners have a responsibility in the face of dynamic trends in tutelage fields, to expose students to new media and its tools to facilitate multimedia and digital communications. It is, therefore, imperative in our view for tutors to engage learners in e-learning and blogging to prepare them for social networking tasks.

Wasserman (2010), in his article stated that journalism courses that approach students as if they can continue to work as an elite, professional class will have to reflect on how journalism has become a more collaborative field of practice.

Currently, integration of digital tools, training and the world of work is needed owing to globalization and the resulting interdependence between countries and market places (Kitchen *et al.*, 2004; Schultz, 1996). While some are under control, others appear to be insurmountable. Hawkins, (2002), in his work identified reasons why information and communication technology (ICT) education in Ghana is facing numerous challenges. In his

introductory pages, Hawkins (2002) made the very insightful statement that:

*“The skills to productively transform knowledge and information into innovative products and services will define successful knowledge economies. Because knowledge and information have become the most important currency for productivity, competitiveness, and increased wealth and prosperity, nations have placed greater priority on developing their human capital. Governments around the world are thus focusing on strategies to increase access to and improve the quality of education.”* Hawkins (2002). He writes further that;

*“A relevant education is more important today than ever, because today’s Networked World demands a workforce that understands how to use technology as a tool to increase productivity and creativity. These skills include information reasoning, a process in which reliable sources of information are identified, effectively accessed, understood, contextualized, and communicated to colleagues. Furthermore, employers require workers to have the skills necessary to collaborate, work in teams, and share information across global networks, that is, to analyze issues from a multidisciplinary perspective.”* Hawkins (2002).

Addo (2001) pointed out earlier that technology assists in increasing motivation to learn, as well as attentiveness.

Journalism and public relations are adapting to modern technological practices driven by the Internet. A study by Alfonso & de Valbuena (2006) of 120 corporate websites from six European countries, the US and Singapore found that the ‘use of Internet tools to build strong and solid relationships with the media is far from ideal? Dewdney & Ride (2006) suggested that new media was becoming the preferred term for a range of media practices that employ digital technologies and the computer in some way or another. Communication training institutions must therefore step-up training for learners by integrating instructional technology and e-learning tools into the curriculum and allow it to dictate the pace of teaching and leaning. The justification is that learners graduating from communication training institutes acquire the requisite skills required for at least online journalism and public relations (Dewdney & Ride, 2006).

Gotts (2006) reminds readers that “Blogs were seen as a key strategy contributing to the vibrancy of the online community, in helping students to create a digital identity, and thus develop stronger linkages with people they would never otherwise meet”. Hargittai, (2003) explained the term digital divide as:

*“People’s actual use of the medium beyond merely having access to it. The ‘digital divide’ is most often conceptualized in binary terms: someone either has access to the medium or does not, someone either using the Internet or does not; the ‘digital divide’ to include a discussion of different dimensions of the divide focusing on such details as quality of equipment, autonomy of use, the presence of social support networks, experience and online skill.”* (Hargittai, 2003)

There seems to be a number of parts to Hargittai’s (2003) definition of the term ‘digital divide’ which precisely expose the problems that are faced in Ghana and for that matter Africa. In one part, she identified access to (technological) medium and in the other, usage of technology. These are relevant because for e-learning to be successful in higher institutions of learning, there is the need for these two challenges to be dealt with. The latter part of the statement indentified social support networks, experience and online skill, as key variables to be discussed or considered in the digital divide.

In Africa, and for that matter Ghana, both tutors and students in tertiary institutions are caught in Hargittai’s (2003) *divide* and, therefore, need to be equipped or trained.

## ***2. E-learning and Instructional Technology***

Instructional Technology is as well identified and discussed as a subject matter from which e-learning and its related tools emanate, and Atwell, (2010), identified pedagogical structures powered by computer technology, as giving birth to two other methods of teaching which are; Andragogy and Mobigogy. The former is regarded as pedagogy for adult learners, while the latter is regarded as mobile learning; education of the future.

To further strengthen the rationale for e-learning, online learning and distant learning, the researchers have identified that several theories and conceptual

frameworks, alongside academic models, have been proposed and approved to guide or ensure the principles for creating, sustaining and operating such programmes. Notable among them are; the Model of Online Learning, Constructivism and Connectivism.

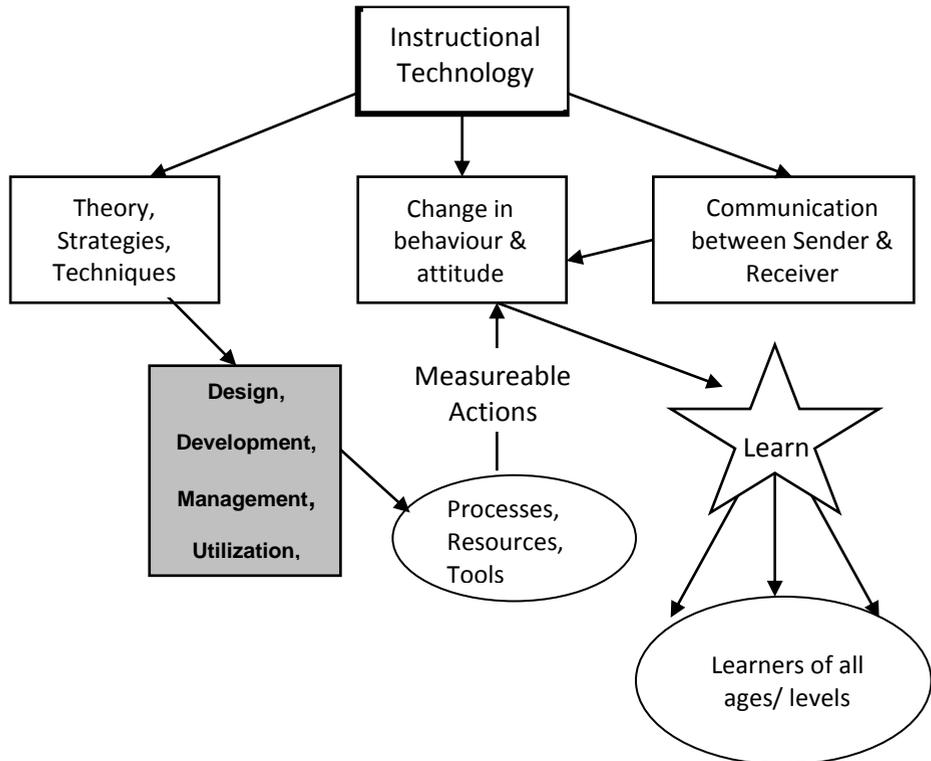
Seals and Richey (1994), through the Association for Educational Communication and Technology (AECT), defined instructional technology as ‘the theory and practice of design, development, utilization, management and evaluation of processes and resources for learning, throwing more light on theory, practice and process with the perspective of design, development, utilization and evaluation’ (Seals and Richey 1994).

The beauty of instructional technology is that technological devices for teaching and learning can be customized or specially designed with specific features, to serve specific needs. For example, the brail and other learning devices have been created for visually impaired students to participate in teaching and learning. Instructional technology has more to do with direct application of technology in the acts of teaching and learning (Mishra and Koehler, 2006).

According to Cole (2000), instructional technology also encapsulates online learning, which is gradually replacing conventional instruction, because online learning makes use of the computer and the Internet with computer-based applications such as Internet browsers and other learning-platforms. Online learning allows participants to collapse time and space; however, the learning materials must be designed properly to engage the learner and promote learning. Bonk and Reynolds (1997) reported that to promote higher-order thinking on the web, online learning must create challenging activities that enable learners to link new information to old: acquire meaningful knowledge; and use their meta-cognitive abilities; hence it is the instructional strategy, not the technology that influences the quality of learning.

Below is a detailed illustration of the Concept of the Instructional

**Fig. 1: Concept of the Instructional Technology Field.**



*Technology Field by McGriff 2001.*

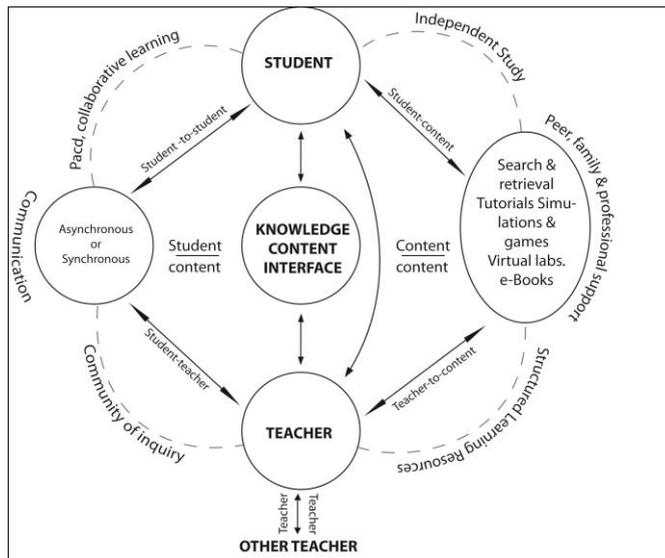
These researchers determine that, educators who seek to transform traditional teaching practices should advance educational systems via instructional technology at all levels.

### **3. E-learning/Online Learning Model as a Teaching and Learning Domain**

Anderson (2004), in his work, *Theory and Practice of online Learning*, stated that ‘a first step in theory building often consists of model building, in which the major variables are displayed and the relationships between the variables schematized.’

These researchers agree that building a model to consist of variables is ideal for the establishment of a theory or concept for teaching and learning. Many academics have proposed theories with basic models made up of variables that are fundamental to the parts of the model and for quick and easy understanding. The researchers have proposed the model by Terry Anderson (2004) as a unique model for the understanding of the e-learning landscape. In the same vein, Anderson (2004) introduced ‘A model of e-learning’. According to him, three major modes of online learning must be considered. They are: Collaborative, Community-of-inquiry models, and Community-of-learning models. Besides, two major human actors are also identified in the model: *learners* and *teachers*, and their interactions with each other and the content.

Learners can, of course, interact directly and spontaneously with any content that they find, in multiple formats and especially on the Web. However, many choose to have their learning sequenced, directed, and credentialed through the assistance of a teacher in a formal education system. This interaction can take place within a community-of-inquiry, using a variety of net-based synchronous and asynchronous (video, audio, computer conferencing, chats, or virtual world) interactions. These environments are particularly rich and allow for the learning of social skills, collaboration, and the development of personal relationships among participants. The community, however, binds learners in time, and thus forces regular sessions – or at least group-paced learning. Community models are also generally more expensive simply because they cannot scale up to serve large numbers of students (Anderson, 2004).

**Fig. 2: A Model of E-Learning /Online Learning**

Source: *Theory and Practice of online Learning*, Terry Anderson (2004)

There are essential lessons to be learnt from this model. As observed, the first is that e-learning always takes place between two human actors: *learners* and *teachers*. To make e-learning effective, these two actors must communicate based on a particular material which must be shared between them. That material is referred to as the '*content*'. However, for the content to be shared, there is the need for interaction, which can be direct, instant (synchronous) or delayed, yet in various formats as transmitted through the Web (asynchronous).

That is why Web 2.0 tools, required for e-learning, must be encouraged among learners and teachers in higher institutions of learning. According to Ferdig and Roehler (2003), one of the Web 2.0 tools that support Vygotsky's theory is *blogging*.

Bloggging engages students in active learning, increases student and teacher relationships, increases *higher-order thinking skills*, and improves flexibility in teaching and learning (Ferdig & Roehler, 2003). Classroom bloggging sites provide students with opportunities to share their viewpoints, and a

supportive environment for reading and writing (Huffaker, 2005). They promote verbal and visual literacy through dialogue and storytelling and allow opportunities for collaborative learning (Huffaker, 2005).

It is noteworthy that, *community-of-inquiry*, *higher-order thinking skills* and *collaborative learning*, have been identified as part of the direct benefits that the two human actors are likely to benefit. Collaborative learning uses learning strategies made up of groups of learners. Higher-order thinking is basically a query that requires the student to analyse and produce a reasoned response, not a mimic of teacher's words. (Sprinthall and Sharon, 1994). Anderson (2004, p.60), explained the second part of the model illustrated above;

The second part of the model (to the right side) illustrates the structured learning tools associated with independent learning. Common tools used in this mode include computer-assisted learning, drills and simulations. Virtual labs, where students complete simulations of lab experiments and have access to sophisticated search and retrieval tools, are also becoming common tools. Texts in print - and now distributed and read online -have long served as the basis for conveying teaching interpretations, insights and knowledge in independent study. It should also be emphasized, however, that although engaged in independent study, the student is not alone (Anderson, 2004, p.60).

A critical study of all the variables in the *Model of Online Learning* reveals that key players of *Interaction* in online learning coincides with the variables of *Educational Interactions* as listed below:

***Student-Student Interaction*** – Peer-to-peer interaction is an unavoidable exercise for learners or students, because modern constructivist and connectivist theorists stress the value of peer-to-peer interaction in investigating and developing multiple perspectives. Work on collaborative learning illustrates potential gains in cognitive learning tasks, as well as increasing completion rates and acquisition of critical social skills in education (Kirby and Boak, 1987) as cited by Anderson (2004). In their work, Rourke & Anderson (2002) found that student-led teams can result in higher levels of cognitive, social, and even teaching presence, than those led by teachers. Weblogs have a function that supports student-to-student

interaction and can be found through the lens of sharing comments and engaging in forum discussions. Blogger.com, Wordpress.com and Live Journal.com, among others, allow such interactions to take place.

***Student-Content Interaction*** – A long-standing practice in formal education has been identified in this model because content is usually delivered or found in different forms. They could be delivered in the form of face-to-face interaction with the tutor, reading textbooks and accessing library resources. However, attention must be given to the development of customized interactive content that responds to student behaviour and attributes as well as support the individual needs of each unique learner. Due to research and information gathering exercises, students in the four tertiary institutions understudied in this research were found to be active in student-content interactions.

***Student-Teacher Interaction*** – This is where asynchronous and synchronous communication in text, audio and video communications take place between students and tutors. Communication students in the four tertiary institutions cited in this study were found to be familiar with this type of interaction.

***Teacher-Content Interaction*** – Another component in the cycle of interaction focuses on the teacher's creation of content. Teachers must be concerned with the learning objectives as well as units of study, complete courses and associated learning activities. Teacher-content interaction gives teachers the opportunity to continually monitor, construct and update course content resources and activities.

***Teacher-Teacher Interaction*** – This kind of interaction opens teachers to the reality of criticism or peer review of one's work. But this is good for professional development. If many teachers will use weblogs and online learning tools to interact with each other, they will be encouraged to take advantage of knowledge growth and discovery, in their own subject area and within the scholarly community of teachers.

***Content-Content Interaction*** – According to Anderson (2004), in content-content interaction, content is programmed to interact with other automated information sources to constantly refresh itself and acquire new capabilities,

through updates and interaction with other content sources. This kind of intheration, also provides a means to assert control of rights and facilitate tracking content use by diverse groups of learners and teachers.

**Communication** – *ASYNCHRONOUS* and *SYNCHRONOUS* communications. *Synchronous communication* refers to communication occurring or existing among two or more people at the same time or having the same period of phase.

*Asynchronous communication* means communication occurring or existing among two or more people but at different times. These two forms of communication in online learning are very important because many technological devices, both mobile and immobile, are able to communicate among themselves in real time, allowing learners and tutors to interact in a community of inquiry often in a structured and guided format. This interaction can take place within a community of inquiry, using a variety of net-based synchronous and asynchronous (video, audio, computer conferencing, chats, or virtual world) interactions (Anderson, 2004).

For example, video conferencing can take place among two or more learners and their tutors at the same time or a set period, thereby, bringing and binding learners together at the same time. That is synchronous in nature. Additionally, there is a web community or network community (identified in the Model) that binds learners or users together. According to Anderson, the community, however, binds learners in time, and thus forces regular sessions – or at least group-paced learning (Anderson, 2004).

#### **4. Knowledge Content as an Interface of E-learning**

Understanding the principles of knowledge content as a pedagogical framework is vital for one to know what mediates communication and how e-learning tools support peer-to-peer interactions. The works of Dr. Lee Shulman (1986) an educational psychologist, helps in the understanding of the place of *Knowledge Content Interface* in this Online Model.

Ball, Thames and Phelps (2003), in their work entitled *Content Knowledge for Teaching: What makes it special?*, recognised Shulman's posit that, 'high quality instruction requires a sophisticated professional knowledge that goes beyond simple rules such as how long to wait for students to

respond.’ Shulman suspected that through the process of planning and teaching specific content, teachers would develop more powerful forms of subject matter knowledge. Due to this, Shulman suggested three ways or categories of knowledge content. They are:

*Content Knowledge.* One crucial aspect of teachers’ knowledge development in these early years was the *growth of knowledge* of how to teach their subject matter, which Shulman saw as an integral form of *content knowledge*. It also included knowledge of the subject and its organizing structures.

*Curricular Knowledge.* This category is “represented by the full range of programmes designed for the teaching of particular subjects and topics at a given level, the variety of instructional materials available in relation to those programmes, and the set of characteristics that serve as both the indications and contradictions for the use of particular curriculum or programme materials in particular circumstances” (Shulman, 1986).

*Pedagogical Content Knowledge.* The third kind of content knowledge is pedagogical knowledge, which goes beyond knowledge of the subject matter, per se, to the dimension of subject matter for teaching.

**Peer, Family and Professional Support** – This relates to the use of *Search and retrieval tools, Tutorials, Simulations and Games, Virtual Labs, and E-books*. These are structured learning tools associated with independent learning. Anderson deems this component or variable in the Model as vital because citing from Potter (1998), although the learner is engaged in independent study, the student is not alone.

The student not alone was emphasised by Shank (1993), as stated by Anderson (2004) in: *Towards a theory of online learning*; that the value of another person’s perspective, usually gained through interaction, is a key learning component in constructivist learning theories. Shank’s (1993) observation is worth noting because one of the assumptions of the Constructivists is that they believe that *learning should move away from one-way instruction to construction and discovery of knowledge*.

### **5. Constructivism**

Constructivist approach is different from Constructionist. Whereas constructivist approach which was propounded by psychologists on the basis of studying how humans construct knowledge, construction of reality has been associated with social science and communication. The constructivist approach is credited to Jean Piaget (1920) who investigated the components by which knowledge is internalized by learners. Piaget suggested two main things in this theory. They are the processes of *accommodation* and the processes of *assimilation* as cited by Simatwa (2010).

By *accommodation*, Piaget (1989 as cited by Glasersfeld) explained that individuals construct new knowledge from their experiences. By *assimilation*, he noted that individuals incorporate their new experiences into an already existing structure without changing that structure (Simatwa, 2010).

According to the theory, accommodation is the process of reframing one's mental representation of the external world to fit new experiences. Accommodation can be understood as the mechanism by which failure leads to learning: when we act on the expectation that the world operates in one way and it violates our expectations, we often fail, but by accommodating this new experience and reframing our model of the way the world works, we learn from the experience of failure, or others' failure. In addition, classroom teaching has to provide students with opportunities to make hypothesis, to predict, to explain, to investigate and to find their own answers (Saunders, 1992).

In brief, and in the opinion of the researchers, learning occurs within a social context, therefore the interaction of students and teachers, as well as peer-to-peer, plays an important role in learning.

### **6. Connectivism**

George Siemens (2003) stated that connectivism as a theory of learning recognises that technology has impacted society and that thoughts on teaching and learning are shifting. It acknowledges that learning is no longer individualistic but relies on the informal learning that occurs through participation in communities of practice, personal networks and work-

related tasks. Connectivism is an alternative theory of learning developed by Siemens addresses inadequacies of current theoretical models such as behaviourism, connectivism and constructivism (Alger, 2005).

Simply put, connectivism is about forming connections between people and with technology. To cope with information overload and complexity, teaching and learning in a connectivist-learning environment occurs within learning environments, communities and networks. These facilitate connections and information sharing while encouraging life-long learning in the individual as well as the group (Siemens, 2003).

### **7. *Interactivity***

According to van Dijk (2006), Interactivity is the second structural new media characteristic of the current communications revolution. It is a sequence of action and reaction. A suggestion from van Dijk and Vos (2001) is that, interactivity provides an operational definition that is supposed to be valid for face-to-face communication as well. These authors define interactivity at four accumulative levels, acknowledging that this concept is a multidimensional construct. The levels of interactivity are supposed to be appropriate to define how interactive a particular digital medium is (van Dijk, 2006).

van Dijk (2006) identified a first level of interactivity as the degree of synchronicity and this is the time dimension, and a second level of interactivity as the extent of control exercised by the interacting parties. The third, the highest level of interactivity, is acting and reacting with an understanding of meanings and contexts by all interactors involved.

Interactivity is a major construct and striking characteristic of a web-based learning environment (Chou, 2003; Vrasidas, 2000). In the instructional context, interactivity refers to sustained, two-way communication between students, or between students and an instructor. The purpose of interactivity may be completing a learning task or building social relationships (Gilbert and Moore, 1998; Liaw and Huang, 2000).

A technology-based interactive learning environment involves four types of interaction: learner–content, learner–instructor, learner–learner, and learner–

interface (Chou, 2003; Moore, 1989). The interaction of learner–instructor and interaction of learner–learner can be combined as interaction of learner–people, or called social interaction (Liaw and Huang, 2000; Moallem, 2003). The interactivity in a learning environment can therefore be simplified into learner–content.

### **8. *Interactivity of New Media and Independent Studying***

Independent learning in recent times has been linked with new media and therefore, the concept of interactivity. According to van Dijk (2006), ‘the interactivity of new media enables a more active and more independent way of learning than we are used to. Interacting with and through these media, the superior type of enacting learning is *simulated*, not equaled.’ While discussing the issue of ‘*Learning in the new media*’, van Dijk presents five opportunities of interactive learning as follows:

- a. Students will be able to *manipulate subject matter themselves*. The order, the speed and even the complete contents do not have to be determined in advance. Thus, with enough additional and simulating guidance from their tutors, they will be able to determine their own course, style and speed of studying.
- b. Making use of the many choices available in multimedia course material, students are able to learn by exploring and experimenting in open environments. Extensive research in education and psychology proves that self-directed and exploratory learning can be highly motivating.
- c. Students may choose from several types of presentation, each with the same content. This content may take the form of text, data (such as figures, graphs and models), moving images and sounds. Thus students with special preferences for reading text or with special capacities for auditive and visual learning may all be served according to their abilities.
- d. Course material used in multimedia education is extremely suitable for visualizing, modeling and simulating information. ‘Playing’ with this material proves to be very valuable experience. It helps to clarify and understand abstract matters.
- e. Finally, interactivity enables the student to start a direct dialogue with a program in a device. This combination of hardware and software is called ‘intelligent’. Students receive direct feedback and immediately know what they are doing wrong. van Dijk (2006).

These opportunities explained by van Dijk, epitomise the nature of e-learning or online learning and the benefits that students tend to derive from the use of new media and the various devices that are available for communication in an evolving education domain.

### **Research Methodology**

This research is treated as an exploratory study, using survey design and a quantitative method to discover e-learning in tertiary communication institutions and the rate at which e-learning tools were being used to enhance teaching and learning in Ghana.

Primary and secondary approach to research methodology and related instruments were used for data collection. The study sought data from learners and tutors of blogging in the fields of communication and public relation in institutions in the major cities of Accra and Kumasi in Ghana, to reflect the true thoughts, feelings, experiences and behaviour of the respondents towards the use of e-learning in communication training institutions.

The Multi-stage sampling method was generally used because the study identified three groups of respondents to be sampled at different stages. The first group was 'Accredited Communication Universities' in Ghana. There are eight (8) of them. Out of this number, the study used the simple random sampling technique to select four (4). The second was level 400 (final year) regular students in the selected universities. The third group was full-time lecturers or tutors in selected faculties in the sampled universities.

Multi-stage sampling involved selecting the sample in stages, taking samples from samples. Using the large community example in cluster sampling, one type of stage sampling might be to select a number of schools at random, and from within each of these schools, a number of classes are selected randomly, and from within those classes a number of students are selected. (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011: *Research methods in education*).

Simple random sampling technique was adopted, specifically for data collected from the various populations sampled. There were three (3) groups of populations sampled. The first group was 'Accredited Communication

Universities' in Ghana. The second group was Level 400 (final-year) regular students of GIJ, AUCC, JAYEE and CSUC. The third group was communication faculty lecturers from the four universities.

More specifically, Level 400 regular Journalism and PR students were chosen because they were more inclined towards the principles of Online Journalism powered by New Media tools and e-learning tools.

Within these identified populations sampled, every student has an equal and independent chance of being selected and the probability of a member being selected is unaffected by the selection of other members of the population. 'The method involved selecting at random from a list of the population (a sampling frame) the required number of subjects for the sample' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

A customized questionnaire, designed for students in the chosen sample, was distributed to respondents. Data collection was limited to forty (40) students at level 400 in relevant faculties of each of the chosen tertiary institutions. One Hundred and Sixty (160) responded.

The third group, identified as lecturers, 'teachers' or 'tutors' or facilitators from the four institutions, were chosen based on evidence that they facilitated teaching and learning through the use of New Media and e-learning tools, in both Journalism and Public Relations faculties. Lecturers from the four institutions completed separate questionnaires. The Simple Random Sampling Technique was adopted to ensure twenty (20) lecturers from each of the selected institutions completed a questionnaire.

Statistical tools used for the analysis, interpretations and presentations were: *frequency distribution tables, multiple response analysis, cross tabulation and graphs* adduced using S.P.S.S. Analysing the attributes of individual variables and how they relate to other variables with the aim of providing a clear picture and significance of the data set and the variables in question.

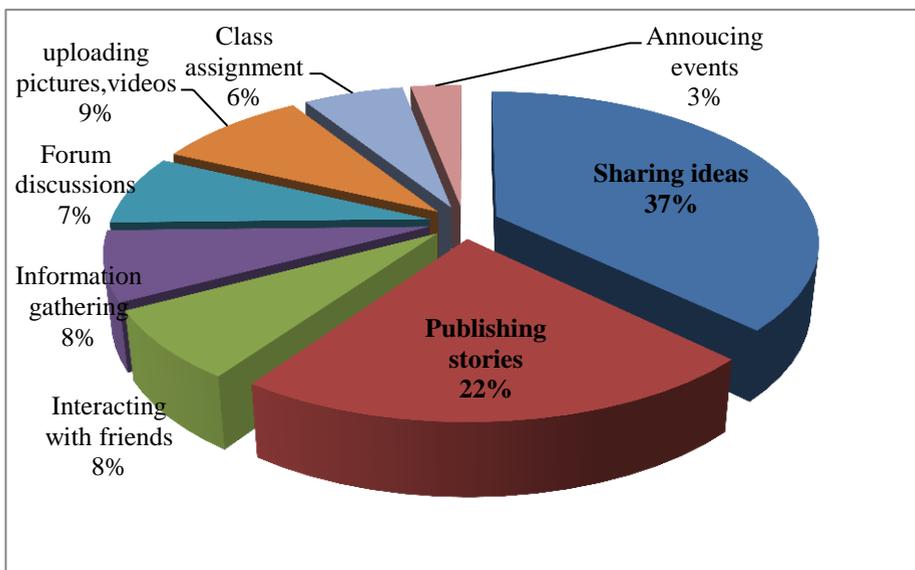
## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Gender representation and age distribution of the respondents indicate that; 58.7% were female, 41.3% male, with majority within the age bracket of 23 to 27 years.

### Using of Blogs in communication institutions

According to Figure 3, majority, 37% of respondents specifically used blogs for sharing ideas. A further 22% used blog for publishing stories while some 9% used it to upload pictures and videos. Others, 8% interacted with friends using blogs, 8% also gathered information using blogs and 7% used it for forum discussions. The rest; 6% used it for class assignment and 3% used it for announcing events.

**Fig.3: Reasons why students use blogs.**



Source: Research data, 2016

**Table 1: The role of blogging in job placement**

<b>Students Role in Blogging</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
For easy assessment of students performance	17	<b>10.6</b>
Source of recommendation	26	<b>16.2</b>
Provides a platform where individuals market themselves internationally by sharing ideas through publications, articles and many others	32	<b>20.0</b>
Provides lot of job opportunities	24	<b>15.0</b>
Provides easy access to information which helps the students in decision making	24	<b>15.0</b>
Helps them to gain competitive advantage over other students	16	<b>10.0</b>
No response	21	<b>13.1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Source: Research data, 2016*

As observed in Table 1, blogging plays a major role in terms of job placement. Majority, 20.0% of students, agreed that blogging provides a platform where individuals market themselves by sharing ideas through publications, articles and many others; 16.2% agreed that it serves as a source of recommendation and 15.0% established that blogging provides them with lot of job opportunities and another 15.0% also stated that it provides easy access to information which helps the students in decision making. Over ten percent (10.6%) suggested that it helps to easily access student performance and 10.0% agreed that it helped them to gain competitive advantage over other students. 13.1% did not respond to the question.

### Proposition 1

**The first proposition was to test whether students who have blog sites were more comfortable with lecturers who use blogging as an e-learning tool for teaching and learning.**

From Table 2 below, the Pearson chi-square was 5.562 and its significance 0.031 which is less than the significance level = 0.05 hence we reject the null hypothesis that there is **no relationship between** students who have blog sites are and lectures who use blogging as an e-learning tool for teaching and learning.

The high Pearsons chi-square was 5.562 and its low significance score of 0.031 *concludes that students who have blog sites are more comfortable with lecturers who use blogging as an e-learning tool for teaching and learning.*

**Table 2: Chi-Square Tests**

Pearson's	Value	df	Sig.
Pearson Chi-Square	<b>5.562</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>.031</b>
Likelihood Ratio	<b>6.181</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>.045</b>
Linear-by-Linear Association	<b>2.844</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>.092</b>
N of Valid Cases	<b>160</b>		

*Source: Research data: 2016*

Results from Table 2 were further confirmed in Table 3, indicating that a large proportion (i.e. 66.9%) of respondents who have blog sites feel more comfortable with lecturers who use blogging as an e-learning tool for teaching and learning.

**Table 3: Cross tabulation of Students who have blog sites against lecturers who use blogging as an e-learning tool for teaching and learning**

		Do you feel comfortable with lecturers who use blogging as an e-learning tool for teaching and learning in the classroom?			Total
		Yes	No	No response	
Students who have blog sites	Yes	87 66.9%	31 23.8%	12 9.2%	130 100.0%
	No	17 56.7%	8 26.7%	5 16.7%	30 100.0%
Total		104 65.0%	39 24.4%	17 10.6%	160 100.0%

Source: Research data: 2016

### Proposition 2:

The second proposition was to investigate whether there is a significant positive relationship between students with blog sites and Communication training institutes that consider e-learning as a significant platform for teaching and learning.

From Table 4 using the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation, the results show that there is a **significant positive relationship** between students having blog sites and communication training institutions which consider e-learning as a significant platform for teaching and learning. This is indicated by:  $r = 0.170$ ,  $N = 160$ ,  $p\text{-value} (0.016) < 0.05$ . *Hence, we conclude that, when Communication training Institutes which consider e-learning as a significant platform for teaching and learning, give priority to blogging, it will influence many more students to own blog sites.* Also, as the significance placed on e-learning platform increases in communication training institutes, the higher the number of users with blog sites.

**Table 4: Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (r) among students having blog sites and communication training institutions which consider e-learning as a significant platform for teaching and learning.**

Variables	Students having blogsites	Communication training institutes which consider e-learning as a significant platform for teaching and learning.
Students having blogsites		0.170*
Communication training institutes which consider e-learning as a significant platform for teaching and learning.		–

*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed), N=160*

*Source: Research data: 2016*

### **Proposition 3:**

**The last proposition was to test whether having a blog site influenced the career development of Communication training students.**

From Table 5, the Pearson chi-square is 1.531 and its significance is 0.465, which is greater than the significance level = 0.05 hence we fail to reject the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between students who have blog sites and career development. *So, we conclude that having a blog site will not influence the career development of communication students. Hence we can deduce that on the issue of career development of communication students it depends on other factors not necessarily having a blog site while at school. Maybe the environment outside school has not come to terms with blogging and other e-learning tools as a mass media communication tool and not for academia.*

**Table 5:** Chi-Square Tests

Pearson's	Value	df	Sig.
Pearson Chi-Square	<b>1.531</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>.465</b>
Likelihood Ratio	1.501	2	.472
Linear-by-Linear Association	.805	1	<b>.370</b>
N of Valid Cases	160		

*Source: Research data: 2016*

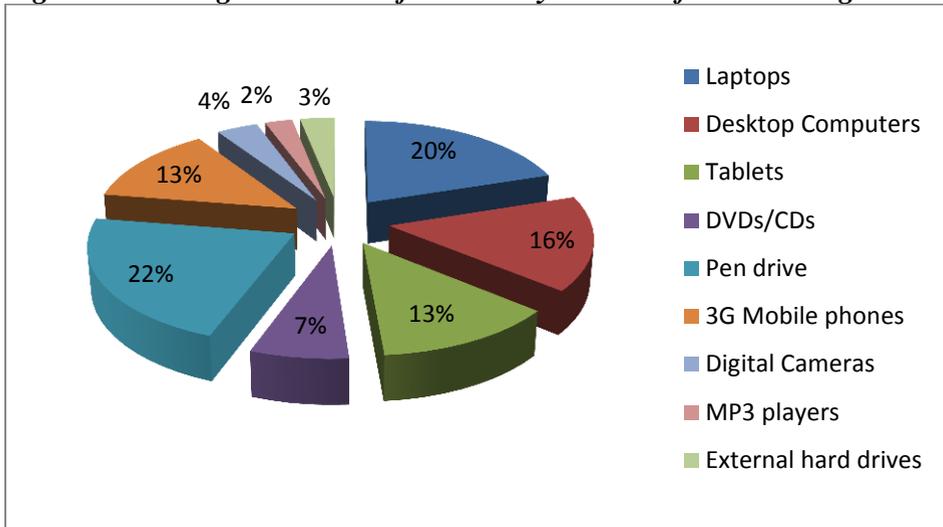
**Table 6: Cross tabulation Students who have blog sites against Essential tool for career development**

		Essential tool for career development			Total
		Yes	No	No response	
Students who have blog sites	Yes	<b>76</b> <b>58.5%</b>	31 23.8%	23 17.7%	<b>130</b> <b>100.0%</b>
	No	<b>14</b> <b>46.7%</b>	10 33.3%	6 20.0%	<b>30</b> <b>100.0%</b>
Total		<b>90</b> <b>56.2%</b>	41 25.6%	29 18.1%	<b>160</b> <b>100.0%</b>

*Source: Research data: 2016*

### Analysis of Findings from Lecturers

In all, 20 lecturers from four institutions completed separate questionnaires. This section delves into the attributes of individual variables, how they relate to other variables with the aim of giving a clearer picture and significance of the data set and the variables in question.

**Fig. 4: Technological devices often used by lecturers for e-learning.**

Source: Research data: 2016

As observed in Figure 4, various technological devices were used for e-learning and new media. These technological devices differ from lecturer to lecturer. In figure 2, majority, 22.0% of lecturers indicated they used Pen drives very often, 20.0% also used Laptops, 16.0% Desktop computers, 13.0% used Tablets and 13.0% used 3G mobile phones. Also, 7.0% used DVDs/CDs, 4.0% used Digital cameras, and 3.0% used External hard drives as well, 2.0% used MP3 players very often.

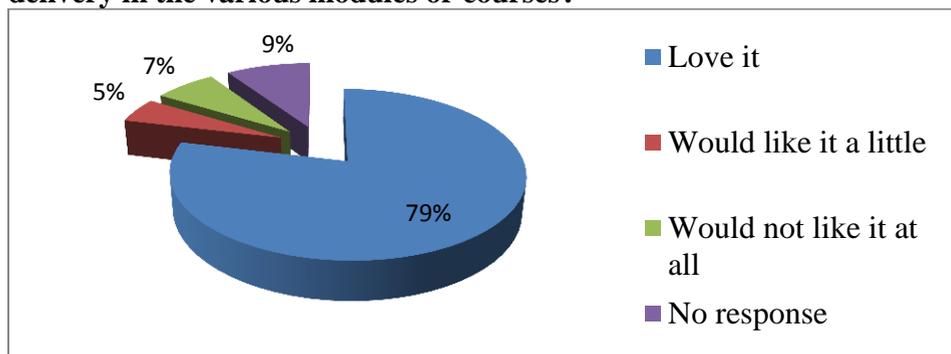
Learning needs and theories that describe learning principles and processes should be reflective of underlying social environments. As cited by Siemens (2005), Vaill (1996), “learning must be a way of being – an ongoing set of attitude and actions by individuals and groups that they employ to try to keep abreast with the surprising, novel, messy, obtrusive, recurring events...” (Vaill, 1996 p.42)

After successful data collection from the required fields, this research has produced amazing and thought-provoking results, with insights that provide the mirror for reflection. More specifically, some sensitive parts of the results indicated and confirmed George Siemens’s (2014) statement that technology has modernised our way of living, communicating and learning.

### Findings were as follows:

- a. The study found that tutors and learners are passively using e-learning tools such as blogs, vlogs, wikis, and youtube, among others at a very slow pace in communication studies.
- b. In Figure 5 below, majority (79%) of students and lecturers in communication training institutions *would love to experience e-learning tools for lesson delivery in the various modules*, but currently, it is sparingly, casually and occasionally being used to instruct research-based assignments for online publishing.

**Fig. 5: How would you feel if e-learning tools are used for lesson delivery in the various modules or courses?**



Source: Research data, 2016

#### *i. Significance and availability of e-learning resources*

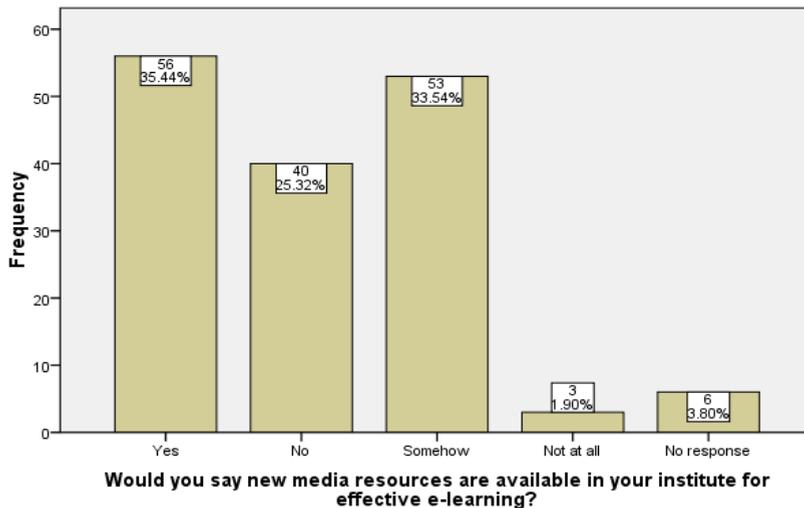
To determine the state of e-learning for teaching and learning in the selected tertiary institutions, the research instrument sought to probe respondents' (students') about the Significance of e-learning as a platform for teaching and learning in communication education. The results indicate that 88.6% of the respondents share the view that e-learning is significant for communication education in Ghana.

However, it was rather worrying to learn in Figure 6, that New Media resources required for effective e-learning are not available; whereas 35.44% were confident about availability of resources, 33.54% were not sure. Besides, 25.32% of the respondents admitted that New Media resources for teaching and learning were unavailable. This is quite a challenge because a sum of the results from these two categories of respondents comes to 58.86%; a figure which is larger than the number of

respondents (33.54%) who emphatically ascertained to availability of New Media resources.

**Fig. 6: The availability of New Media resources in your institute for effective e-learning**

Would you say new media resources are available in your institute for effective e-learning?



In Kermeh's study on Ghanaian Universities (2011), *availability of e-learning platform for teaching and learning in higher institutions of learning* turned out to be low as revealed by the research because 47.10% of the respondents admitted that e-learning platforms were not available among students and lecturers in Ghana's most resourced universities. Meanwhile, Mangesi (2007), in his study found that *'the Ghanaian tertiary education sector is the most advanced in the deployment and use of ICTs in the country.'* All the country's major universities have their own separate ICT policy, which includes an ICT levy for students. This enables students to have access to 24-hour computer labs with broadband connection. But the situation is not entirely the same in the communication training institutions in Ghana.

Quite clearly, the state of e-learning in the various communication training institutes comes to one conclusion; *unavailability of resources or*

*inadequate resources*. This provides a caveat for Directors of ICT education and Academic boards of the various institutions to seriously consider the challenge and resolve to provide students and lecturers with New Media resources such as the Internet, computers, network interfaces, learning management systems (LMS), and e-learning tools for effective teaching and learning.

### ii. Importance of blogging

The table below indicates that majority 83.1% of the respondents strongly agree that *connecting and interacting* with learners and teachers across the world through blogging, is a great avenue for career development. Majority of the students 83.8% agree that e-learning tools such as blogging have made *online journalism gain contemporary relevance* in society.

**Table 7: Importance of blogging**

Constructs	Strongly Agree (%)	Quite Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
<i>Connecting and interacting with people across the world through blogging, vlogging and podcasting is a great avenue for career development.</i>	<b>83.1</b>	7.5	1.2	1.9
<i>Online journalism has gained contemporary relevance in society by the use of blogging.</i>	<b>83.8</b>	10.6	0.0	0.0
<i>Social media and citizen journalism skills have been enhanced with the introduction of e-learning tools.</i>	<b>86.9</b>	6.9		0.6
<i>Blogging can help you gain competitive advantage in any media house.</i>	<b>78.1</b>	12.5	1.9	

Source: Researcher, 2016

Also, 86.9% agree that *social media and citizen journalism skills have been enhanced* with the introduction of e-learning.

Besides, 78.1% of the respondents strongly agree that their blog can become a strong media outlet (portfolio) for them to have *competitive advantage for employment* in any media house.

Considering the prominence of blogging among students in tertiary communication institutions, four major themes resonate and appear to be main constructs for attention. They are:

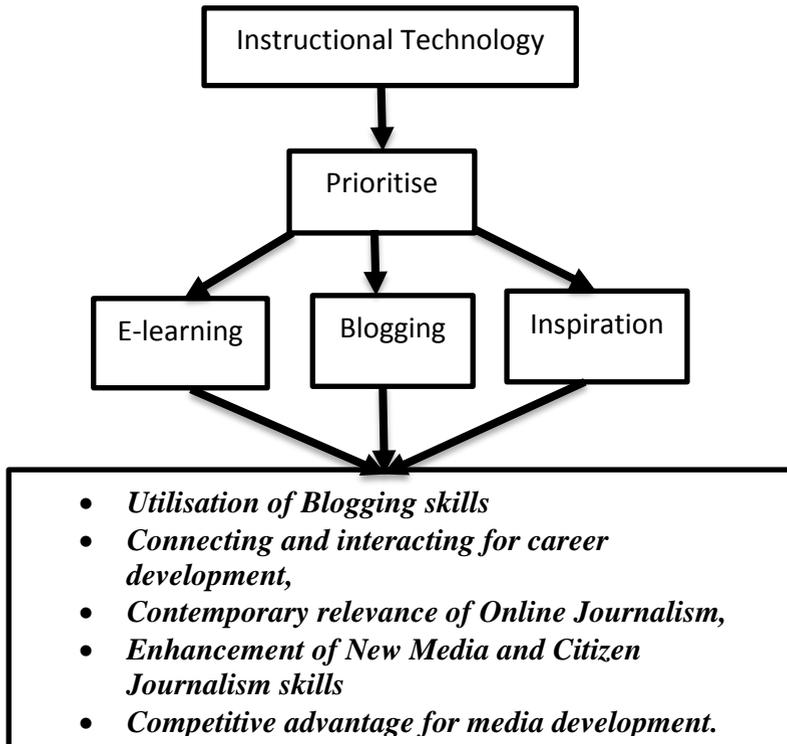
- *Utilisation of blogging skills*
- *Connecting and interacting for career development,*
- *Contemporary relevance of online journalism,*
- *Enhancement of Social media and citizen journalism skills and*
- *Competitive advantage over peers in media houses.*

Stakeholders must therefore put these themes in context and encourage students to develop blogging, vlogging and podcasting skills.

### **Solutions to the problem of low patronage**

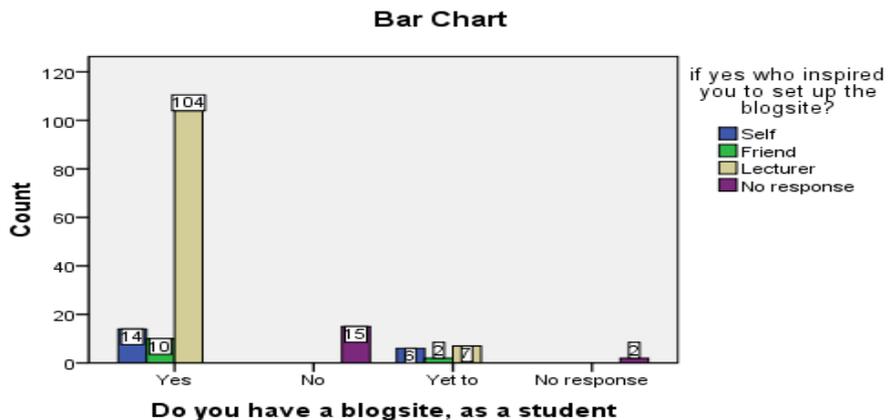
Developing a model for patronage of e-learning tools in communication training institutions in Ghana may be necessary for stakeholders at this time because the second hypothesis (Table 4) has established that *if priority* is given to e-learning and blogging, it will influence many more students to have blog sites and their studies further enhanced.

**Fig.7: A MODEL FOR E- LEARNING IN COMMUNICATION TRAINING INSTITUTIONS IN GHANA**



Source: Researcher, 2016

A theme that was identified in the second proposition is *‘Inspiration’* because, the researchers have learned that if priority is given to e-learning, students will be compelled to patronize e-learning tools for teaching and learning. It was revealed that **104** out of the **160** students (73%) were *inspired* by their lecturers to set up active blogs for academic purposes.

**Fig. 8: Who inspired you to set up the blogsite?**

Source: Researcher, 2016

Inspiration from lecturers, which came in the form of instruction, lecturers evidently ‘instructed’ *students (104) to set up blogs* for the purpose of assignments, publishing and interaction.

The use of blogs and other e-learning tools in the classroom for lesson delivery has also been confirmed by respondents in this study, though results show that enough is not being done. There is, therefore, no doubt that students are influenced or inspired to set up blogs. This study has established that priority be given to the patronage of e-learning through instructions and motivation from tertiary education managers and teachers.

## IMPLICATIONS

As indicated by Gotts (2006), that Blogs were seen as key strategy contributing to the vibrancy of the online community, this research has confirmed that patronage of blogging is one of the essential tools that communication institutions in Ghana should use.

The study has also established that both students and lecturers would prefer the use of e-learning procedure and its tools to enhance teaching and learning. The study has, however, established that not much of the New Media was being utilised for teaching and learning, thus confirming the explanation of Hargittai (2003) of the term *digital divide*, to refer to people actually using the technology beyond merely having access to it.

The researchers conclude that actual usage of the medium means active usage of e-learning tools as well as other online interfaces built to facilitate and bridge the digital divide. This research has also established that the problem facing students in communication training institutions in Ghana is not access to ICT devices and the Internet, but a lack of motivation from tertiary institution management and teachers to actively use e-learning tools and mediums.

## **CONCLUSION**

The researchers recommend that the academic boards, deans and faculties adopt e-learning and blogging as a niche to enhance teaching and learning in communication institutions.

Learners in communication institutions are aware of e-learning and have found it to be beneficial to their professional education pursuits and that they should sufficiently be encouraged to engage in online communication, data processing and forum discussions. And that, through available technological devices and applications such as laptops, computers, internet connectivity and weblogs, learners would be able to share more ideas, publish more and interact with peers, teachers and the rest of the world, and be exposed to educational content from other affiliate institutions or universities.

Patronage of blogging and utilization of e-learning tools must be encouraged and improved by consistently inspiring, instructing and influencing students as this will help them gain competitive advantage over peers, and could be a source of recommendation for them to be employed in a related career.

In conclusion, all educational stakeholders in communication training institutions must promote instructional technology and inspire the use of new media in the curriculum to ensure that students and lecturers actively use the facilities and become fluent in the use of e-learning tools such as blogs, vlogs, podcasts, wikis and many more. Through routine exercises in e-learning, students and lecturers will eventually close the digital divide.

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