

## **Designing a Learner Engaged Online Learning for Biblical Greek Grammar**

**OlubiyiAdeniyiAdewale (Ph. D)**

*School of Arts and Social Sciences, National Open University of Nigeria, Lagos*

---

**Abstract:** *Being an ancient and a dead language, learning biblical Greek has been a frustrating experience for most students of Christian Theology in Nigeria. This explains the paucity of biblical scholars in the country when compared with other fields of study like Church History, Systematic Theology and Comparative Religion among others. The frustration of learning biblical Greek is more acute for students in distance learning institutions, since the presence of a teacher may not be felt. Easing this problem lies in the creation of an online learning site which would be interactive enough to engage the learners. This researcher, following the established principles of instructional design, ADDIE, designed an online site for the course. The usability of the site is tested by a pilot test using 50 students of AjayiCrowther College of Theology. The pilot test was conducted as a cross-sectional survey using a questionnaire that was administered to the students after being exposed to the online course. At the end, it was found out that the students found it a lot easier to study biblical Greek as designed online and also felt that it would even be better if all other courses were designed in similar manner.*

**Keywords:** *Biblical Greek, Instructional Design, Open and Distance Learning, Online learning, Theology*

---

### **I. Introduction**

Online learning is the most recent version of distance learning which improves access to educational opportunities for learners using new blend of resources, interactivity, and performance support as well as structured learning activities [1]. In the bid to rush and join the elite world of online learning users, most distance learning institutions in Nigeria just digitize their existing print course materials and declared that they have “online courses”. However, rather than have online learning, they have just turned hard copies of their course materials to soft copies and put them on the web. This situation becomes worrisome as the students of biblical Greek (and any other language course) are at the losing end, having to cope with learning the language in a situation that does not promote learning of language. For the researcher, the only way to solve the problem is to design an online learning course in biblical Greek that would not only promote the learning of biblical Greek through the distance learning mode but will also show what actually an online course is and how it is to be developed using the traditionally acceptable principles of instructional design. It is hoped that by the end of this paper, readers who belong to the soft copy groups would have learn what to do to put courses in the online learning environment and to the proper thing as well as have the perception of the students concerning the use of online learning in a distance learning institution.

#### **1Designing an Online Biblical Greek Course**

The criticism against online learning has been grouped into three [2] as follows:

- a. E-Learning is “course in a can” format
- b. E-Learning does not allow interaction
- c. E-Learning does not allow informal learning.

Consequently, any designing of online course must be aware and make the course rich and interactive in such a way as to create room for informal learning. Apart from this, designing for the online environment must also follow the ADDIE model (this is the generic model for instructional design). On the importance and centrality of the ADDIE model in instructional design, it is stated that “instructional design is a conceptual model for designing instruction and typically includes analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation (i.e. ADDIE model)” [3]. It is this conceptual model that is followed below to create the online learning site for the course.

#### **1.1Analysis Stage**

The analysis phase is the first stage in the process of instructional design and therefore, it is the foundation of any instructional design. The analysis phase has been described as follows:

Within the ADDIE Model instructional designers perform many different kinds of analysis, including needs analysis, task analysis, learner analysis, and context or environmental analysis. All of these forms of

analysis are intended to define the requirements and parameters of the learning situation--who the learners are, what they need to know, how they should perform, what skills they need to develop, and how the context may affect the design and learning processes. [4]

This step would take into consideration the following sub-steps: learner analysis, task analysis and environmental analysis.

### 1.1.1 Learner Analysis

Learner analysis is that aspect of analysis that tries to understand the learner. In seeking to do this, as implied in the quotation above, there is the need to **know** who the learners are, what they need to know, how they should perform and what skills they need to develop. This is reflected for the design below as culled from the questionnaire sent out to collect the students' details:

51 students registered for this course at 17 study centres across the nation. Out of these, only 10 students have not passed through any Greek class at the lower level, however, none of them has been able to get to the desired objective, that is, ability to read and translate the New Testament directly from the Greek language. Most of them could not either recognize the Greek alphabets or recall their names. Therefore, there is the need to begin teaching again from the rudimentary level.

The entry level of the students are good as 50 out of the 51 are clergymen and the other one seeks to know more about God for the purpose of changing his life. Because of the importance of the course to the students' work as ministers of the Gospel, the attitude of the students to the course is very positive as they are all eager to learn. All the 50 clergy admitted that it will benefit them in their vocation the other 1 also agreed that it would help his understanding of the Bible and aid his appreciation of God's word. In trying to analyze their learning style and the use of multimedia technology in learning, all the students own a personal computer, ranging from laptops to desktops and are all connected to the internet via various ISPs. This means that they would be able to stay online for participation.

### 1.1.2 Learning Task Analysis

Task analysis is undertaken to determine what would be taught [4]. It is the process of analysing and articulating the kind of learning that the learners are expected to know. Among other things, this sub-task would produce the goals and the objectives of learning as well as the sequence of tasks [4] [5]. This sub-phase is important because designing instruction that will support learning demands an understanding of the task the learners are to perform.

The hierarchical analysis is adopted in this stage because in the study of language, several steps have to be taken before certain tasks can be meaningfully undertaken. For example, one cannot begin to learn vocabularies without having mastered the alphabets. In doing this, tasks would be broken down from top to bottom showing the hierarchical relationships among the tasks. Though three tasks are to be taken here, but two will suffice since the designer is the subject matter expert. These two tasks are:

- a. Clustering or grouping the tasks
- b. Organizing tasks within each group showing hierarchical relationships for learning

This is reflected in the table below:

S/N	Tasks	Sub-Tasks	Objectives
1.	Learning the Alphabets	a. Going through the alphabets one after the other in text format b. Watching the video on writing, naming and pronouncing the alphabets. c. Going through a test on the alphabets to gauge the mastery of the alphabets	a. Students should be able to recognize each alphabet by symbol and by name. b. Students should be able to pronounce each alphabet. c. Students should be able to write each alphabet, especially in the lower case.
2.	Preliminary Grammar Issues	a. Identifying the vowels. b. Identifying the diphthongs. c. Learning the iota-subscript. d. Learning the breathing marks. e. Learning the accents f. Learning the punctuation marks	a. Students should be able to identify all the vowels. b. Students should be able to identify the diphthongs. c. Students should be able to recognize any iota-subscript. d. Students should be able to discuss the use of breathing marks. e. Students should be able to identify and name the accent marks. f. Students should be able to compare and contrast the punctuation marks in Greek and English languages.

As expected of the learning task analysis, both the objectives of the tasks and the task sequencing have been produced here.

### 1.1.3 Environmental Analysis

As far as this design is concerned, the environment is the National Open University of Nigeria. Though the term ‘online learning’ was not mentioned in any of the literature of NOUN, it is clear from the statements therein that it was part of the vision of the founding fathers of the university. For example, on the mode of programme delivery, NOUN (2004) states that:

The instructional materials for distance learning will be delivered through printed materials, audiotapes, videotapes, CD ROMs and non-interactive presentations. Variety of delivery channels will be employed and these include courier and postal services, radio and television broadcast, *electronic transmission in voice, data, graphics, terrestrial and VSAT wireless communication systems, internet*, and face-to-face interactions at the network of Study Centres (p. 58) [6]. (italics mine).

From all these, it is clear that online learning has been the choice of learning instruction for NOUN. That the university is actually ready for the transition to online learning, NOUN has deployed a Learner Management System in place that would create the room for deployment of learning materials and learning activities. The LMS also have chat rooms and discussion forums for asynchronous activities. All the study centres are equipped with internet facilities that would allow smooth flow of activities. In all, the analysis has clearly shown that all is ready for a good online course in all the areas covered by the analysis.

## 1.2 Design Stage

This is the phase where the architectural design of the instructional design is made. In the design phase, the instructional materials are planned [7]. There are three aspects of the design, these are: the organizational, the delivery and the management strategies.

### 1.2.1 Organizational Strategy

The aim of this strategy is to show the manner in which topics and the sub-topics would be organized within the presentation. The overall mapping for this topic is as shown below:

Topic 1: Greek Alphabet and Preliminary Issues

- 1:1 The Greek Alphabets (Text Format)
  - 1:1:1 The Greek Alphabets (Multimedia Format)
  - 1:1:2 Proficiency Test on Greek Alphabets
  - 1:1:3 Video Installing SPionic
  - 1:1:4 Video on Using SPionic
- 1:2 Preliminary Grammar Issues
  - 1:2:1 The Vowels
  - 1:2:2 The Diphthongs
  - 1:2:3 The Iota-Subscript
  - 1:2:4 The Breathing Marks
  - 1:2:5 The Accent Marks
  - 1:2:6 The Punctuation Marks
  - 1:2:7 Tutor-Marked Assignment

### 1.2.2 Delivery Strategy

For the purpose of the delivery, the Expanded Gagne’s Nine Events of Instruction would be used:

<b>Introduction</b>
Gain Learner Attention
Inform learner of Lesson Objective, stimulate learner attention and provide overview (where applicable)
<b>Body</b>
Stimulate Recall of Prior learning
Present information and examples
Guide learning, prompt use of learning strategies
Elicit performance
Provide informative feedback
<b>Conclusion</b>
Summarize and review
Remotivate
<b>Assessment</b>
Assess performance
Enhance retention and learning transfer

Below is the designed 'delivery strategy' for topic 1, showing sub-topic 1.1 and 1.2 of the biblical Greek course from the introduction to the assessment in line with the Expanded Gagne's Nine Events of Instruction

### **Introduction**

The introduction would be a pre-class activity to appreciate the importance of the ability to read and translate the Greek New Testament directly. The students would be asked to interpret an English sentence into their local languages. The statement is: "Father Francis fried five fishes for five French fathers from France."

As expected:

- a. No translation would retain the alliteration (this would explain loss of the beauty of the original language in translation)
- b. No translation of the same local language would be similar (this would explain the role of interpretation in translation)

This would be discussed to stimulate the need for each of the students to ensure their mastery of the Greek language to enrich their ministry.

This discussion would hold on the CTH215 wikispaces site and the purpose is to help gain the attention of the students.

### **Inform learner of lesson objectives; stimulate learner attention and present overview**

The real lesson would be delivered on the web: [www.biyinyi.com/CTH215](http://www.biyinyi.com/CTH215). It would also be packaged using the exelarning authoring tool. The webpage would be structured using the earlier hierarchical structure as indicated above. The webpage for Greek Alphabets have all the objectives listed. From this page, the students should be able to access every other page through the use of the "next" icon.

### **Body**

The first page to be displayed is the text format of the Greek alphabets. This would lead to the video page. The video page is to be assembled from its three components:

- a. There is going to be a video recording of the lecture on the Greek alphabets
- b. There is going to be a power-point presentation on the Greek alphabets
- c. There is going to be the creation of the animation of how to write the alphabets through the use of flash macromedia.

All these three would be combined together to have a single .jpg or mpeg 4 file that would be played.

At the end of this presentation, students are expected to go through these files over and over again to ensure that they have mastered the alphabets. This would be checked through the use of an assessment. A test would be provided to name the alphabets. For every wrong answer, the test would begin from the beginning again till the student is able to give all the names of the alphabets correctly. This would serve as reinforcement of learning, summary of presentation as well as assessment of the performance level on the Greek alphabets.

Having mastered the alphabets, the next stage is for the students to be able to type their assignments in Greek. This would only be made possible through the installation of an identical Greek font. We have chosen the SPionic for this purpose. All the students would receive the font through their email and the next two learning materials are to assist the students in installing and using the font.

### **1.3Development**

At the development phase, what has been designed is expected to be put into actual course online. Since interactivity and learner engagement is key to any online course environment, the following are brought out in the development phase.

#### **1.3.1 Level of Interactivity in the Design**

Interactivity can be defined as "the engagement of students in the learning process" [8]. The importance of interactive in online learning cannot be over emphasized. Maor and Volet (2007) agree that "it is well established in the online literature that interactions between peers and between teacher and learners during an online course are critical factors towards successful outcomes and quality of online learning" (p. 269) [9]. This position is also maintained by Mahle (2011) as she also opines that "interactivity is often referred to as a significant component for successful online learning" (p. 207) [10].

It has been further established by research that there are three levels of interactivity that must be present in every online course to allow for good level of interactivity and these are, interaction of the student with the instructor, interaction with the peers and interaction with the content [11]. As a result of the importance of interactivity, this design made use of the three levels of interactivity. The following are examples of the interactivities:

*Online Forum:* the introductory translation exercise is designed not to only stimulate the students' interest but to also foster the learner to instructor interactivity and learner to learner interactivity. This is because the instructor's response to the students' translation and the student's responses to their peer's translations would engender the desired interactions at these two levels.

*Explanatory Videos:* There are two videos that are created to create a high level learner to content interactivity. These are the video clip that would explain how the student will install the SPionic font that would be used to create the Greek characters on their own PC and the video clip explaining how to use the installed font. Through the video clips, the students are taught how to install and are expected to install the font and use the font after watching the video clips.

### **1.3.2 Learner Engagement in the Design**

Learner engagement can be defined as "the combination of students' time on task and their willingness to participate in activities" [12]. Coming from another angle, engagement can be defined as the quality of effort students devote to activities that contribute directly to the desired outcomes of learning while the degree to which learners are engaged with educational activities that are directly and positively linked to the desired outcomes is another level of definition [13]. From these three definitions, learner engagement has to do with educational activities provided by the learning design and how students are made to spend time on these activities. Thus every well designed online course must engage the learners optimally.

In this design, a lot of activities are provided that the students have to engage in to produce the desired learning outcomes. For example, in this design, room is made for a test at the end of each topic that are expected to be formative. Formative in the sense that the test is designed in such a way that feedback is provided for each question item and the review would display the students answer as well as the correct answer. Thus, at the end of each test activity, the student who has not produced the desired objective would have to go back and study the topic again.

The most important of all these is the test on the alphabets. Because of the importance of knowing the alphabets, a test is created from which a student cannot navigate to the next sub-topic unless the student has obtained the maximum score. In fact, at any point a student gets a wrong answer, the student is made to begin from the beginning again. If after going through successfully the student is not satisfied with the rate of trials before full score, the student can take a replay.

### **1.4 Implementation**

According to the rule of instructional design, after the completion of the development according to the blueprint from the design stage, the designed topics were implemented with the students of Greek at the AjayiCrowther College of Theology, Abeokuta.

### **1.5 Evaluation**

To end the process of ADDIE, all the errors discovered in the design during the implementation were corrected such as failed links and error in coding thus leading to no response from the design.

## **II. Research on Online Environments**

Because online learning of Greek is not a common experience, the researcher decided to use the pilot test as a research to gauge the learner's perception of online learning. In this line, two research questions were formulated:

Research Question 1: Did online learning facilitate student's learning of biblical Greek?

Research Question 2: With your experience of online learning, would you like all other courses to be facilitated online?

### **2.1 Instrument**

The research instrument was designed by the researcher drawing from the experiences gathered from the literature review as well as the researcher's experience in the field. A questionnaire having two sections is the only instrument used for this research and it is designed to answer the two research questions that have been identified in the research. The first section is designed to harvest data on the personal and background information of the learners ranging from their age to gender and entry level (if any) at the biblical Greek course including any prior experience of blended learning. The second section deals with the current research. It contains 20 5-point Likert items designed to harvest data on the users' perception on online learning and the possibility of the learner being stimulated to learn with the online environment. The 5-point Likert scale is scheduled as follows: 5-Strongly Agree; 4-Agree; 3-Moderately Agree; 2-Disagree and 1-Strongly Disagree.

The reliability of the questionnaire was carried out through a pilot-test. Using the Cronbach Alpha, the test gave a result of .834 which is considered good level of reliability as Phillips (2007) opines that 0.7 is an acceptable reliability coefficient. The questionnaires were distributed after the students have been taken through the lessons on biblical Greek through the online environment. All the fifty questionnaires that were administered were returned.

## **2.2 Research Question 1: Did online learning facilitate student's learning of biblical Greek?**

The first research question is to determine if the use of online learning in teaching biblical Greek helped in the students' learning process from the students' perspective. To answer this question, there is the need to ascertain if online learning created a conducive environment for learning as environment has to be conducive for learning to be enhanced.

### **2.2.1 Interaction**

One of the first issues in the creation of a conducive learning environment is that of interaction with the instructor and with peers in the learning process. Since one of the major complaints about online learning is the absence of social interaction among the learners, it is therefore important to know if online learning gives room for interaction. Items 2 and 3 in section B is directed towards this end. It is important to note that in their responses, all of the respondents agree that online learning enhanced their interaction with both the instructor and their peers. However, while 97% indicate that they agree that the online environment create room for interactivity, the remaining 3% indicates that they did not agree.

### **2.2.2 Motivation and Encouragement to Learn**

Another major issue in the area of learning environment is the motivation and encouragement to learn. As Svinicki (2005) opines that, "of the factors that influence student learning, motivation is surely one of the most potent. Teachers can affect student motivation in ways that either facilitate or impede learning" [14] and the way and manner this is done is the handling of the pedagogy. Items 5, 7, 9 and 12 are directly related to students' motivation to learn.

It is important to note that the findings in these items are contrary to the findings when students were taught Biblical Greek using the traditional method. When online learning was used, all the students indicated that blended learning encouraged them to learn more efficiently (though 23% indicate 'agree', a higher percentage of 77% indicate 'strongly agree'). Contrary to the frustrations and worries encountered when the traditional method is used, 100% strongly agree that online learning made their learning experience of Biblical Greek exciting. Close to 89% strongly agree that online learning made them learn Biblical Greek better while the remaining 11% agree that their learning of Biblical Greek was better with blended learning. Finally, contrary to the situation when traditional method is used and larger percentage of the students would come out hating the course and not making anything out of it, 78% strongly indicated that they liked biblical Greek more.

### **2.2.3 Learning Organization**

One advantage in online learning that suits most learners is the flexibility in learning organization. The presence of the flexibility in this design also promotes learning. As some of the respondents stated in their response, they prefer online learning because unlike the classroom that is structured for learning, they can always go back to access their materials online and still have fresh learning encounter. Items 13, 14 and 15 of the questionnaire deal with this issue.

### **2.2.4 Achievement of Learning**

A substantial aspect of the measurement of learning has to do with learning outcome. Items 4, 8, 19 and 20 have to do with the issue of learning outcome. From the data gathered, close to 67% strongly agree that they were able to write the Greek alphabets very well while the remaining 33% indicated that they agree. There is no one who disagreed with this fact. Also, close to 89% strongly agree that they were able to achieve the course objectives. Though the remaining 11% indicated moderately agree, none of the students indicated that they were not able to achieve the course objectives. On the improvement in computer and internet skills, 67% strongly agree that their skills have improved through the use of online learning though the remaining 33% indicated moderately agree. Thus there is a strong relationship between the use of online learning and improvement in computer and internet navigation skills. Finally in this section, 98% indicated strongly agree that through the use of online learning they were happy with their achievements.

### **2.3 Research Question 2: With your experience of online learning, would you like all other courses to be facilitated online?**

The second research question is directly related only to item 18 on the questionnaire. As high as 82% of the respondents agreed that online learning has made learning experience better for them and wish that other courses should also be made available in the online environment.

From the result of the research on the implementation of the online environment in the teaching of biblical Greek, it has become clear that using the online environment to teach in the open and distance environment is the right path to toe. Consequently, one concludes that since the use of online environment is of economic advantage to the institution, the university can embark on transferring facilitation of all the courses in the university to the online environment.

For NOUN to effectively deploy online learning, the following are recommended:

1. The university must set up in each school a course development team that would include an instructional designer so as to allow online course development to come from the various schools rather than to be centralized.
2. The university's learner management system must be made to become robust so as to cope with the traffic that would be on it if all courses are now online.
3. The university must also be ready to train the academic staff and the needed non-academic staff in the principles of online learning so that they would know the commitment being demanded of each staff.
4. Because of the cultural issue with Nigerian students, the journey to full online learning should be mid-wived by blended learning so that the transition would not be drastic but gradual.
5. Since almost all NOUN students are connected to one social network or the other, the use of social networks to promote engagement and interactivity should be part of the course designs.

### **III. Conclusion**

This research work, apart from its main objective of stating that learners can learn better in an online learning environment and showing the process of developing an online learning environment, has also shown that contrary to widespread belief that the Nigerian distance learners are not ready for the online learning environment, the learners are ready. This is because despite the age of the samples used for the pilot test, which largely belonged to the middle age range, that is 40-50, they all have internet access, e-mail addresses and use them often. Thus, the fear that students would not be able to access internet is not as high as generally perceived. In this case, one would say that if the people in their middle ages are internet compliant and computer savvy, then the younger ones would be much more savvy since they belong to the 'digital native' age bracket. Not using the online learning environment then in Nigeria is a disservice to distance education in the country.

### **Reference**

- [1]. J. L. Moore, C. Dickson-Deane, and K. Galyen, e-learning, online learning, and distance learning environments: Are they the same?, *Internet and Higher Education* 14, 2011, 129-135.
- [2]. T. Denton, Can e-learning be effective learning?, Life Cycle Engineering, available at [www.LCE.com](http://www.LCE.com) (accessed October 10, 2012).
- [3]. S. G. Magliano, and N. Shambaugh, Students model of instructional design, *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 54(1), 2006, 83-106.
- [4]. D. H. Jonassen, M. Tessmar, and W. H. Hannum, *Task analysis methods for instructional design* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999).
- [5]. G. McArdle, *Instructional design for action learning* (New York: American Management Association, 2011).
- [6]. National Open University of Nigeria, *Getting to know your university* (Lagos: NOUN, 2004).
- [7]. R. D. Tennyson, F. Schott, N. M. Seel, and S. Dijkstra, *Instructional design: International perspectives* Vol. 1. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997).
- [8]. J. Dunlap, D. Sobel, and D. I. Sands, Supporting students' cognitive processing in online courses: Designing for deep and meaningful student-to-content interactions. *TechTrends*, 51(4), 2007, 20-31.
- [9]. D. Maor, and S. Volet, Interactivity in professional online learning: A review of research based studies, *Australian Journal of Educational Technology*, 23(2), 2007, 269-290.
- [10]. M. Mahle, Effects of interactivity on student achievement and motivation in distance education, *The Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 12(3), 2011, 207-215.
- [11]. M. Moore, and G. Kearsley, *Distance education: A systems view*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. (Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005).
- [12]. C. Beer, K. Clark, and D. Jones, Indicators of engagement. In C. H. Steel, M. J. Keppell, P. Gerbicand S. Housego (eds.), *Curriculum, technology & transformation for an unknown future. Proceedings ascilite Sydney 2010*, 75-86 available online at <http://ascilite.org.au/conferences/sydney10/procs/Beer-full.pdf>
- [13]. P. Chen, D. Gonyea, and G. Kuh, Learning at a distance, *Journal of Online Education*, 4(3) 2008, available online at <http://innovateonline.info/index.php?view=article&id=438&action=logon> (accessed October 10, 2012).
- [14]. M. D. Svinicki, Student Goal Orientation, Motivation, and Learning. Idea Paper #41, 2005, [http://www.theideacenter.org/sites/default/files/Idea\\_Paper\\_41.pdf](http://www.theideacenter.org/sites/default/files/Idea_Paper_41.pdf).