

REVAMPING BASIC EDUCATION FOR MEETING THE NEEDS AND CHALLENGES OF E-LEARNING IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper analyzed the concept of basic education, assessed the concept of e-learning, highlighted the need for and benefits of e-learning to basic education, determined the challenges of e-learning in basic education, and examined the revamping of basic education to meet the need for and challenges of e-learning in Nigeria. The paper concluded that Nigeria can find e-learning most suitable and cost effective to disseminate basic education as an entitlement to the entire populace as online learning is no longer peripheral or supplementary yet an integral part of mainstream society. While teaching can be based in or out of the classrooms, the use of computers and the internet forms the major component of e-learning. E-learning is needed in basic education because it is learner-centered. It accommodates individual preferences and needs. At the same time, it empowers learners of various backgrounds to have equal access to the best resources and referral materials, class sessions, tutoring, and experienced teachers. The challenges facing the application of e-learning in basic education have reduced the yield expected from the universal basic education programme of the federal government. The paper recommended among others that it is important that teachers are trained and developed through staff development programmes by the federal government and government should make internet connectivity a priority for basic education to be able to leverage on the promises and opportunities ICTs present.

Key Words: Revamping, Basic Education, E-learning, Benefits, Needs.

Introduction

In the contemporary period, there is the realization that the traditional or conventional educational system, in the midst of the COVID 19 pandemic, no longer suffice to bring an education to all persons; hence, the need for unique approaches in order to create a knowledge-based society. The world today is a global village, e-

learning has emerged handy as an alternative approach in increasing education opportunities to reach the unreached, marginalized, or excluded groups of citizens. This is because e-learning or online learning has the potentiality to bring education to all kinds of persons, their individual and special needs notwithstanding. Its flexibility makes it a convenient and all inclusive approach to learning. Hence, the recipients of basic education through online learning are the school-age children, the youths and adults that are unable to attend conventional schools, persons who are geographically dispersed, urban and rural folks alike among others.

As a developing nation, Nigeria can find e-learning or online learning most suitable, cost effective approach to disseminate basic education as an entitlement to the entire populace. It is partly in recognition of the plight of especially developing countries like Nigeria, that the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2002) backs online or distance education initiatives to enhance the priority of ensuring that the right to education for all is realized and persons that are deprived of basic education benefit. Thus, in the recent past decades, there has been a noticeable growth in Open Distance Learning (ODL) all over the world (Cavanaugh, 2005; Fozdar & Kumar, 2006).

Nigeria as a country has many vulnerable persons (Achoka, Odebero, Maiyo & Ndiku, 2007). Among are disables, illiterates and those who are out of school. Their vulnerability is worsened by challenges such as poverty and lack of education. Since education in Nigeria is provided largely through formal schooling, alternative delivery initiatives are likely to alleviate the situation. It is, therefore, the position of this paper to examine the concept of basic education, assess the concept of e-learning, examine the need for and benefits of e-learning to basic education, determine the challenges of e-learning in basic education, and find out how basic education can be revamped to meet the needs and challenges of e-learning in Nigeria.

Concept of Basic Education

A cursory examination of the terms “basic” and “education” is imperative for an in-depth understanding of the concept of basic education. Hornby (2010) perceives the term “basic” as forming the part of something that is most necessary and from which other things develop. Kpee (2006) posits that the term “basic” implies “fundamental” and “necessary”. It may be said to consist of 9 continuous years of non-stop education classified as Basic 1 – 3 (6 – 8 years), Basic 4 – 6 (9 – 11 years) and Basic 7 – 9 (12 –

14 years) which can simply be referred to as lower, middle and upper Basic respectively. On the other hand, the term “education” is the process of acquiring basic knowledge, skills, habits and values that enable individuals function effectively and become relevant in the society (Ogundele, Mugu & Yarwal, 2015). It is the process by which every society attempts to preserve and upgrade the accumulated knowledge, skills and attitudes in its cultural setting and heritage in order to foster continuously the well-being of mankind and guarantee its survival against the unpredictable (Nwagwu in Adiele, 2010). Thus, education is the bedrock through which development acquires its meaning (Chidi, 2011).

Consequent upon the aforementioned facts therefore basic education can be perceived as the education that is fundamental and necessary for the inculcation of appropriate values, attitudes, and habits to enable recipients function effectively and become relevant in the society. Universal basic education as a policy was launched on the 30th of September, 1999 by President Olusegun Obasanjo in Sokoto State, Nigeria. According to the Federal Ministry of Education in Ogbonnaya (2010), universal basic education encompasses primary, junior secondary and nomadic education as well as adult literacy. One of the main reasons for introducing the universal basic education scheme is because Nigeria is a signatory to the 1990 Jomtiem Declaration of Education for all by the year 2000 and also a member of the Group E-9 nation committed to the total eradication of illiteracy.

The universal basic education programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria according to Dorgu and Olu-Obafemi (2017) has the following as its objectives:

1. Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion.
2. Provision of free Universal Basic Education for every Nigerian child of school age.
3. Reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality and efficiency).
4. Catering for the learning needs of young persons who, for one reason or the other, have had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of Basic Education.
5. Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate level of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as ethical, moral and civic

values needs for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning and education (p. 78).

From the above assertions, it becomes imperative to affirm that the acquisition of literacy, numeracy, communicative and life skills as well as ethical, moral and civic values are the focus of basic education which can be acquired through e-learning.

Concept of E-learning

The term “e-learning” has been viewed in varied perspectives by scholars. It happens in a variety of ways and a variety of terms such as blended learning or hybrid learning online learning, digital learning, distance learning or remote learning, flipped classroom, and others are associated with it. E-learning is the process of extending learning or delivering instructional resource sharing opportunities, to locations away from a classroom, building or site, to another classroom, building or site by using video, audio, computer, multimedia communications, or some combination of these with other traditional delivery methods (Wani, 2013). It comprises all forms of electronically supported learning and teaching. Kalaivani (2014) posits that e-learning is a type of teaching and learning that can be obtained by means of online technology. It involves all kinds of electronic media by utilizing all the potentialities of information technology. In e-learning the instructional material and content may be delivered by any one of all electronic media including the internet, intranet, Local Area Network (LAN), satellite broadcasts, audio video tapes.

Bennett (2020) asserts that e-learning is a learning system based on formalized teaching but with the help of electronic resources. It is a network enabled transfer of skills and knowledge, and the delivery of education is made to a large number of recipients at the same or different times. While teaching can be based in or out of the classrooms, the use of computers and the internet forms the major component of e-learning. Afolabi and Uhomoibhi (2017) opine that e-learning is the use of electronic technology to deliver, support and enhance teaching and learning. It is the use of ICT infrastructures such as computers, networks, internet, smart phones and iPods to facilitate access to resources and services as well as remote exchanges and collaborations. Ajuonuma and Oguguo (2015) aver that e-learning is the instructional medium that enable greater and faster human communication and collaboration and lead to fundamentally new forms of economic activity that produce the required basic changes in education. Oluwuo and Lawanson (2013) posit that e-learning is a sub-

system within ICT and comprises of all electronically supported teaching-learning. It is a modern process of learning which can successfully improve the quality in education and foster sustainable development.

Today, the use of web to teach and learn is inevitable for both teachers and learners. Online teaching and learning are becoming more and more necessary for education to and for knowledge spread. Thus, teachers should consider this trend in basic education and get prepared technically and pedagogically to take online teaching in consideration. In turn, learners need to get enough skills that will help them effectively benefit from the advantages e-learning is providing (Fresh Science New, 2015).

Need for and Benefits of E-learning to Basic Education

In today's knowledge economy, learning is needed to survive and to thrive. In this sense, knowledge is power and proliferation of knowledge through e-learning in basic education is not a luxury, but a necessity for current and future generations. In this context, distance learning has become an imperative. The need is constant, while the nature of our society and economy drives the need for learning. E-learning is the next level of learning beginning as a revolution, and the internet has now become a part and parcel of the 21st century world, particularly in this era of COVID 19 pandemic. Everything and everyone is going online, as those who are not doing so are missing out on the immense power of this modern age wonder (Wani, 2013). Can basic education be any far behind? Indeed not, as is evident from the advent of e-learning. E-learning is needed in basic education because it is learner-centred. It accommodates individual preferences and needs. At the same time, it empowers learners of various backgrounds to have equal access to the best resources and referral material, class sessions, tutoring, and experienced teachers.

The need for e-learning in basic education is dependent upon the benefits derivable from its usage. As identified by Dashe and Thomson (2020), some of the benefits include the following:

1. E-learning provides flexibility for users. Content can be delivered to teams and individuals on-demand to their preferred devices, anytime, anywhere. The more self-paced, interactive access increases proficiency and allows learners to revisit information, re-take tests, and track their progress.

2. E-learning offers ease of use for content creators, subject matter experts, and managers. The curriculum can be easily updated, from tweaking verbiage to adding new information and visuals. This means that your courses stay current. It also provides much better scalability for a wider audience. With e-learning, the content curate by a small number of subject matter experts can reach a much larger audience through different means than if those experts were teaching individuals in person.
3. E-learning bolsters productivity. E-learning uses 40% to 60% less employee time compared to Instructor Led Training, which often takes people away from their jobs for hours or days and can require travel costs. This makes more time available for employees to be productive.
4. E-learning reinforces memory retention because it is visual and interactive. Plus, studies show that e-learning participants learn up to five times more material than they learn via tradition instruction, without increasing the time spent in training.
5. E-learning provides valuable metrics that management can use to test and improve training effectiveness. Also, learners and their managers can track individual progress and performance, which improves compliance.

Kalaivani (2014) avers that e-learning is a promising way for improving the quality of education and the effectiveness of learning. It can give increased flexibility of learning experience to learners, enhance access to information resources for more learners; the potential to drive innovative and effective ways of learning and enhancement of quality in education by leading to innovative pedagogical methods, new ways of learning and interacting by the easy sharing of the new practices among learners and teachers communities, as well as by more transparency and easier comparison and cross fertilization of materials and methods. According to Zambito (2018), when learning is made available at the exact moment of need from countless devices, it makes learning possible. Unlike the conventional learning methods, e-learning ensures that learners complete their training sooner in order to enhance productivity.

Kalaivani (2014) reiterates that e-learning suits literally everyone, as its content can be accessed, consumed, discussed, and shared as each individual learner sees fit to their own benefit. From selecting to learn on weekends or evenings (in the case of adult

learners), to accessing content as many times as needed, dictating a personalized pace of learning, learning in the comfort of home or the office, or selecting the exact learning material of interest or relevance, e-learning is virtually limitless in how it can be customized to meet the needs of every learner. In the words of Fayad (2014), learning is not a one-size-fits-all experience and e-learning understands that. Thus, by creating a unique and individual experience for each learner to discover, read, watch and interact at his own pace, e-learning creates an educational atmosphere more conducive to learning and retention. In spite of these aforementioned benefits of e-learning, its application in basic education is faced with numerous challenges in Nigeria.

Challenges of E-learning in Basic Education in Nigeria

There are various challenges facing the application of e-learning in basic education in Nigeria. These challenges have reduced the yield expected from the universal basic education programme of the federal government. A survey conducted by Afolabi and Uhomobhi (2017) reveals lapses in e-learning application in developing countries when compared with the practice in developed countries of the world. These lapses were attributable to many reasons such as lack of resources (energy/power/electricity), infrastructure, strategy and policies, which are important for laying a foundation for development and growth of business education, not only in Nigeria but the developing countries around the world. This is as a result of financial incapacity to implement the resources. In this paper, the writer highlights the following as major challenges facing the application of e-learning in basic education:

Funding Challenge

O'Neil (2006); Hornby (2010); and Brookes, Croves, O'Neil and Robertson (2010) assert that funding is the provision of money for a particular project, organization or purpose. Money is an important resource needed in basic education and requires adequate provision because through it, all other vital elements in the school system can be obtained (Nzepueme, 2011). Thus, applying e-learning in basic education requires adequate funding. Abali and Nwapi (2017) aver that the funding of the Nigerian educational system from 1960 – 2019 has been haphazard. The year 1971 has the lowest (0.53%) budgetary allocation while the highest allocation (17.59%) of funds was in 1997.

Nigeria has not performed to expectation in terms of education funding in the country, as the Federal Government has not allocated more than 17.59% of her annual budget to education. The funding of the universal basic education programme is heavily relied on government thereby reducing its independence as a result of lean income (Madugu, 2016). While there is an increase over the years in the ministry of education budget but the budget give more priority to recurrent aspect of the budget and is non-charlant towards the growth and development of e-learning in education; hence, the slow pace of digital learning in the basic schools in the country.

Infrastructural Challenge

There are strong indications that infrastructural facilities needed for effective application of e-learning in basic education are inadequate if not lacking in some places. For example, in some communities, the school buildings are dilapidated; some de-roofed for years, and others in a state of total neglect. The absence of classrooms for effective teaching and learning presupposes the absence of other facilities such as computers, laptops, audio-visual materials, and others (Nwafor, 2006). In this age of computer and information technology, computers should be a major part of the instructional materials needed in the application of e-learning in basic schools. This will not develop manipulative skills that will enable learners function effectively within the limit of their capacity.

Curriculum Challenge

The curriculum of basic education in Nigeria is more a foreigner than indigenous. It does not reflect our local technology and in practice we cannot meet up the standard (in terms of ICT tools and equipment) of where we copied it. The improper approach to ICT towards teaching in basic schools has contributed to the slow pace in achieving the modern curriculum of basic education with focus on e-learning (Madugu, 2016).

Brain Drain Challenge

The teaching profession in Nigeria is losing its best brains to other sectors of the economy. Some are leaving the shores of Nigeria to foreign countries for greener pastures due to lack of satisfaction or unfavourable conditions of service. Although this is a global phenomenon, but basic education suffers the most as teachers capable of

implementing e-learning in the basic education programme are in short supply. In the face of these challenges therefore, it becomes imperative to revamp basic education to meet the need for and challenges of e-learning.

Revamping Basic Education to Meet the Need for and Challenges of E-learning in Nigeria

Revamping basic education entails making changes to the form of basic education, usually to improve its appearance. Thus, the specific actions that governments at all levels should take to address the challenges of e-learning in basic education in Nigeria, particularly in this era of COVID 19 pandemic, are the provision of ICT infrastructure and equipment in all basic schools; the implementation of the provisions of the National Technological Education Framework (Abali, Nabie & Dike, 2019), the available staff members for the development and delivery of e-learning must be of the right size and be skilled adequately. In the face of challenges such as finance, culture, data and record keeping, development and implementation of different business models to meet the needs of education are required. Standard practices in traditional education systems must be well recognized. Some of these would need to be revised to take account of changes associated with e-learning (Afolabi & Uhomoibhi, 2017).

Godwin in Chigozie-Okwum (2018) asserts that when teachers are digitally literate and trained to use ICT these approaches can lead to higher order thinking skills, provide creative and individualized options for learners to express their understandings and leave them better prepared to deal with the on-going technological changes in society and the workplace. It therefore, becomes imperative for Nigeria to have an ICT implementation strategy to respond to the global reality and thus avert becoming a victim of the digital divide. ICT can impact students' learning when teachers are digitally literate and understand how to integrate it into curriculum. Increase in students' exposure to e-learning through curriculum integration has significant and positive impact on learners' achievement, especially in terms of knowledge, comprehension, practical skills and presentation skills. Teachers should therefore be digitally literate and trained to use e-learning tools for full implementation of Nigeria's ICT policy by participating in staff development programmes.

Conclusion

Nigeria can find e-learning most suitable, cost effective to disseminate basic education as an entitlement to the entire population as online learning is no longer peripheral or supplementary yet an integral part of mainstream society. While teaching can be based in or out of the classrooms, the use of computers and the internet forms the major component of e-learning. E-learning is needed in basic education because it is learner-centred. It accommodates individual preferences and needs. At the same time, it empowers learners of various backgrounds to have equal access to the best resources and referral material, class sessions, tutoring, and experienced teachers. The challenges facing the application of e-learning in basic education have reduced the yield expected from the universal basic education programme of the federal government. Thus, the specific actions that the government should take to address the challenges are the provision of ICT infrastructure and equipment in all basic schools and make internet connectivity a priority for basic education to enable leverage on the promises and opportunities ICTs present.

Recommendations

In order for e-learning to be successfully applied and implemented in basic education, it is important that the federal government of Nigeria makes its initiatives part of the institution's strategic plan and budget with specific goals set for e-learning initiatives. Development programmes must be planned and deployed as e-learning technology is adopted across board. It is important that teachers are trained and developed through staff development programmes by the federal government and government should make internet connectivity a priority for basic education to be able to leverage on the promises and opportunities ICTs present.

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