

# **EFFECTIVE UTILIZATION OF WHATSAPP E-LEARNING PLATFORM IN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS: THE NEED FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE AND SUSTAINABILITY**

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## **Abstract**

*The main discourse of this paper is centered on the effective utilization of whatsapp e-learning platform and the need to ensure quality assurance as well as its sustainability in higher institution. Conceptual issues such as whatsapp e-learning, higher institutions, quality assurance and sustainability were explained. However, various forms of e-learning were outlined which include amongst others computer managed learning, synchronous and asynchronous online learning and whatsapp e-learning falls under the asynchronous online learning. It was pointed out that whatsapp e-learning is unique and fascinating in the sense that, it is a multisensory medium that can stimulate students' sense organs in teaching and learning process. It also addresses the problem of individual differences in learners as well as their learning styles. The paper is of the view that instructional designers should adopt the framework for e-learning programme while planning and designing of whatsapp e-learning in order to ensure quality assurance and its sustainability in higher institutions. The framework include five elements such as course content, interactivity for learner's engagement, visual design and so on. It was further stressed in the paper that thorough review of whatsapp e-learning content is very important so as to ensure standard, quality programmes and best practices in higher institution. Consequently the benefits of whatsapp e-learning programme, conclusion as well as recommendations were made.*

**Keywords:** Quality Assurance, Sustainability, Whatsapp E-Learning, Higher Institution, Instructional Designer.

The need to ensure quality assurance and sustainability of whatsapp e-learning in higher institutions cannot be over-emphasized. This stems from the fact that there is higher degree of skepticisms and concerns being expressed by many educators, administrators and policy makers on the effective use of whatsapp e-learning for educational purposes. Collins and Moonem, (2001) stated that as with the conventional teaching and learning method e-learning is most often done well and poorly in higher institutions. In the same line of thought Garret (2004) asserted that many e-learning educational programmes have failed to realized their aims and goals thereby making people to question the quality assurance as well as the capability of educational delivery through e-learning technologies. It is against this background that it is considered imperative that quality assurance and sustainability are ensured in e-learning using whatsapp platform in teaching and learning purposes in higher institutions. The paper also discussed the roles of instructional designers in ensuring quality assurance in whatsapp e-learning and its sustainability.

## **Conceptual Issues**

Indeed whatsapp e-learning platform is gaining more popularity and grounds in most higher institutions throughout the world. It makes the delivery of education to be highly flexible, timely, precision as well as anywhere and anytime. E-learning occurs in a wide range of teaching and learning activities where technology of one form or another is being used (Ron, 2016). Stella and Gnanam (2004) described e-learning as the effective use of technology as a discrete educational activities. In the context of this paper, e-learning is define as a form of educational delivery using technologies such as computers, internet, wikis, blogs and social media. In other words, e-learning could be conceived as one of the means of imparting education through educational tools and communication media. There are different types of e-learning such as computer managed learning, computer assisted instruction, synchronous and asynchronous online, flexible learning and interactive online learning (Fresen, 2005).

However, this paper is focused on the effective utilization of whatsapp e-learning platform for teaching and learning in higher institutions. Fortunately, whatsapp e-learning falls under asynchronous online learning in the sense that, it is an organized form of teaching and learning whereby students come online at a particular fixed time but from different locations and communicate directly with the teacher and/or instructor. Whatsapp e-learning involves a group of students taking their studies separately although simultaneously via instant messaging. Furthermore, whatsapp is a platform through which a teacher and/or instructor and students exchange instant messages such as text message, pictures, images, video, audio as well as voice recording- that is voice note over the internet using smarthphones, iphone, Android and window phone. It is interesting to note that what is now known as whastapp was founded by Brain Acton and Jan Koum in the year 2009. Virtually all courses and/or subjects can be taught effectively through whatsapp e-learning platform. Indeed, what makes whatsapp e-learning so unique and fascinating is that it is a multi-media that is, it is a multi sensory medium; it has the capacity to stimulates all the human sense organs in the course of teaching and learning process. Through this means, it addresses the problem of individual differences in learners as well as their learning styles.

Most essentially, whatsapp e-learning platform has relevant features such as doc, pictures, camera, video, audio, animation, voice note and so on. All these features can be systematically integrated and organized by teachers and/or instructors to deliver instructions to the students. In addition to this, there are planned dates for lectures, tests or quizzes, examination and submission of assignments.

However, the instructional content of whastapp e-learning has to be well designed so as to achieve the educational purposes and intentions. In view of this, there is need to ensure quality assurance of whasapps e-learning educational programmes and its sustainability. As noted by the Quality Assurance Agency in the United Kingdom (2004), quality assurance is described as a code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in the provision of flexible and distributed learning such as e-learning. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2002) define quality assurance as the practice of managing the way goods produced or services are provided to make sure they maintained a high standard. In the context of this paper, quality assurance is all about to ensure excellence, standards as well as best practices in internet-based teaching and learning as per in this case whatsapp e-

learning platform. The whatsapp e-learning educational programmes is expected to reflect standard and the best practices globally.

On the other hand, sustainability is viewed as how man may live in harmony with the natural environment around him, protecting it from damage and destruction (Diamond, 2005). Similarly, Brundtland and Commission (2007) define sustainability as the type of education that meets the needs of the present generations without necessarily compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. Within the context of this paper, sustainability is conceived as the ability to sustain whatsapp e-learning platform in higher institution so that students and teachers would be able to meet their learning needs as well as achieve their greatest potentials in the present while preserving and maintaining quality assurance, standards and the best practices for the future generations. However, quality assurance and sustainability in higher institutions involves processes such as; accountability to a funding body that is, the government; a desire to improve outcome; being able to sustain programmes and activities as well as the ability to demonstrate achievement against stated educational goals (Briggs, 2001). Briggs referred this quality assurance processes as “retrospective activities” in the sense that e-learning developers and/or instructional designers tend to look back to seek what has been done in the past with a view to see what could be done to transform or change educational processes in order to improve the service delivery.

Consequently, the Quality Assurance Agency for higher institutions (2001) enumerated some of the aims of quality assurance in e-learning using whatsapp platform to include the following contribute to the promotion of high quality and standards in whatsapp e-learning; provide students with reliable and consistent information about quality and standard in higher institutions as well as ensure that higher institutions where quality and standards are unsatisfactory rapid response action is taken to improve them.

### **Quality Assurance and Sustainability of Whatsapp E-learning Programme in Higher Institutions- The Roles of Instructional Designer.**

In order to ensure quality assurance and sustainability of whatsapp e-learning for effective teaching and learning in higher institutions, the instructional designer has to make use of the framework for e-learning quality assurance which include the following:

- The course content
- Interactivity for engagement
- Visual design
- Logical structure and
- Adequate technology support (Grace, 2016).

By implication the instructional designer in this case, is the teacher and/or the instructor has to ensure that whatsapp e-learning course content is well thought-out, concise as well as consistent. In as much as, students do not like to read too much especially when they learn in a self-paced manner, the whatsapp e-learning course content should not be too complicated. As a matter of fact, the teacher or the instructor should make complex or difficult concepts so simple to be easily understood by the students. Moreover, punctuation, grammar, as well as spelling accuracy for figures and facts has to be checked from time to time in order to make the learner have confidence in the course and its ability to create value for him or her.

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Furthermore, the instructional designer should try as much as possible to incorporate interactivity for learner's engagement in whatsapp e-learning; this will to a large extent provide relief and a kind of challenge to the learners to think and apply assimilated learning. For example, there are lots of inter-activities for engagement of learners in whatsapp e-learning programme such as: fill-in-the blanks, multiple-choice questions, true or false and match-the correct answers. The students could as well watch video clips. However, simple and straightforward interactivities help students in learning conceptual and factual issues. In the case of visual design, the instructional designer should pay more attention to the use of fonts, space, colour, as well as graphics. As a matter of fact, the instructional designer should ensure that the quality, layout and relevance of images and graphics posted on whatsapp e-learning platform are at par. This help the student to learn at ease as well as reduces the cognitive overload. Most importantly, the logical structure of whatsapp e-learning programme should be simple and consistent throughout the course. It should not be structured in a manner that it will prevent learners from learning meaningfully. However, the instructional designer should create e-learning courses that can be delivered through mobile devices and which should contain short audio-visual which students can listen and learn anytime and anywhere. In addition to this, the instructional designer should be thorough when reviewing whatsapp e-learning course content; if need be, he may invite another person to review it as well as before posting it online. It is also important that the instructional designer conducts what is known as "multiple end -to- end" review instead of concentrating on visuals, text at the same time; he should start with "an end-to- end" review of text then followed by visuals and so on. The essence of reviewing the content is to eliminate to the barest minimum all forms of typographical errors as well as ensure that e-learning content of whatsapp truly reflects quality assurance and best practices. However, the whatsapp e-learning programme should be evaluated periodically.

### **The Benefits of Whatsapp E-learning Platform in Higher Institutions**

The outbreak of COVID-19 really offered an unprecedented challenges especially in terms of teaching and learning in most higher institutions. But then, teaching and learning could have go on continuously with whatsapp e-learning platform. However, the benefits of whatsapp e-learning programme according to Shiksha (nd) include the following:

- Whatsapp e-learning tends to reduce cost of travel and time convenient especially for off-campus students
- Whatsapp e-learning platform fosters more interactions among teachers and students than in a large class in conventional method.
- Whatsapp e-learning can accommodate different learning styles of learners hence, it is a multimedia, and it makes learning possible through a variety of activities.
- Through whatsapp e-learning platform students can study anywhere and anytime with their computers and smart phones as long as there is internet connection.
- Whatsapp e-learning help students develop knowledge of the internet as well as skills on computer that would help them throughout their life and careers.
- Through whatsapp e-learning, class activities can be planned without necessarily compromising family engagement or office work.

• Whatsapp e-learning platform provides self-paced learning modules that allow students to study at their own pace or rate.

However, the disadvantages of whatsapp e-learning programme are as follows:

- Students with no self-discipline may lag behind.
- Poor internet connections may make accessing course materials sometimes frustrating.
- Conducting practical and/or laboratory work may be difficult through whatsapp e-learning.

### **Conclusion**

The paper discussed extensively the effective utilization of whatsapp e-learning platform in higher institutions and the need to ensure quality assurance and sustainability for efficient and effective instructional delivery system. Conceptual issues such as whatsapp e-learning, higher institution, quality assurance and sustainability were highlighted. Different types of e-learning were equally enumerated of which whatsapp e-learning was mainly focused on the paper. It was also pointed out that the instructional content of whatsapp e-learning programme should be planned and designed so as to achieve the educational objective. The essence of quality assurance and sustainability of whatsapp e-learning in higher institutions as well as the roles of instructional designer in ensuring quality assurance and sustainability were explained. However, the benefits of whatsapp e-learning in higher institutions which include amongst others, to reduce cost of travel for off-campus students and providing learners the opportunity to learn anywhere and anytime with their computers and smart phones were stated. Nevertheless, the disadvantages of whatsapp e-learning were equally outlined.

### **Recommendations**

Recommendations were made which include amongst others that Government should make it a policy that all higher institutions should adopt as well as integrate e-learning in their curriculum using whatsapp e-learning platform. In order to ensure quality assurance and sustainability of whatsapp e-learning in higher institution, quality assurance committee of the institution has to be set up. The committee should comprised of experts in Information Communication and Technology (ICT) and other subject specialists and/or professionals. The work of the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) is to monitor instructional delivery processes, its implementation, assessment process and students learning outcomes.

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