
Challenges of Synergizing Education Via Distance/E-Learning for Values, Knowledge, Skills and National Development

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Abstract

The need for education cannot be over emphasized. Every year, everywhere, every time, people all over the world continue to search for quality knowledge via tertiary studies. This, no doubt, has created the need for more radical approach to receiving education. Distance/e-learning has come to synergize education, a condition upon which a prospective student now feels self-challenged first because he must meet his target for self actualization and self esteem. Consequently, many prospective tertiary students in education, science, social science, vocation, etc. now go for several degrees online (e-learning) especially in educational psychology, accountancy etc. Prospective students do so because of the knowledge, values, skills and job opportunities inherent in the studies. In the light of this, this paper explains how e –learning synergizes education, advantages and challenges, inherent in this mode of tertiary studies and proffer solutions to these.

Firstly, distance learning is the method of study through which lectures are broadcast or classes are conducted by correspondence or over the internet. It can be seen as a method of delivering education and instruction on an individual basis, to students who are not physically present in traditional setting such as a classroom. Distance learning provides access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance or both. Distance education courses that require a physical on-site presence for any reason (including taking examinations) have been referred to as hybrid or blended courses of study. Distance education dates back to at least as early as 1728, when an advertisement in the Boston gazette named Caleb Phillips, teacher of the new method of shorthand was seeking students for lesson to be sent weekly. In 1840's, University of London was the first to offer distance learning degrees, established external programmes in 1958 now known as the university of London international programmes running postgraduate, undergraduate and diploma degrees run by the London school of Economics as noted by Royal Holloway and Goldsmith. In the US, it was known as satellite colleges in the wider communities as established by the first President of the University of Chicago, William Rainey Harper and in 1892, he further encouraged the concept of correspondence school courses promoting distance learning. (<http://www.google.com>).

E-Learning

Unizulu (2012) opined that, the term e-Learning was claimed to have been coined by Cross in 1998. but it seems to have earlier been published by Cross in 2004. However, it seems to have already, been published by Mori in 1997.

Clerk, 2011 listed below are several notable definitions of e-learning which describe the utilization of ICT within educational and training programmes.

The American Society for Training and Development (ASTD),(1998), defined e-learning in 1998 as broad set of applications and processes which include Web-based learning, virtual classrooms and digital collaboration. Much of this is delivered via the internet, intranet/extranet (LAN/WAN) audio and video tapes, satellite broadcast, interactive TV and CD-Rom, (ASTD).

According to the World Bank, e-learning refers to the use of computer-based electronic technology, e-mail, websites and CD-ROMs, and their applications to deliver, facilitate and enhance both formal and informal learning and knowledge sharing at any time.

Wikipedia saw e-learning to comprise all forms of electronically supported learning and teaching. The information and communication systems, whether networked or not serve as specific media to implement the learning process.

E-learning can refer to educational processes such as those offering such as those offering learning scenarios, worksheets and interactive exercises for children. The term is also used extensively in the business sector where it generally refers to cost-effective online education.

The recent trend in the E-learning sector is screencasting. This is a digital recording of computer screen output also known as video screen capture which often contains audio narrations as noted by Udell, MacDonald and Cooley in 2004. There are many screen casting tools available but the latest buzz is all about the web based screen casting tools which allow the user to create screen casts directly from their browser and make the video available online so that the viewers can stream the video directly. The advantage of such tools is that it gives the presenter the ability to show his ideals and flow of thoughts rather than simply explaining them, which may be more confusing when delivered via simple text instructions. With the combination of video and audio, the expert can mimic the one on one experience of the classroom and deliver clear complete instructions. From the learner's point of view, this provides the ability to pause and rewind and gives the learners the advantage of moving at their own pace, something orthodox classroom cannot always offer. Research on the use of video in lessons is preliminary, but clearly results show an increased retention and better results when video is used in a lesson. Creating a systematic video development method holds promise for creating video models that can positively impact student learning.

Difference between Distance and 'E'-Learning

Distance learning, as the name rightly suggests, is observed when the learner is quite some distance obtaining instructions while learning. This could come via radio broadcast, internet, mails etc. while E-learning includes all forms of electronically supported learning and teaching. Educational technology also supports E-learning as it helps "out of classroom" and "in classroom" educational experiences through application of technology (Edutech). E-learning is the computer and network-enabled transfer of skills and knowledge. E-learning applications and process include web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual education opportunities and digital collaboration. Content of lessons are delivered via any or combinations of internet/intranet/extranet, audio or video tape, TV and CD-rom. It can be self paced or instructor-led and includes media in the form of texts, image animation, streaming video and audio. Both distance and e-learning offers almost the same method of learning since all of them do not necessarily need the presence of the teacher or instructor before teaching and learning could take place and also distance is involved though technology such as internet/ICT could reduce the problems. The two terms can be used interchangeably.

Why Distance and E-learning Options

There are many reasons why one may take the option of distance/ e-learning and this could count from possible reasons as follows:-

1. Sickness like allergies: reactions from pollen, cold, asthma etc, as such precludes classroom learning and allow for Distance/E-learning.
2. Fear of violence/riot at public school/shoot-outs: Parents may fear some volatile areas that have crisis such as Boko-Haram, history of shoot-outs in public schools and as such may not want the option of classroom learning hence Distance/E-learning.
3. Non qualification: The crave for qualified teachers/lecturers in a particular course can lure one into the option of Distance/E-learning programme.
4. Income: Irregular flow of streams of income is always a problem to an individual or households. Poor and inadequate flow of income is equally a serious problem. Stream flow of arms not accountable in nation income accounting, cannot be substantial enough to carry the programme since it is irregular and inadequate hence poor. Therefore a steady and slow flow of income is vital and a prerequisite for a Distance or an E-learning programme since it can be spaced to suite the learner's schedule at anytime.
5. Class size: in many public universities or higher institutions in Nigeria, there is always high population explosion in every class or course. These dilutes teaching and learning encounter and so many students opt for distance/E-learning especially were the student is physically challenged.
6. Cultism: Cult activities in a public or private universities can put-off one's interest in studying specific choice course in a university were there exist history of cult related activities in the past.
7. Transportation/fares: In a multi-campus (set-up) university means of movement (transportation) and high cost of fares could pose a problem to existing and prospective students, hence the option of Distance/E-learning programme.
8. Work schedules etc: tight work schedules is always a problem to having the choice of a regular programme. These condition creates a robots oppoturnity for busy executive to acquire desired and necessary skills via the option of Distance/E-learning.
9. Fear of crowd: the fear of thick population and its resultant effect on utilities can create opportunity of fear and intimidation to some prospective students. It dose not matter weather the student is bright or dull. This negative psychological effect creates opportunity for the option of Distance/E-learning.

10. Introverts: personalities who are introverted are always fearful and shy of crowd hence prefer the option of Distance/E-learning, as this still allows them their shell privacy.
11. (Open) competition: Not many people enjoy (stiff) open competition. In many cases, they do not know that they are bright and capable of the challenge because they are afraid of competition, hence rush to Distance/E-learning programme.

Types of E-Learning

According to Monday (2010), Broadbent 2002, there are four types of e-learning and they include:-

1. Informal e-learning
2. Self-Paced e-learning,
3. Leader-led e-learning and
4. Performance Support Tools.

Informal E-learning

In the case of the informal e-learning, a learner could access a web-site or join an online discussion group to find relevant information.

Self-paced E-learning

This method refers to the process whereby learners access computer based or web-based training materials at their own pace.

Leader-led E-learning

As the name suggests, refers to an instructor/tutor or facilitator leading the process. This type of learning can further be divided into two categories viz

1. Learners accessing real time (synchronous) learning materials and
2. Learners accessing delayed learning materials (asynchronous).

The Performance Support Tools

This is the fourth and last type of e-learning, described by the use of performance support tools which refers to materials that learners can use to help perform a task, (normally in software) such as using a wizard references.

The E-learning Synergies in Education

Information, Communication, and Technologies (ICT) are not a panacea or magic formulae, but in many ways can improve the lives of everyone in this planet, Earth. According to Olusegun(2003),

Our government supports the goals and shared vision of information society as articulated by Resolution 56/183 of the United Nations General Assembly which seeks to put at the disposal of our common humanity, the benefits of

Information and Communications Technology (ICT). The internationally-agreed development goals are contained in the Millennium Declaration as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights cannot be realized until an all-inclusive information society is created. The infusion of ICT in education has the capacity and capability of achieving the possibilities of giving education to many for eradication of extreme hunger and poverty by 2015.

It is possible that about 70 percent of the world population may not have been connected to the internet thereby, depriving them of the 21st century resource and digging a digital divide between the rich and poor, richer nations like Japan and European Union, but still, e-learning has power and capability of synergizing education, bridging gaps between the rich and poor empowering many more people (graduates and non graduates).

In furtherance to this understanding therefore, as also has been noted by Annan (2003), an American nuclear Scientist Robert J once opined that:

The open society, the unrestricted access to knowledge, the unplanned and uninhibited association of men... (ICT and Internet access) these are what may make a vast, complex ever growing, ever changing, ever more specialized and expert technological world, nevertheless a world of human community.

The place of distance/e-learning making way for a functional education for national development no doubt- produces the synergies in education. The first world summit on information society, put up a 29 point, action plan committing nations to using telecommunications Technologies such as worldwide Web and Cellular telephone to boost economic growth and development. Distance/E-learning and the classroom formal method when utilized is capable of synergizing education so long as all requires a level of technology which educational technology can provide. This will help for the improvement of knowledge and skills desirable for national development.

The possibility of synergizing education via rapid application of e-learning is not in doubt. The application of ICT in Distance/E-learning in education will equally be of help in developing the required level of human capital formation desirable for national development. Distance and e-Learning programmes stand a chance of bringing up the synergies that can sustain sound educational development in Nigeria, Obasanjo at the convocation ceremony of University of Lagos(UNILAG) in 2002, advocated the weeding test (post JAMB test) for candidates admitted from 2003 at UNILAG. Today the place of e-learning is being embraced by all at least for its all embracing benefits. Recently, JAMB has introduced the e-exam beginning from the 2013 United Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME). Expectation therein is that candidates from outside Nigeria can easily take the examination same time same day. This move gives

Distance/E-learning education more boost as it will improve Nigerian's Stimulus-Response in ICT development. This will fasten the release of results and prevent examination malpractices and cult related activities. At this juncture, the place of e-learning (*ICT*) serving as a back-bone infrastructure to achieving other things (in education) is highly favoured. When the human capital is sincerely developed through distance/e-learning, this will in no small measure make way for a more functional education, a condition upon which values knowledge skills acquired will be put in full functional usage.

Functional Education Via E-Learning

Distance/E-learning has come to spread learning more rapidly than the orthodox mode. In the recent times, it has come to synergize education making education really functional, expanding the demand and supply of it even to the most remotest area and in terms of urban setting. It has come to expand the choice of very many people, young and old. The quest for knowledge no doubt continues to be one of man's greatest need irrespective of age hence via technology, barriers/restrictions, distance etc call it any kind of inhibition and challenges could be averted thereby, allowing knowledge and learning to co-exist. Issues like health, not necessarily medicare, drug, food, healthcare, banking etc can be solved through good provisions of functional education which in turn, produces additional values, knowledge, skills, and national development.

E-learning has provided men with new opportunities in teaching-learning procedures. A historical review of educational systems literature reveals that e-learning has spread out among people much faster than any other learning methods.

E-learning as the state-of-the-art technology, has caused great innovations in materials, development in those societies in which new methods and procedures could hardly ever been accepted. These are the benefits accruable when e-learning has come to synergize education making for a functional education through integration of ICT into educational system.

How the Synergy Works

Communication technologies are generally categorized as asynchronous or synchronous. Asynchronous activities use technologies such as blog, wikis, and discussion boards. The idea here is that participants may engage in the exchange of ideas or information without the dependency of other participants involvement at the same time. Electronic mail (Email) is also asynchronous in that mail can be sent or received without having both the participants' involvement at the same time. Asynchronous learning also gives students the ability to work at their own pace. This is particularly beneficial for students who have health problems or have child care

responsibilities and regularly leaving the home to attend lectures is difficult. They have the opportunity to complete their work in a low stress environment and within a more flexible time frame.

Synchronous activities involve the exchange of ideas and information with one or more participants during the same periods of time. A face discussion is an example of synchronous communications. In an “E” learning environment, an example of synchronous communications would be a Skype conversation or a chat room where everyone is online and working collaboratively at the same time. Synchronous activities occur with all participants join in at once, as with an online chat session or a virtual classroom or meeting.

Virtual classrooms and meetings can often use a mix of communication technologies. Participants in a virtual classroom use icons called emoticons to communicate feelings and responses to questions or statements. Students are able to ‘write on the board’ and even share their desktop, when given rights by the teacher. Other communication technologies available in a virtual classroom include text note, microphone rights, and breakout sessions. Breakout sessions allow the participants to work collaboratively in small group setting to accomplish a task as well as allow the teacher to have private conversations with his or her students.

The virtual classroom also provides the opportunity for students to receive direct instruction from a qualified teacher in an interactive environment. Students have direct and immediate access to the instructor thereby enabling them to have instant feedback and way forward. The virtual classroom also provides a structured schedule of classes, which can be helpful for students who may find the freedom of asynchronous learning to be overwhelming. The virtual classroom also provides a social learning environment that closely replicates the traditional ‘brick and mortar’ classroom. Most virtual classroom applications provide a recording feature. Each class is recorded and stored on a server, which allows for instant playback of any class over the course of the school year. This can be extremely useful for students to review material and concepts for an upcoming exam. This also provides students with the opportunity to watch any class that they may have missed. It also gives parents the ability to monitor any classroom to insure that they are satisfied with the education their child is receiving.

In Asynchronous online courses, the students proceed at their own pace. If they need to listen to a lecture a second time, or think about a question for a while, they may do so without fearing that they will cause “draw-back” to the rest of the class. Through online courses, students can earn their Diplomas, Certificates and Degrees more quickly, or repeat failed courses without the embarrassment of being in a class with younger students. Students also have access to an incredible variety of enriched courses

in online learning, and can participate in college courses, internships, sports, or work and still graduate with their class mates.

Benefits and Challenges of E-Learning.

Benefits and Challenges abound relating to personal perception of E-Learning, Learning attitude, personal expertise, ICT use and access to the requisite technology.

Benefits of E-Learning

Among notable advantages include

- 1) E-learning attracts companies for training staff learners actively involved in his/her e-learning.
- 2) It allows for flexibility and adaptability vis-avis time, location, training at own pace, independently of other learners.
- 3) e-Learning is perfectly good for both formative and summative self assessment during and at the end of course.
- 4) Through E-learning, a student can set-up a personal progress monitoring (PPM) of achievement to determine success or failure and required reinforcement and motivation when need be.
- 5) E-learning encourages institutions/companies to train staffers en-mass because of low cost accruable to such opportunities.
- 6) Through E-learning, there is the possibility of Customization and adjustment of training courses to predefined skills and teaching goals to the benefit of the Company.
- 7) There is always the low logistical constraints in E-learning as beneficiaries only manipulate necessities like electricity and Portable Computers (PCs), to suit their conveniences.
- 8) No room booking, employee travel etc by prospective students.

Disadvantages

There are still some disadvantages challenging e-learning students such as below.

1. Most times some students are not serious because nobody disturbs them on assignment, lateness and non attendance to lectures. Students of this programme are always working at own pace.
2. Obtaining another admission using their certificate may pose a serious problem to a student as many online Universities do not accept each other's credits as they doubt the quality. The dexterity/flexibility is not easy in holders using their certificates obtained through this mode.
3. E-learning programmes may not afford one the opportunity to learn more courses in a programme as each course taken is billed.

4. Students of this programme have no fun campus activities e.g. sports team, clubs rather, one interacts with computer always.
5. This does give room for work history, and also no good experience during work interview.
6. There is the high opportunity cost of investment in computer hardwares incurred by E-learning students.
7. Students with visual or physical impairments may be disadvantaged.
8. Most times employers of labour look down on holders of online Certificates (Degrees)/correspondence. Except the condition where one is already employed and obtain it. Sometimes, there is the argument that such certificates were gotten due to huge sum the holders paid and not by merit.

Challenges to E-learning

1. Computer literacy and access to equipment. Basic computer literacy and education is required for a successful e-learning programme.
2. Some topics are not appropriate for e-learning that courses/subjects that require physical exertion and practice like sports and public speaking may not be easy using e-learning even though it may be useful.
3. Students themselves may have some limitations to e-learning. A successful e-learning student should be well organized and highly self motivated as a successful outing is directly related to the amount of effort the student put.
4. Some employers of labour may not have explicit confidence to a possessor of the certificate.
5. A student of e-learning may find it very difficult to attract to himself scholarship funding to his studies hence funding may be difficult to a prospective student.
6. In the Nigerian setting, a graduate of the programme may not easily be enlisted into the National Youth Service programme (NYSC) hence patronage to this programme may decline except those already employed who may need the studies for more knowledge and skills.

Solutions to the Challenges

Government should subsidize Laptops in Nigeria making it easy for prospective Distance/E-learning students to operate.

Government should establish ICT centers to provide for free, learning of basic ICT issues and packages equipping many more with the knowledge.

Prospective students of distance/e-learning should try as much as possible to be economically engaged before embarking on E-learning programmes.

Service providers should beef up their services in the rural and urban areas to encourage for E-Learning proper to enable a functional education and national development in line with the developed world. Prospective students of Distance/E-Learning should try and own alternative power supply first so as to be sure of completing the programme in record time.

Summary and Conclusion

It has been on record that no investment can yield higher returns more than education.

Distance/E-learning can synergize education as the two methods of receiving knowledge can surely transform the human capital towards achieving greater fit in the economy. The orthodox (classroom), and the Distance/E-learning working together can produce the desired effect in education sub sector. Where the classroom method stops, the Distance/E-learning continues for knowledge skills and national development.

A current findings shows that no Nigerian university is listed among the best one hundred universities in the world. Equally, there is a decline in the enrollment of students in science and technology. Transformation of our economy can only take place when universities are churning out graduates who can compete favourably in the modern world. With the depressing performance of education sector in Nigeria over time, tertiary institutions producing graduates who are not marketable, Lecturers who cannot deliver teaching easily due to lack of adequate instructional materials, good text books, etc. some are in very many other institutions of higher learning on adjunct programmes due to inability to meet up their financial obligations easily, undergraduates who are not committed to their studies etc. Universities themselves are challenged with some problems like lack of research facilities, shortage of skilled teachers for the teaching subjects and courses of study, frequent strikes largely as a result of unpaid salaries and allowances, official corruption, collapse value system, exam malpractices and unsatisfactory condition of services, hence serious depression in the education sector.etc, tend to reduce the quality of our university products leaving the economy with half baked graduates and this makes it difficult for them to be employed easily. E-learning stops these ugly conditions. With distance/e-learning approaches in higher educational studies, there is the continual functional education and

national development. It is a sure way of getting well grounded graduates, having new aptitudes, innovative thinking, problem-solving skills while acquiring higher values and skills assisting the country to occupy front position in the international community. In conclusion it is wise a choice to go into Distance/E-learning programmes. It energizes education, improve and make for good values, knowledge, skills and national development. The challenges arising from it can be resolved as long as the student in the programme has the intrinsic motivation to finish his programme. There is no doubt the problems of dilapidated infrastructure in education and the possibility of synergizing education via Distance/E-learning.

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