E-LEARNING AND DISTANCE EDUCATION: RATIONALE AND PROBLEMS

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Abstract
This paper discussed the rationale of e-learning as delivery technique in distance education as well as the problems to be encountered therein. It commenced by discussing the meaning of e-learning and distance education. It also discussed the problems of e-learning in distance education. Furthermore the paper highlighted rationale for e-learning in distance education. It also proffered recommendations for effective use of e-learning in distance education.

Today, we live in a world of constant emerging new technologies that pose challenges in the field of education. Strategic use of technologies whether remote or close range can enhance teaching and learning (kwan R, Fox R, Chan F.T and Tsang P, 2008). The prospect of tertiary education (post graduate, under graduate and non graduate) in the near future relies on these technologies.

The socio-economic dimensions of providing education for the population within the context of prevailing national circumstances of dwindling financial resources in the face of developmental needs are heavy. The ever-continuing growth in Nigeria’s population, the attendant high demand for education at all levels, the difficulty of re-sourcing education through the traditional means of face-to-face classroom bound mode, and the compelling needs to provide education for all (EFA) irrespective of environment, social or cultural challenges and circumstances have meant that the country must of necessity find the appropriate and cost effective means to respond adequately to the huge unmet demand for education. All these emerging situations have signaled the need for a comprehensive search for a more viable, reliable, efficient and cost beneficial educational solutions which according to Jegede (2003) and Sadeq (2003) are that the most logical pathway to achieving these is by embracing distance education through e-learning. What then is e-learning and distance education?

E – learning
E - Learning according to Sale (2002) is the use of electronic technology to deliver education and training applications, monitor learner’s performance and report
learners progress. Hedge and Hayward (2004) defined it as an innovative approach for delivering electronically mediated well-designed learner centred and interactive learning environments to anyone, anyplace, anytime by utilizing the internet and digital technologies in concern with instructional design principles.

Tripathi (2007) noted that E-learning encompasses courses offered online, courses face-to-face and online access to course materials and courses provided access to online discussion forums, notes, and other course materials. It is all about learning with the use of computers. Learning with the use of computer is simply online ways of acquiring knowledge through the internet or through the offline CD-ROM. The online involves the use of internet Explorer/Navigator. It may be in form of Audio, Visual and or Audio Visual. The applications and process of e-learning include computer-based learning, web-based learning, virtual classroom and digital collaboration where contents is delivered via the internet, intranet/extranet, audio and or video tapes satellite TV and CD-ROM (Islam, 1997).

E-learning is suited to distant learning and independent study, but can also be used in conjunction with face to face teaching which is referred to as “blended learning”. The importance of e-learning is growing in higher education. Key advantages of e-learning are flexibility convenience and the ability to work at any place where an Internet connection is available and at one’s own pace (E-Learning’ 2011). E-learning is a viable option for those with commitments or conditions such as family or work, or who cannot participate easily for reasons including disability. The time and cost of commuting to and from campus are eliminated.

The urge to embark on e-learning is still a dream to some institutions of higher learning because of their poor state of ICT facilities. This notwithstanding the rapid expansion of ICTs in Nigeria offers an opportunity to consider its use in the promotion of distance education (DE). It offers students considerable benefits including increase access to learning opportunities, convenience of time, and place making available a greater variety of learning resources and improves opportunities for individualized learning (Khan 1996).

**Distance Education**

Distance Education (DE) is a system of education characterized by physical separation between the teacher and the learner in which instruction is delivered through a variety of media including print and other ICTs to learners who may either have missed the opportunity earlier in life or have been denied the face-to-face formal education due to socio economic career, family and other circumstances. Jegede (2003) defined distance education as education provided by a mode other than the conventional face-to-face. Study centres are the main contact place for students learning activities.
Rationale for E-learning in Distance Education

In Nigeria, awareness of the government on information and communication technology (ICT) have offered an opportunity for the adoption of e-learning in delivering distance education (DE) for educating a vast mass of uneducated or less educated Nigerians (Ajadi 2008). The e-learning facilities when provided and judiciously implemented would:

1. Reduce and/or eliminate the costs for instructor fees and materials to the bearest minimum;
2. Reduce time of learning and the time employee’s absents themselves from duty.
4. Help fast learners go with their speed in any course and avoid redundancy.
5. Make slow learners go on their own pace by eliminating frustration with themselves, their fellow learners and the subject matter.
6. Enhance evaluation as it become self-paced because e-learning is a networked phenomenon.
7. Make easy delivery of content using standard internet technology as it enhances surf ability.
8. Be highly interactive as it engages users and pushes them than pulling them to progress.
9. Increase retention and enhanced hands on application unlike traditional methods.
10. Allow for automated monitor of user’s progress with supervisor and teachers.

Problems of E-learning
1. Uninteractiveness in Lesson Delivery

In Nigerian schools, the commonest type of e-learning adopted is in form of lectures on CD-ROM which can be played as at when the learners desires. The challenge of this method is that the numbers of students per computer in which these facilities are available are un-interactive as compared to when lectures are being received in the classroom. Also most students in Nigeria go to the Cyber Café but because there are people of diverse intension on the internet at the same time, and the bandwidth problem, a multimedia interactive forum cannot be done effectively (Jegede, 2004)

2. Poor E-learning Infrastructure

Distance Education via e-learning in Nigeria is still a dream because of poor e-learning infrastructure. The procurement of e-learning tools is one of the problems that may seem to be a deadlock to the attainment of viable e-learning in distance education. According to Ahmad (2012) some basic tools to echo in our minds when we talk of e-learning are enumerated below on table 1.
**Pristine**

Table 1: List of Some E-learning Tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flexible</th>
<th>Fixed/Mobile</th>
<th>Mobile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>Mobile phones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite Receivers</td>
<td>Storage Devices</td>
<td>Memory readers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recorders</td>
<td>Internet/e-mail</td>
<td>Ipod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameras Video/CCTV</td>
<td>Smart Boads/Touch screens</td>
<td>Ipads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projectors/beams</td>
<td>Pan screens</td>
<td>Androids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Games</td>
<td>Robots</td>
<td>PDAS</td>
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<tr>
<td>MP3-4players</td>
<td>Avatars</td>
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</table>

Due to very high cost of infrastructural development and to increase public access to internet and other ICTs, Nigeria is still far behind from getting benefit from e-learning.

3. Inequality of Access to the Technology

The cost of a personal computer (PC) and Laptop are still very high in Nigeria considering the income level of an average worker in the country. Few students that are privileged to have a personal computer/Laptop are not connected to internet as this do attract extra cost which they cannot afford (Ajadi 2008).

4. Interpretation of the Software for E-Learning

Some of the software is not developed locally. They are developed in Europe and other developed countries to suit their own system and make their own living. The interpretation of the software put off some of the DE students who showed interest (Jegede, 2008).

5. Technophobia

Most of the DE students have no computer education background hence they are afraid of operating one. Computer literacy is an imperative to e-learning. Some of them hire experts to fill their admission, registration and other documents meant for them to fill online (Besser, 2004).

6. Internet Connectivity

The cost of accessing internet is still very high in Nigeria. Most DE students make use of Cyber Café who charges between N100.k and N150.k per hour despite their poor service and slow rate of the server. In support of this view, according to Nikos and Christos (2009) Internet access is mainly through foreign ISPs due to unreliable local ISPs.
7. Electricity

Electricity is a perennial problem in Nigeria is the problem of electricity. Power instability has been major setback for our technological development. DE students are faced with the problems of epileptic power supply which impact negatively to the use of ICT in the learning process.

8. Low Level Literacy of ICT

According to Lau and Sim (2008) there exist low levels of ICT amongst educators. It appears that many educators were still not skilled or confident enough to use the e-learning technology. They further observed that “despite the apparent benefits of the use of ICT for educational purposes… the learning potential of ICT is deprived as many teachers are still not fully ICT literate and do not use it in their teaching.

Conclusion

The survival of tertiary education institutions in the 21st century will rely on various forms of electronic delivery. E – Learning is now widely used in most of the developed countries to promote distance education and lifelong learning in an effective way.

The demand for e-learning is growing day by day. E – Learning is used to deliver courses for students of distance education round the clock. In Nigeria the recent developments and awareness of the government on ICT have opened opportunities to adopt e-learning to deliver DE for the benefit of its uneducated populace.

Infrastructures for establishing e-learning must include stable electricity and upgrading or installing a high speed internet connection to support a variety of services such as web servers, proxy servers for remote access. Finally, the library should conduct online tutorials for improving the information searching skills of the learners and so doing, contributing greatly in improving e-learning and distance education in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the problems envisaged in e-learning and distance education, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. The government should provide adequate information technology facilities to the institutions of higher learning in the country to enable them run the programme of distance education through e-learning.
2. Machinery for constant training and empowerment of staff in the institutions about the latest e-learning tools is necessary. This will go a long way facilitate distance education.

3. All user requirements must be taken into consideration by the government in planning e-learning strategies for distance education.

4. The accreditation teams of the National University Commission (NUC) as well as the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) should revise the syllabus of the Nigerian Universities, Colleges and polytechnics respectively to include virtual courses that will be internet based through a well established learning management system.

5. Government should consider as a matter of concern the removal of all the tariff rate on e-learning hardware.

6. Adequate power supply is paramount.

7. In case of low and poor bandwidth, offline multimedia materials can be used.

References


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