Chapter 14

E–Learning in Higher Education: The Nigerian Universities’ Experience

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ABSTRACT

Technological innovations have enhanced performance in all sectors of economic and social activities including education. The purpose of the educational system is to achieve efficient communication, which involves transmission of information, knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to the learner. This study therefore seeks to survey the extent to which e-learning is applied in Nigerian Universities for effective teaching and learning processes. The sample comprised four government universities in the north central geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Twenty five lecturers and 25 students (from second year level and above) totaling 100 in each case were randomly selected. Six research questions guided the study. The findings of the work showed that lecturers are better exposed to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) than students, most e-learning facilities though available in the universities are not entirely functional and adequate. Also lecturers and students do not employ most ICT facilities for teaching and learning respectively.

INTRODUCTION

E-learning has been a hot topic since the late 1990s with the dramatic developments in communication and information technology. These developments continue with the introduction of Web 2.0 and its social networking. While developing countries are quick at absorbing these technologies to develop their e-learning, the adoption of e-learning in developing economies like Nigeria has not been in the same pace. However, there is sufficient interest in e-learning in Nigeria, beginning from the Universities, to warrant periodic reviews of its development. Therefore this study conducted
in early part of 2011 endeavours to review the situation using four universities as the sample. The rest of this chapter will present (a) e-learning background, (b) e-learning in Nigeria, (c) research questions, (d) method, (e) results, (f) discussion, (g) conclusion and recommendations, and (d) limitations and areas for further studies.

E-LEARNING BACKGROUND

The Internet had its explosion in the late 1990s when it was possible not only to browse but to place contents that users can easily access. This explosion was accompanied with interest from both practitioners and academics in e-learning which can be regarded as “the delivery of training, education and collaboration using various electronic media, but predominantly the Internet” (Usoro and Abiagam, 2009). This definition essentially includes every learning with the use of ICT to be e-learning since the “e” stands for electronic. Thus, it does not need to be distant though in practice most e-learning is done in distance and asynchronously. Unlike the US that is prominently successful with pure e-learning with no human interaction in the delivery, the UK is typified with use of the mixed (face-to-face and ICT-utilised) e-learning, sometimes termed “blended learning.” For example, the delivery of courses by University of the West of Scotland at TEI Piraeus University in Greece was done by Blackboard as an e-learning platform but at the same time, lecturers would fly once a month to Athens to perform eye-ball-to-eye-ball deliveries. The blended approach recognizes that it is very difficult for information technology to fully replace the physical human interaction between lecturers and students as well as among the students themselves.

It has to be accepted though that modern technology is pushing the boundaries of human-interaction in the delivery of learning. The increasing ease of producing and distributing electronic videos and animations makes possible the production of engaging electronic games and the same technology is also applied to e-learning. It can be reasoned that if most game players do not need human teachers, e-learning materials that are fashioned in the same way should do without much human teachers; thus, the great interest in games-based learning. Perhaps at last the problem of student motivation as a result of absence of the teacher will be removed from the list of e-learning drawbacks and problems as listed by Connolly and Stansfield (2007) and Carr (2000).

Another significant development in e-learning is in the incorporation of Web 2.0 technology which allows for social networking and ease of participants to contribute content on the Internet. Even outside learning, electronic social networking has been significantly accepted by both the young and even the not-so-young as evidenced in the use of Facebook, Twitter and other popular tools. Incorporation of this technology into e-learning means a chance is given to make the learning active and participatory; moreover, student’s management and speed of feedback is enhanced (Rath, 2011; Loving and Ochoa, 2011). It is also significant that this technology is available in most modern mobile devices like internet phones and tablets (iPads). The consequence is not only the delivery but engagement in learning while the learner is on the move with his telephone for instance. Thus, e-learning is expanded to the concept of m-learning. Kim et al (2011) in their research, for instance found various ways that m-learning could be utilized in hospitality industry.

Even before the wide uptake of these high level e-learning, many researchers had started to offer evidence of superior outcomes of e-learning: removal of obstacles of time, cost, socio-economic status and distance but at the same time allowing individuals to take more responsibility for their learning which now can continue throughout their lives (cf Usoro and Abiagam, 2009; Larson and Bruning, 1996; Alexander, 2001; Stansfield et al, 2004). The benefits of e-learning are derived
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