

Applicability Of The E-Learning Approach In Fostering Continuous Education Of Students Amidst Covid-19 Social Distancing Period In Port Harcourt

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Abstract – This paper sought to investigate the applicability of the e-learning approach in fostering continuous education of students amidst COVID-19 social distancing period in Port Harcourt. The purpose of this paper was to establish the relativeness between e-learning approach and the fostering of continuous education even during the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic. In achieving this, four concepts and two theories were reviewed to seek how relevant e-learning approach is towards fostering continuous education in the country. It was found out that e-learning approach does play a vital role on the rate of fostering continuous education but it is not well-implemented in the nation. It was then concluded that e-learning does possess a vital role towards fostering continuous education during the COVID-19 pandemic disruption of the economy of the nation but it is yet to be fully implemented in our nation Nigeria, thereby making it to be less feasible. It was recommended that curriculum planners should endeavour to seek for more corroborative means by which the implementation of electronic learning system can be fully implemented to ensure the fostering of continuous education. It was also recommended that the government, NGOs, and other concerned bodies should ensure that they contribute their means whatsoever towards ensuring the better implementation of electronic learning system towards the fostering of continuous education in Nigeria.

Keywords – E-learning, Relevance of E-learning for Continuous Education, COVID-19 Social Distancing, and Applicability of E-learning Approach for Fostering Continuous Education of Students amidst COVID-19 Social Distancing Period

I. INTRODUCTION

The Corona Virus pandemic, otherwise known as COVID-19, has gained a lot of stronghold on the economy of nations worldwide ever since its arrival. It has affected the shutting down of several sectors of the economy thereby bringing about a halt in almost all of the activities that dominated the economy of nations previously and the education sector is not left out of this chaotic mess. Educational institutions, regardless of the strata that they belong to, have been forcefully shutdown as a preventive means towards averting the continuous spread of the deadly COVID-19 pandemic. This brought about the abrupt halt in the overall educational activities that were previously on-going in these institutions. But even with the presence of a dire situation, the government of any nation must work in synchrony with their citizens as to bring about the continuous flow of activities in the respective sectors of the economy that have been shut down thus far because of the presence of this pandemic.

With regards to the educational sector, one of the means that can be employed by the government to bring about the continuous education of students nationwide is the presentation of the electronic learning system, otherwise known as the e-

learning. This is so because this form of learning offers the advantageous opportunity over this pandemic situation in essence that it allows for the continuing of educational activities even without the movement of students outside their homes but rather at the comfort of the four walls of their respective homes. Electronic learning system is therefore considered to be the kind of learning system that brings about flexibility of the entire educational process that can be easily achieved even at the comfort of ones' home with the aid of technological gadgets that supports this endeavour.

Though the introduction of the electronic learning system proves to be prominently sufficient enough in fostering continuous education of students even during this COVID-19 pandemic period, the implementation process of it in our country Nigeria is what is not yet termed as being feasible enough. This non-feasibility of the electronic learning system can be accrued to several impending factors that can tend to deteriorate the actuality rate of the electronic learning system in Nigeria. With the presence of these impending factors, the government as well as other concerned bodies as per regards to fostering of education in the education still need to develop means by which the promising electronic learning system can be efficiently implemented thereby improving its feasibility rate in the country. This, alongside several intervening concepts will be further discussed so as to bring about a clearer picture of what is achievable and what is not with regards to the topic under study.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Communal Constructivism

Communal constructivism was propounded by Bryn Holmes and collaborators and Leask and Younie in the mid-1990s. It is an approach to learning in which students not only construct their knowledge (constructivism) as a result of interacting with the environment (Social Constructivism), but also are actively engaged in the process of constructing knowledge for their learning environment. Holmes *et al.* (2001) have suggested that the advent of new educational technologies warrant a new kind of educational theory - 'communal constructivism.' Social constructivism, as a broad theoretical framework regarding how people learn, argues that learning, taking place within 'situated' learning contexts, is optimised (Oliver & Herrington, 2000). It is frequently suggested, however, that while traditional teaching methods prove largely inadequate for cultivating such environments, C&IT-enabled approaches to learning are particularly adept at doing so.

Modern approaches to teaching and learning, such as constructivism, which involves the active formation and adaptation of thoughts and ideas (Howe & Berv, 2000), problem-based learning and experiential learning, assume that knowledge is acquired through social negotiation, experience and reflection. This construction results from two different types of interaction in the learning process (Bates, 1991). At the outset, this is an individual affair between the learner and the learning material, which may range from the traditional textbook to computer-based simulations. The second is a social activity, between the learner and the tutor, the facilitator or other learners.

Cognitive restructuring occurs as learners revise their ways of thinking to provide a better fit to reality when faced with discrepancies between their own ways of viewing the world and new information (Rogoff, 1990). Social interaction with tutors and facilitators is expected to promote development through the guidance provided by interaction with people who are skilled in solving the problems emerging from the learning activities (Rogoff, 1990).

Electronic Learning (E-learning) System

As formerly said, electronic learning system is considered to be the kind of learning system that brings about flexibility of the entire educational process that can be easily achieved even at the comfort of ones' home with the aid of technological gadgets that supports this endeavour. Electronic learning is the type of learning whereby educational activities are being fully implemented with the aid of some enabling technology gadgets. It can as well be seen as the corroboration of educational procedures with technological gadgets to foster the improvement in the delivery process of educational activities. It is that learning that one can engage in even at the comfort of ones' home so long as one possess the necessary equipment, tools, or gadgets that supports the whole process. E-learning refers to the use of network technology to design, deliver, select, administer and extend learning (Masie, 2006).

According to Markus (2008), E-learning can be defined as a learning process created by interaction with digitally delivered content, network-based services and tutoring support. E-learning is any technologically mediated learning using computers whether from a distance or in face to face classroom setting (computer assisted learning), it is a shift from traditional education or

training to ICT-based personalized, flexible, individual, self-organized, collaborative learning based on a community of learners, teachers, facilitators, experts. E-learning is the use of Internet technologies to enhance knowledge and performance. E-learning technologies offer learners control over content, learning sequence, pace of learning, time, and often media, allowing them to tailor their experiences to meet their personal learning objectives. to manage access to e-learning materials, consensus on technical standardization, and methods for peer review of these resources. This definition can therefore imply that E-learning is simply the corroboration of several technological means towards making the successful delivery of instructional contents in a flexible manner.

General Relevance of Electronic Learning System

E-learning presents numerous research opportunities for faculty, along with continuing challenges for documenting scholarship. Innovations in e-learning technologies point toward a revolution in education, allowing learning to be individualized (adaptive learning), enhancing learners' interactions with others (collaborative learning), and transforming the role of the teacher (Olojo, Adewumi, & Ajisola, 2012). The integration of e-learning into education can catalyze the shift toward applying adult learning theory, where educators will no longer serve mainly as the distributors of content, but will become more involved as facilitators of learning and assessors of competency. This is to show that the incorporation of E-learning system into the educational system helps bring about increased learning efficiency, thereby causing an enhancement in the whole endeavour.

Learning enhancement permits greater learner interactivity and promotes learners' efficiency, motivation, cognitive effectiveness, and flexibility of learning style. Learning is a deeply personal experience: we learn because we want to learn (Olojo, Adewumi, & Ajisola, 2012). By enabling learners to be more active participants, a well-designed e-learning experience can motivate them to become more engaged with the content. Interactive learning shifts the focus from a passive, teacher-centred model to one that is active and learner-centred, offering a stronger learning stimulus. Interactivity helps to maintain the learner's interest and provides a means for individual practice and reinforcement (Olojo, Adewumi, & Ajisola, 2012). Evidence suggests that e-learning is more efficient because learners gain knowledge, skills, and attitudes faster than through traditional instructor-led methods. This efficiency is likely to translate into improved motivation and performance. E-learners have demonstrated increased retention rates and better utilization of content, resulting in better achievement of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Multimedia e-learning offers learners the flexibility to select from a large menu of media options to accommodate their diverse learning styles. With all said thus far, E-learning has proven to be positively affecting the educational system and its activities as well as outcomes and so therefore needs to be duly implemented and incorporated with all manner of efficiency.

Current Status of E-Learning in Nigerian Education

Nigeria is a country of about 160 million people with 117 universities (Guardian, 2012), there are more than 1 million young school leavers competing for the limited spaces in the universities on the yearly basis and only a few of these could be admitted into universities. There are always a large number of admission seekers who get disappointed as a result of their inability to secure admission. This gap prompted the Nigeria government to establish the National Open University in 2003 which is a distance learning education making use of e-learning method. Other universities, with distance learning programmes also adopt e-learning method to reach their students. Distance education has made e-learning more popular as it has become a veritable way to bridge the distance between the teacher and the learner, between the writer and the speaker (Obuh, 2010).

Electronic learning alias e-learning do possess a lot of benefit when eventually implemented properly and efficiently but even with all these beneficial opportunities attached to it, the rate at which it is actually being welcomed and initiated in Nigerian schools is alarmingly not encouraging. This can be said to be due to the fact that these schools are not well-equipped as to enable them actualise the practicability of the e-learning system appropriately. This is so because electronic learning requires more than what meets the eye and requires the correspondence of several technological medium to bring about this actuality and these are not easy to come by therefore bringing about its low practice in the country since it is not fully developed to the rate at which it can support this form of learning and achieve the full potential perfectly.

The e-learning techniques mostly adopted by most of the Nigerian institution are in form of prepared lectures on a CD-ROM that can be played as at when the need arises. This is limited by the fact that the number of computer system is inadequate to go round the students, this therefore would make lectures not to be interactive enough as compare with when the lecture is been received in real time over the internet (Odunayo & Gloria, 2013). Most schools cannot maintain their intranet facilities because of

its high cost of running especially in the absence of adequate power supply. These therefore forced students to go to the public internet cafes where there exist diverse distractions because of people with diverse interest on the net at the same time. There is also the problem of low bandwidth in most of the cafes thus the systems operate at a very slow pace thereby obstructing free and smooth flow of e-learning (Odunayo& Gloria, 2013).

Applicability of Electronic Learning System to Fostering Continuous Education during COVID-19

Even with the eminent presence of corona virus pandemic alias COVID-19, there is still need for the economy of every nation, most especially Nigeria, to thrive and so therefore means must be developed towards ensuring the continuity of the various economic activities in the country. Since this topic is majorly focused on the education sector as per how educational activities can be further progressed with respect to continuous education pattern of the students that are all over the country and one of the means by which this can be brought into actuality is through the integration of electronic learning alias e-learning into the whole process, since one of its most relevant benefit is that it allows for learning to take place even at the comfort of ones' home without the need to move around so long as one is fully equipped with the necessary technological gadgets that are needed for actualising it. With this way, learning can continue and students can still endeavour to maintain the social distancing exercise that is of major necessity during this period of the pandemic.

There comes a time where the Nigerian government have actually tend to bring about this to actuality but in a different ramification and with the aid of several other gadgets that they can lay hold of, but still the potency of this endeavour is still far-fetched based on the fact that not all individual student can have access to these several other means of going about this continuous education in several hindering areas possible and provision are not actually being made to actualise the successful achievement of this feat in the country. There is growing evidence that "digital technologies change the way students learn, the way teachers teach, and where and when learning takes place" (21st Century Learning Reference Group, 2014; p.4).

There is widespread understanding that learning today needs to entail more than knowledge-acquisition; there needs to be an equally strong emphasis on skill-development, particularly 21st century skills or Key Skills. Learners need "more open-ended learning experiences that develop the learners' higher-order thinking, creativity, independence, collaborating and ownership of learning" (Department of Education and Skills, 2013; p.20). Even with this, the possibility of integrating e-learning in schools efficiently cannot be fully ascertained, just as emphasized that embedding ICT in teaching, learning and assessment is a complex endeavour and the mere presence of ICT in a school does not equate to its effective use (OECD, 2015). This therefore proves that the inculcation of E-learning system into the educational system during this COVID-19 pandemic will ensure that there is assured continuity in the learning of students in the country and therefore should be carefully implemented upon.

III. THEORETICAL REVIEW

A report paper on E-learning was written by Miguel and Maggie (2014). The aim of the paper was to illustrate the benefits of a strategic approach to integrating digital technologies into a blended learning curriculum for staff and students. It was asserted that digital technologies have matured rapidly over the past five years, and are commonplace in many sectors which affect our daily lives. In the Higher Education sector, digital technologies are still seen as an add-on to the learning experience, and are not always an integral and accepted part of the teaching and learning process. Many universities have developed e-learning or digital strategies to address this, and this paper will reflect on the success of these strategies from a range of perspectives, using the University of Leeds as a case study. The session explored the adoption of digital technologies by staff and students, the impact on the teaching and learning process and the impact on student learning and experience. The paper used the author's experiences of VLE resources, mobile learning, Open Educational Resources, Massive Open Online Courses and social media to demonstrate the main arguments.

A report paper on E-learning trends and hypes in academic teaching: Methodology and findings of a trend study was written by Helge, Linda, Matthias, Kathrin, and Thomas (2014). The paper introduced methodology and findings of a trend study in the field of e-teaching. The overall interest of the study was the analysis of life stages and future potentials of e-learning innovations. A content analysis was conducted based on 427 scientific articles of leading German-speaking e-learning conferences and e-learning trends and hypes in academic teaching have been identified and characterised. The paper focussed on two things: on the one hand, existing academic concepts of trend research in the field of e-learning will be discussed, and on the other hand, the above-mentioned study will be introduced.

A report paper on E-Learning and Constructivism: From Theory to Application was written by Alex, Liz, Terry, and Jeanne (2009). The paper presented a learner-centered model for designing e-learning assignments/activities within e-learning environments. The model was based on constructivism learning theory. The model included two categories - the learning design elements (comprised of fundamental design elements and collaborative elements) and the learning assessment elements (self-assessment, team assessment, and facilitator's assessment). The application of the model was shown through various working examples. A factual situation using the model within an e-learning course was presented to further demonstrate the application of the model in an actual e-learning environment.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on what have been discussed and reviewed thus far above, it can be concluded that e-learning does possess a vital role towards fostering continuous education during the COVID-19 pandemic disruption of the economy of the nation but it is yet to be fully implemented in our nation Nigeria, thereby making it to be less feasible.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusion that has been derived at above, it was therefore recommended that:

- 1) Curriculum planners should endeavour to seek for more corroborative means by which the implementation of electronic learning system can be fully implemented to ensure the fostering of continuous education.
- 2) The government, NGOs, and other concerned bodies should ensure that they contribute their means whatsoever towards ensuring the better implementation of electronic learning system towards the fostering of continuous education in Nigeria.

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