E- LEARNING IN NIGERIA : CURRENT IMPLEMENTATIONS AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

E-learning is a concept which came to limelight about two decades ago in Nigeria. It has gone through several metamorphoses since then ranging from open skepticism to acceptance. It was accepted by most people because the percentage of Conventional Universities in Nigeria to the number of candidates seeking admission into these Universities were getting small every year and such Conventional Universities cannot cope with the pressure from the candidates. This is the main reason why many people embraced E- learning as option and a welcome supplement to normal university learning. This study is designed to evaluate the current implementation of E-learning in Nigeria and the current challenges militating against the full implementation of E-learning as an option in Nigeria.

KEYWORDS

E-learning, Conventional Universities, Candidates.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education has become increasingly important for occupational and personal success, therefore the demand for higher education is becoming greater with each passing day. Higher Institutions have found themselves in a position which they are unable to admit the greater percentage of the students who qualify for admission in their various Institutions. They are therefore seeking ways to offer their courses to a larger group of people. One promising way is to apply the method of distance learning where one can take courses, complete them and collect the certificate without actually going to the classroom to attend lectures.

The Internet has become one of the vital ways to make available resources for research and learning for both teachers and students to share and acquire information [1]. Technology-based e-learning encompasses the use of the internet and other important technologies to produce materials for learning, teach learners, and also regulate courses in an organization [2].

There has been extensive debate about a common definition of the term e-learning. Existing definitions according to [3] tend to reveal the specialization and interest of the researchers. E-learning as a concept covers a range of applications, learning methods and processes [4]. It is therefore difficult to find a commonly accepted definition for the term e-Learning, and according to [8] and [3], there is even no common definition for the term. [7] also made a comment on these inconsistencies by saying that there may be as many definitions of the term e-learning as there are academic papers on the subject [3] in trying to find a common meaning of the term e-learning went on to ask the following questions: Is e-learning an on-line coursework for students at a distance? Does it mean using a virtual learning environment to support the provision of campus based education? Does it refer to an on-line tool to enrich, extend and enhance collaboration? OR is it a totally on-line learning or part of blended learning? [3].

Some of the definitions of the term e-learning as given by different researchers and institutions are reviewed below. In some definitions e-Learning encompasses more than just the offering of wholly on-line. [8] noted that e-Learning has transformed from a fully-online course to using technology to deliver part or all of a course independent of permanent time and place. Also [6] describes, e-Learning as the use of new multimedia technologies and the Internet to increase learning quality by easing access to facilities and services as well as distant exchanges and collaboration. The following are also different definitions of e-learning. E-learning refers to the use of information and communication technologies to enable the access to online learning/teaching resources. In its broadest sense, [5] defined E-learning to mean any learning that is enabled electronically. They however narrowed this definition down to mean learning that is empowered by the use of digital technologies.

E-learning is a method of learning which employs the use of digital Technology to learn. It means the application of internet technology to 'receive lectures', perform assignments, and write tests and examinations. The students are graded by the Computer and there is no bias. However, in Nigeria as a developing Country, we still have a long way to go as far as E-learning is concerned. Some of these challenges can be resolved or made better and the others will improve in synchronization with development in the Country.

E-learning in Nigeria was adopted about a decade ago, at first it was a welcome distraction from the normal classroom lectures. But as time went on, the numerous challenges such as power issue, internet connectivity issues, the system began to encounter at first skepticism then outright antagonism from the would be users.

The objective of this research is to examine the current level of implementation of distance e-learning in Nigeria and the factors militating against its total challenge, the attendant challenges and possible ways of distance learning as related to e-learning and its attendant challenges using National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) as a case study.

NOUN was established initially in 1983 and suspended in 1984. Since it's resuscitation in 2001, this School has taken Tertiary Education beyond the boundaries of Conventional Classroom method.

2. CURRENT IMPLEMENTATION OF E-LEARNING IN NIGERIA

Today, technology enhanced learning, including distance and online instruction, is recognized as a viable tool necessary for preparing citizens to participate in the technologically driven global environment. A multidisciplinary approach to online pedagogical research recognizes the value of technology enhanced teaching and learning as critical in the mix of diverse strategies. Its centrality in the global marketplace has been enhanced by a new culture shared by many educators.

At present, the method employed in National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) is through internet-generated mode where the course materials would be uploaded on the Institution website and the students are expected to log on with their unique user id and password and download the materials meant for them, study it, do assignments and interact with their lecturers and classmates via the internet.

Likewise writing of Examination in NOUN is through the internet. Taking online exams in NOUN is a simple process. It does not require extensive computing skills. The basic skill of reading text on the computer screen and clicking on or typing the right answers is what is required to take exam.

The steps to follow are outlined below:

1. Open your web-browser – (Internet explorer or Mozilla Firefox ….)

2. Log on to the National Open University of Nigeria website;www.nou.edu.ng

3. Click on the e-exam link

4. You will be directed to a page where you will have to choose among the following options:

   i.   Instructions on taking the Electronic Test

   ii. Log in to take an exam or practice test

   iii. Download student help

5. Click on the "Log in to take an exam or practice test" link to take a practice test or to take an actual examination. Take note that you will only be able to take an actual examination if it has been scheduled for you.

6. A login screen similar to that in figure 1 below displays

7. Enter your Matriculation Number into the user login section.

8. Enter your Matriculation Number as password (lower case only).

9.   The System may ask you to verify that your name and other details have been entered correctly. If so check through to see that the details are correct then click on OK.

10. You will be taken to the system homepage

11. Click on the class (course) whose exam you want to take under the class name

12. Click on the exam you want to take under the assignment name header to begin the examination.

13. Once you have finished answering the questions click on grade. You will be warned if there are unanswered questions.

14. You will get an instant feedback similar to figure 5.

15. To view your results, at the top of the page click View Details.

16. Once you have finished reviewing your results, click Quit & Save.

17. To log out of Maple T.A., click the log out link.
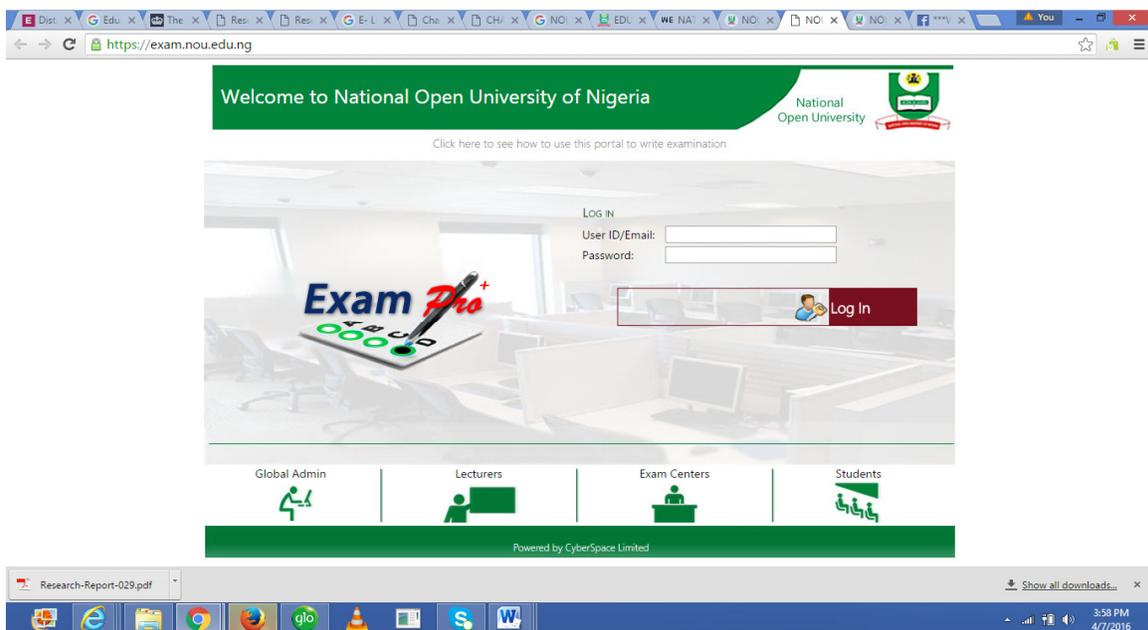
Figure 1 : Login screen to MapleTA – NOUN's e-examination platform

3. ISSUES AGAINST E- LEARNING

(a) Lack of monitoring

The usual method is for students to log on to the school's website, download and read the course materials. But logging on might not necessarily means that the student is doing any useful thing

on the internet and neither is there any measure to monitor the student at any time unlike the conventional classroom practice. Loopholes exist in the system as per lack of monitoring. There is actually no way to monitor when a student should log on or what the student should do when he logs on to the institution website.

(b) Stack overload

The normal method employed as at the present day is the upload of study materials onto the net. Pulling from various centers makes downloading extremely slow and this can be frustrating to the student who barely has enough money for buying the airtime to download course materials. Sometimes, some might end up not being able to download within the time allocated for a particular internet usage.

(c) Discrimination

One major issue against distance learning in Nigeria is Discrimination against graduates of University that utilizes e- learning. Employers, People and Institutions believe that the quality of Education obtained from E-learning is low when compared to graduates that receive their lecture in normal classroom settings. Hence graduates are discriminated against by prospective employers, Other Universities and some Government bodies.

Graduates of e-learning seeking Post Graduate admissions into Conventional Universities are discriminated against because it is believed that the standard of education they've had is too low for them to adapt. However, this discrimination is more intense because of the competition for admissions into such post graduate programs.

A particular instance of this discrimination is the inability of the Nigerian Law School to admit Law Graduates of the National Open University of Nigeria. They claimed that Law is a course which cannot be learned effectively outside normal classrooms. Questions of whether or not the graduates would pass or fail in law school were not even considered.

4. CHALLENGES OF DISTANCE LEARNING IN NIGERIA

(a) Light/ Power

Nigeria is a developing Country which has difficulties providing stable power supply to citizens. This situation has grown worse over the years and with the advent of democracy in the year 1999, stable power supply has become a mirage. With Power supply being a mirage, e-learning is almost impossible to run or sustain. The Computer system with the issue of power supply will break down sooner than expected and most internet facilities rely on power supply to function well. The main private means of power generation in Nigeria is the gasoline generator which has several hazards to its use. Some of the hazards of generator usage is noise and air pollution. Another hazard is the cost implication.

(b) Internet

Internet facilities are not available to the common man in Nigeria. The readily available options of Internet that we have are too expensive and not affordable to the common man. In Nigeria

where the average man lives on less than two dollar per day, It costs an average of 5 dollar per day to be on the internet per hour. The average Nigeria cannot afford to be on the internet for 10 hours at a stretch.

(c) Economy

The poor economic situation of Nigeria is another factor militating against distance learning in Nigeria. The average Nigerian lives on less than 2 dollar a day and as such most cannot afford to own a Computer System, pay for the needed internet facilities and the other financial implications.

(d) Computer Illiteracy Issue:

An average Nigeria doesn't have a Computer System not to think of knowing how to use the Computer. Candidates of the Computer Based Examinations are disadvantaged because of their inability to use the system effectively.

5. BENEFITS OF E-LEARNING

(a) Significant reduction or elimination of costs associated with instructor fees and materials.

(b) Reduction of learning time and the amount of time employees are away from their jobs.

(c) Increased retention by users and enhanced hands-on application to the job over traditional training methods.

(d) Instruction and progress are managed within the framework of a company web portal.

(e) Short videos or hands-on exercises offer practice and assessment activities designed to confirm that a learner has mastered the performance objectives of the course or lesson.

(f) A user's progress is automated and can be monitored by or shared with one's supervisor

(g) Interactivity engages users, pushing them rather than pulling them through training.

(h) Advanced learners may choose to speed through a course and bypass instruction that is redundant.

(i) Beginners or slower learners may determine their own pace and progress, eliminating frustration with themselves, their fellow learners, and the subject matter.

(j) Knowledge is cumulative; lessons build upon one another and may be taken in any order.

(k) Anytime-anywhere learning can greatly increase knowledge retention. – Learners may also view or print simple, one-page "quick start" Job Aids that have stepby-step procedures and graphic workflow charts illustrating tasks to be performed

(l) Testing is self-paced.

6. CONCLUSION

There is a greater potential for sharing information through the Internet than through other means of transmitting and receiving information. Not everyone can be well suited to distance learning programs. Successful participants must be highly motivated and self-disciplined. Because the course may be unmonitored, the learners themselves have full responsibilities for proceeding with the course and evaluating their mastery of a skill or subject.

Although distance education is very flexible and convenient, it still cannot provide the 'college experience.' Working with other learners, being part of a total educational environment, and collaborate closely with academic mentors is still valuable to many learners. In addition, some courses cannot be taught on the Internet and this causes some limitations of distance learning.

E-learning is a concept which has come to stay. The internet is gaining ground every day and the whole world is gradually becoming a global village. The issues of discrimination should be addressed by Government so that we don't make life difficult for graduates who have gone to a University that utilizes e-learning by making them feel inferior in the society.

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