

E-LEARNING; A PANACEA FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING TRANSFORMATION IN BUSINESS EDUCATION

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Abstract

Electronic learning (e-learning) which is one of the by-product of information and communication technology has changed many aspects of life and opened a wide vista of opportunities for people. This paper discussed the need and challenges facing e-learning in teaching and learning of business education courses. Massive computer literacy programmes for teachers and students and adequate provision of online computers/e-mail are among the recommendations made for the improvement in the teaching and learning of business education courses through e-learning technology.

The societal advancement in scientific discoveries has made the world a global village. The drive for more information within the shortest period of time has led to the development of modern technologies. Examples include the advent of the computer in the 1950's and the Internet in the 1990's, which paved the way for the current revolution in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) which is also revolutionizing business as well as the educational institutions across the globe. Okereke (2005) observed that modern computers have the capability of reading, processing and storing millions of instructions per second. The Internet, usually called the "Information Super-highway" has also caused an indescribable expansion in the way information is transferred from one place to another.

Today, people can get information about anything just with a click of the mouse. The difficulties experienced by the old means of message transfer (Telegrams, mails by post, etc) have been removed as the Internet provides 'one-touch-one-delivery' service to user anywhere in the world. The impact of e-learning to education is enormous. Both business educators and students agree to the huge benefits of using e-learning tools in teaching and learning. The Information and Communication Technologies are potentially powerful enabling tools for educational change and reform (Tinio, 2003). When used appropriately, different ICT gadgets help expand access to business education, strengthen the relevance of education to the increasingly digital work place, and raise educational quality by helping to make teaching and learning an engaging active process that is connected to real life.

One challenge that faces the profession and practice of business education and indeed the whole of mankind is the progress and innovation offered by technological developments since mid the 1990s. The emergence of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has brought with it changes in the process of imparting and acquiring knowledge. When business education is integrated with Information Communication Technology, learners will possess relevant skills and competencies necessary for effective performance in the labour market. Indispensable skills basic to the need of the society is provided to its recipients who can avail themselves of the opportunity of setting up their own business centers and earn a living. Electronic learning (e-learning) technology is one of the by-products of Information and Communication Technology. It is all about learning with the use of

computers, which is simply an online way of acquiring knowledge through the internet or through the offline CD-ROM.

Hedge & Hayward (2004) describes e-learning as an innovative approach for delivery electronically mediated, well-designed, learner-centered and interactive learning environment to anyone, at any place, any time by utilizing the internet and digital technologies in concert with instructional design principles. Salawudeen (2006) defined e-learning as the convergence of the internet and learning or internet-enabled learning. It is also the delivery of the individualized, comprehensive, dynamic learning content in real time, aiding the development of communities of knowledge, linking learners and practitioners with experts. e-learning is synonymous with multimedia learning Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL), Computer Based Interaction (CBL), Computer Based Training (CBT), Computer Assisted Instruction or Computer Aided Instruction (CAI), Internet Based Training (IBT), Web-Based Training (WBT), Online Education, Virtual Education, Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), (which is also called learning platforms) and Digital Educational Collaboration (DEC). From the foregoing, it is obvious, that the world is moving at an unimaginable speed in the area of information use and dissemination. For Business education to meet up to the challenges of the present time and the near future, there is need for a reform of the programme – content that will incorporate new and interesting courses such as Information Communication Technology. ICT equips the programme beneficiaries better to meet the challenges of our time. Business education is skill-oriented and employment-motivated. Business education is a type of training that is concerned with the achievement of all aims of education at any level of learning with the primary objective of preparing the subject to enter into a business career, to render efficient services therein and to improve their standard of living (Kanu, 2010). It holds the key to Nigeria becoming technologically relevant, economically prosperous and internationally competitive, if properly packaged and adequately delivered. In spite of the bright future of e-learning in Nigeria, there are some factors hindering the effective use of the technology in teaching business education courses, such as poor ICT infrastructure and other socio-economic reasons. This paper sought to expose these challenges facing the use of e-learning in teaching business education courses and to suggest strategies for improvement.

Statement of the Problem

There appears to be under utilization of electronic devices for educational purposes by business education students. This under utilization is as a result of inability of students to use the computer. Manir (2011) pointed out that the lack of computer culture among students will impede the integration of new technologies in the educational process.

With the increasing clamour for integration of technology into Business education programmes, many institutions seem not to have necessary equipments needed. But it is worrisome as many business education departments are yet to enjoy the benefits of e-learning because of lack or inadequacy of electronic resources. This defect on the technological replication of modern office environment is a single major factor inhibiting the integration of e-learning in many educational programmes. Business education seems to be delaying to effectively integrating e-learning into their programmes because of the doubt on availability of the needed resources. This situation is obvious as most business education classrooms and laboratories seem to be overcrowded with manual typewriters and other out-dated equipment which are not in tone with the modern Technological prerequisites for e-learning integration. Even some institutions that have computer laboratories seems to be lacking most of other technologies needed in carrying out teaching and learning using electronic

media. In most cases, learners are exposed to notional pictures of technologies they will use in modern offices without any practical skills. All these negate the basic principle of business education which holds that business education laboratories and classrooms should be a replica of office environment and as well impedes integration of e-learning.

Consequently, with the introduction and upgrading of electronic platform in most modern offices without corresponding exposure of learner to such platforms, Business Education graduates seem to be unfit for the offices. Since Business Education also prepares her recipients for a teaching career, modern schools now make use of electronic media for record keeping and result preparation, Business education graduates seem not to possess electronic record keeping skills which they could have learnt using technologies in their learning activities. This obviously calls for an assessment of the status of technologies in business education departments of tertiary institutions for effective integration of electronic learning in Business Education programmes.

Concept of Business Education

Business Education is concerned with education that seeks to educate individuals for and about business. It is an aspect of educational programme offered at the higher institutions of learning, which prepares students for careers in business. Obanya (2012) saw business education as that aspect of vocational education programmes which prepares individuals for gainful employment through acquisition of skills and knowledge that affect the business world.

Ubulom (2013), described business education as the transfer of pedagogical and business competencies necessary for teaching business attitudes, concepts, skills and knowledge. He further stated that it can be seen as an aspect of educational or training process which an individual receives with the primary motive of enabling him acquire adequate attitudes, concepts, knowledge, understanding and skills in Business activities for vocational usage in careers as an administrator or manager or teacher, wherever he may find himself in the business world.

Business studies is an aspect of Business education comprises, general business and others at the junior or sub-professional level while at the professional level, business education comprises the following: Accounting Education, Secretarial Education, Information, Management and Office Education, Marketing/Distributive Education, Purchasing and Supply Education, Agro-Business Education, General Business Management Education. Azuka (2016) noted that there are four general objectives of business education, which are: -Vocational competencies, Personal use competencies Consumer, Business competencies, Socio-economic competencies. These four objectives of business education are needed for man's effective participation in the society.

Need for E-Learning in Business Education

E-learning has the potential to enhance teaching and learning. There are self-evaluation software programmes to evaluate instructors. Business education programmes at every tertiary level must blend with technological skills, and this concerns both the students and the educators (Agomuo, 2007). For business education programme to meet the global standard and its recipients to be made competitive they must acquire the competencies and skills for today and tomorrow and this can be made possible through E-learning. According to Jimoh-Kadiri (2008), the need for e-learning in Business Education includes the following:

- Increased retention by users and acquisition of new skills, ideas, knowledge and methodology in teaching and learning business education. New ideas and skills can be adopted from abroad and can be read and learned with the help of the internet in Nigeria.
- Business teachers are exposed to new methods of subject delivery, qualities of instructions are improved, and learners are reposition to the challenges of globalization.
- Business teachers are encouraged to carry out joint research work. It encourages teachers and students to carry out team work where ideas, experiences and knowledge are shared.
- Learning time is reduced and more knowledge is acquired within a limited period.
- Students in distant areas can be trained through the use of internet, television, satellite disc etc. Aboho, (2006) held that with the help ICT, Business Education courses can be taught and learned through distance learning programme to help participants update their educational qualifications.

Challenges facing e-Learning in Teaching Business Education Courses

There is no doubt that the nature of the internet has changed people behaviour and social life. These changes are sweeping across entire industries and are not unique to education. Indeed, in many ways education has lagged behind some of these trends and is just beginning to feel their wake. In spite of the bright prospect of e-learning in the country, there are major challenges facing its implementation in teaching business education courses. Some of these challenges are:

Inequality of Access to Technology

Internet access in Africa is through a foreign gateway (Salawudeen, 2006). Internet service providers that provide internet gateway services to Nigerians are few. In most part of Nigeria, especially in some rural areas, internet facilities are absent. It is therefore impossible for business teachers in such areas to embrace e-learning.

High Cost of Implementing ICT

The poverty level of Nigerians is so high that many can still not acquire personal computers for themselves. Few of the Nigerian teachers that are privileged to have a personal computer/laptop are not connected to the internet as this attracts extra cost which they cannot afford. Teachers and students make use of cyber café whose charge ranges between ₦100.00 to ₦ 200.00 per hour despite their slow rate of their server and poor service. High cost of hardware in Nigeria, which is substantially higher than in the United States, also poses a threat to e-learning. Obanya (2012) while supporting this observed that, the price of computer hardware and software continues to drop in most developed countries, but in developing countries such as Nigeria, computers are still very expensive.

Lack of Internet or Slow Connectivity

In some higher institutions, not all areas in FCE(T) can access the world wide web, even if some area are connected, department of business education where students are to be taught information and communication technology do not have a stable access to the net, due to the high costs involved in the connection.

Incessant Power Supply

Electricity instability has been a major setback for technological development. Business teachers and students residing in cities and towns are faced with the problem of epileptic electricity supply, while majority of them who live in rural areas are not connected to the national grid. Electronic equipment such as radio, television and the computer has been damaged due to irregular power supply. According to Jimoh-Kadiri (2008) it is difficult to keep high technology equipment such as the computer when electricity supply is not consistent and stable.

Lack of ICT Skills

Lack of business teachers with sufficient knowledge of computers and usage is another factor militating against the effective use of electronic technology in teaching business education courses. There is acute shortage of trained personnel in the application of operating system, network communication, software and local technicians to repair and service computer facilities. Salawudeen (2006) stated that 'teachers need effective tools, techniques and assistance that can help them develop computer based projects and activities especially designed to raise the level of teaching in required subjects and improve Student learning'. Companies and academic institutions are reluctant to invest in training of staff due to the likelihood that trained staff will be poached by other Institutions and companies. Therefore, most business teachers are not adequately prepared and not having sufficient confidence, to make use of technology in and out of the classroom. Lack of competence cum inadequate training of business teachers, can be seen as barrier to teachers' use of ICT Jimoh-Kadiri (2008).

Non-inclusion of E-learning in the Business Education Curricula

Most business students have no information technology or computer education knowledge because it was not entrenched in the curriculum at their elementary and secondary Education level. It is only recently that computer education is been introduced at Elementary level, at the secondary school level computer education is yet to be made a compulsory subject. E-learning should ensure effective pedagogy and curriculum implementation in the computer age. According to Nicholls and Nicholls (1980), Mkpa (1987), and Offorma (2002), curriculum implementation is the planning and execution of contents of curriculum in order to bring about certain changes in the behavior of the learners and assessment of the extent to which the changes take place. The curriculum for training secretaries has not fully implemented a change over to ICT-oriented one, therefore obsolete knowledge and skills are still being used for today's business.

Strategies for Improving the use E-learning in Teaching and Learning Business Education Course

Teaching business course with the use of e-learning tools, like as in any other course will require that proper planning and designing of e-learning material is done. The delivery and usage of these materials, depending on the E-learning tool used, should be systematic. E-learning media include: (Tinio, 2003). The design of E-learning material will vary in relation to the e-learning medium used.

Planning e-Learning Material

First, the course content should be broken down into bits. Altenhofen & Schaper (2012) developed a Content Aggregation model in which the course content is divided into four distinct structural levels:

- Knowledge items
- Learning units
- Sub courses and
- Course

Designing e-Learning Material

The design of the E-learning material is very important because it will determine the efficiency of the material. The material should be logical and systematic following the above model. The items in the material should include the following:

- Animated graphics
- Clear text: The text format should be attractive and should suit the idea intended to be passed.
- Easy Navigations: Moving from one page, slide or screen (as the case may be) should be easy for the users.
- Games: where necessary, exciting educational games should be included to help retain students motivation. For instance, the Maxis Beacon typewriting tutor software includes various games that help the student examine his/her typing speed at different stages of the instruction.
- The audio should be clear and easily understandable

Apart for planning and designing the e-learning material, the teacher should deliver the materials to the students at the appropriate time. Not too many E-learning materials should be given at once in order to ensure students understand what is expected from them in the use of these materials. It is the teacher's duty to organize these materials to suit the objectives of the course.

Conclusion

E-learning environments play an important role in helping tertiary institution to optimize the benefit of globalization. It behoves on business teachers in tertiary institutions to come to grasp with the complexities using web-bases, networked technologies of e-learning in teaching business courses. This will expand the capacity of business programme and business educators to continue to fulfill their mission which includes the training of necessary manpower to meet up the current needs of the labour market which comprises classroom, industry, public and private businesses. They should all carryout their functions on-line. It is appropriate to say that E-learning has come to stay under the preview of business education and the only option is to embrace it as the benefits of e-learning to the Nigerian educational system are too enormous ignore.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made;

1. There should be early introduction of ICT to pupils in elementary schools. This will enable them have access to the computer early in life like their counterpart abroad.

2. Provision of infrastructure that supports ICT e.g. electricity should be made. If possible standby generating set should be provided to cater for frequent power shortage.
3. There must be opportunity for in-service training of teachers and business teachers should be grounded enough in ICT skills.
4. There is need for well furnished computer laboratories with internet facilities and other ICT equipments.
5. Curriculum developers should make computer education one the core subject of be offered in secondary schools
6. The accreditation team of National University Commission (NUC), National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and other accreditation agents should revise the curricula of the Nigerian Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education to include virtual courses that will be internet based.
7. The State Ministries of Education through their Local Inspector of Education (LIE) should monitor the implementation of computer education programme in Nigeria secondary school.

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