Challenges in the Integration of E-Learning Technologies in Business Education Programme Curriculum

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Abstract

As a result of changes in office procedures emanating from technological developments, the content of Business Education programme Curriculum are changing to meet the ever — changing needs of businesses. The 21st century is dominated by e-learning with its effect on all spheres of human endeavour. The Business Education lecturers are expected to prepare prospective workers (Students) for classroom instruction as lecturers and for business offices, which are now mostly computerized. This aspect of e-learning technology has been neglected in the curriculum of Business Education. The new curriculum of Business education is more of e-learning than ever before. This paper therefore focuses on the challenges in the integration of e-learning in Business Education programme curriculum. The paper x-rays the process of integrating e-learning in Business education curriculum, challenges ranging from lack of basic computing skills, poor infrastructural support, ignorance, capacity building and educational policy. To make the integration of e-learning effective in business education curriculum, all these challenges should be addressed so as to pave way for job creation in institutions of higher learning. Thus, it was concluded among other that e-learning is very vital to the development of any curriculum of which business education which is the life wire of entrepreneurial skills needs for achieving the needed self reliance. Also, it was recommended, among others, that Business Educator should be given in-service training on the use of e-learning to facilitate teaching and learning processes.

Key Words: Challenges, Integration, e-learning, Business Education, Curriculum.

Introduction

The growth and development of any nation is hinged on highly technological skilled labour force. It is technological skills of the work force that pave way for creativity, innovation and higher productivity. The world today is passing through a lot of changes virtually in every field of human endeavor. These changes are no doubt more conspicuous in science and technology. The 21st century is dominated by electronic technology, a world permeated by the effects and products of electronic technology including e-Government, e-business, e-banking, e-commerce, e-health, e-employment, e-environment, e-agriculture, e-science, e-mail, e-shopping and so on. ICT is all about learning with the use of computers. In this modern age, learning with the use of computer is a simple online way of acquiring knowledge through the internet or through the

offline-CD-Rom. The online involves the use of internet explorer! Navigator, which may be in form of Audio or visual. Thus the emergence of the internet and learning, or internet enabled learning is called e-learning. Hence, e-learning services have evolved since computers were first used in education. E-learning comprises all forms of electronically supported learning and teaching, involving the computer and Network which enabled transfer of skills and knowledge. (Wikipedia, 2011)

E-learning is the use of electronic technology to deliver education and training applications, monitor learner's performance and report learners' progress. Hedged and Hayward (2004), defined it as an innovative approach for delivering electronically mediated, well — designed, learner centered and interactive learning environments to anyone, any place, any time by integrating the Internet and digital

technologies in concert with instructional design principles. Ever since the ban was lifted to allow businesses on Internet, the Web has grown exponentially. However, business Educators have always accepted that change is a fact of life from the typewriter to the transistor, and business curriculum has continually shaped itself to meet the needs of business. As a result, the success and survival of business education constantly depends on its ability to adapt and keep pace with the needs of its customer. The changes present great challenges for both the learner and instructor. Nevertheless, it is the business educator that must be willing to adapt and manage these challenges to ensure successful programmes for the future. It is essential that e-learning be a useful and vital component of the business education curriculum, if business programs across the country are to

continue to meet the needs of its students. E-learning adopts the product of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) which is the convergence of micro electronics and telecommunication and the availability of cheap Web browsers to make information available to learners (reader), researchers, distance education notwithstanding. Indeed e-learning is a technology, which has taken over substantial portion of the teacher's role in instructional delivery. In e-learning, the dialogue tools include e-mail, World Wide Web, file transfer protocol (FTP), remote log in (R log in) and web chat, course materials, assignments and projects are presented through World Wide Web (www). Infact, today, the term e-learning is more appropriately, refers to the accessing of instructional materials via the web.

Bates and Poole (2003) noted that different types or forms of e-

learning can be considered as a continuum, from no e-learning, that is no use of computers and or internet for teaching and learning, through classroom aids, such as making classroom lecture, power point slides available to students through a course Website or learning management system. It is seen as the process of delivery knowledge via electronic media which include the internet, intranet, extranet, satellite broadcast, audio/video tape, interactive TV and CD-Rom, electronic board and e-library. It is also global phenomenon fuelled by a variety of economic, technological, and social forces, as well as students demand. The demand among students, employers and communities for lifelong learning, and awareness among educators to the need to enhance the quality of traditional learning via greater interactivity, collaboration, access to resource and remote exchange are some

educational pressures necessitating e-learning.

E-Learning

Technological advancement in all spheres of life has brought about innovation in the educational system. One of the major innovations is the upsurge of electronic learning, known as e-learning. In Adesoji's (2012) statement, e-learning comprises computer and ICT materials and utilizations, which aid information collection and dissemination. These definition imply that e-learning does not only involve the use of electronic device for teaching, but also the presence of the instructor in the learning.

e-learning resources encourages users to peruse through information by using internet technology. It assists greatly in interaction and facilitation of learning (Obi, 2005).

E-learning is a social activity. It is constructed and bound by the

context, it is created (Winn, 2003). Knowledge is built and shaped in a process of dynamic interaction among task, instructor, learner and community of learners, meaningful collaboration and cooperation (Lim & Chan, 2007).

Business Education

Business Education is the delivery of instruction in skills necessary for persons who are preparing to enter the labour force or who need training or retraining in the technology of their own. Osuala (1998) in Asuquo (2005), defined Business Education to be a programme of instruction which consist of two parts via, (a) Office Education — vocational education programme for office careers, and (b) General business — a programme of instruction to provide students with information and competence which are needed by all in managing personal business. The basic goals of business education have not

changed. Business Education is still about preparing students for the world of business. Ln fact, it is because of this goal that business Education should embrace and use e- learning in order to meet the expectations and needs of the next generation, just as in the past history when significant advances affected business, educators again have an opportunity to broaden and improve their programmes. It is imperative that business curriculum always be flexible enough to change in order to meet the needs of business, if changes are not made in response to new economic condition and work place requirement, Business education will witness an exodus of students from its programs. (Salawuden, 2006)

Curriculum

The curriculum can be described as the heart and soul of education. According to Ogiagah (2009), curriculum is all the learning

activities planned for students, which are directed by the schools to attain specific education goals. Atueyi and Okolo (2005) Summarize curriculum as a structured series of intended learning experiences that embrace purpose experiences provided & directed by educational institution to achieve predetermined objectives. Business education current curriculum as reviewed by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE, 2004) placed emphasis on computer and e-learning related courses. This is an indication that any student who wants to be useful in the courses he /she studies should be prepared to undergo e-learning related courses. This shows that curriculum can simply be viewed as all the activities that are involved in the teaching and learning processes. E-learning curriculum include the following; e-Government, e-business, e-banking, e-commerce, e-health, e-employment, e-environment, e-

agriculture, e-science, e-mail, e-shopping etc.

E-learning should ensure effective pedagogy and curriculum implementation in the computer age. According to Offorma (2002). Curriculum implementation is the planning and execution of the contents of curriculum in order to bring about certain changes in the behavior of the learners and the assessment of the extent to which the changes take place. The primary purpose of implementation is to achieve the objectives of instruction, and achieve retention and transfer of knowledge. E-learning is an instructional medium that permits alternative approaches to curriculum implementation in an e-learning age. Genoni (2006) observed that, there is a great link between the curriculum and e-learning and that there are three major areas that technology can influence learning, including:

i. Presentation, demonstration and the implementation of data using productivity tools.

ii. Use of curriculum – specific applications such as educational games, drills and practice, simulations, tutorials, virtual laboratory visualizations and graphics, representations of abstract concepts, musical composition and expert systems.

iii. Use of information and resources on CD-Rom, online encyclopedia, interactive maps and atlases, electronic journals and other references.

Similarly, the role of ICT in curriculum implementation is recognized by the Nigeria National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013, p. 53) where it stated that, "the government shall provide facilities and necessary infrastructures for the promotion of e-learning.

When using e-learning technologies in business education, all the teachers does is to guide the learners in virtual classroom environment, through interactive online learning, such as shared white boards, shared application software, chat functionality and audio/video over the networking.

According to Ajayi (2008), the use of these facilities involves various methods which include systematic feedback system, computer-based operation network, video conferencing and audio conferencing, internet worldwide websites and computer assisted instruction.

Application of E-learning Technology in Business Education Programme Curriculum

In apparent reference to the place of educational technology in curriculum and instruction, Anao (2003), observed that application of technology in the field of education is not new. This view is supported by Aniekwe (2001), who opined that ever before the advent of e-learning in the forms of computers, e-mail, safe life, teleconferences and host of others, the country has not enjoyed such service like telecommunications, telephones,

the radio and the television, there has been a long tradition of integration of these technologies in teaching and learning. If the integration of e-learning technology in Business Education Curriculum is not a recent development, why then has application of e-learning in teacher education generated in Nigeria? The answer lies in globalization, rapid pace of advancement in information technology and the disparity between the developed and the developing nations of the world in terms of level of IT configuration, sophistication and expertise achieved. Justifying application of e-learning in business education, Aduwa-Ogiegbaen and Iyanmu (2005), stresses that at the close of the century, new challenges are seen in e-learning that teachers and students who are not familiar with the new technologies find themselves threatened by profession. This raises the need to train and retrain business education lecturers in the use of new technologies. Such training is not only necessary to improve and update their lecturing skills, it is imperative that lecturers should be sufficiently conversant with the skills they intend their products to acquire and apply in the world of work, E-learning has come to stay because it seems to be the saving grace for educationally hungry Nigerians who could not be absorbed by conventional universities, who are already working and would want to improve their knowledge, etc (Dobbs 2000).

Benefits of E-learning Technology in Business Education Programme Curriculum.

In a reasonably short time, an e-learning technology has had a marketed effect on education in terms of teaching and learning. An advantage associated with e-learning in promoting the activities

in business education programme includes that:

- Students of business education learn, study at their own pace and make choices about the type and direction of their learning, while gaining quick and efficient feedback.
- E-learning provides business education students courses round the clock, as well as enable them discover how information they gain fits into the real life situations.
- Importantly, the internet would provide business education students a culturally, racially, physically and gender anonymous medium for communication.
- It facilitates access to knowledge that is relevant and useful.
  other benefits of e-learning to business educators include access to information resources and specialists, stress reduction, improved performance and cost effectiveness etc.
- Accepting e-learning in the teaching of business courses and using it as our own normal teaching methodology therefore becomes imperative.

The relevance of ICT in education speaks volume today, as the traditional teaching and learning method is slowly giving way to electronic learning (e-learning), e-learning is a meeting point for different technologies which includes, computer, telecommunication and electronic media used together, store, analyze, retrieve and disseminate information for effective and extensive learning among students in business, education, electronic commerce (e- Commerce) has taking over our business exchange service, production and payments. According to Ngurukwem (2005) the inability of our business graduates from any of the Universities to make use of electronic gadget, spells doom, as he finds it unable to fit into the world of work. Speedy information is transmitted through distant and mobile learning to reach greater number of students at different locations and times for acquisition of knowledge and skills on-line,

using electronic media and ICT equipment.

E-learning Technology Integration with Business Education Programme Curriculum

Learning (e-learning) new technology skills is not sufficient but using them to improve the teaching and learning environment is the key for pedagogy-technology integration. Understanding the changing role of teachers from instructors to facilitators, teacher—led instruction to learner-centered instruction is the key to the successful implementation of pedagogy-teaching integration for teacher development. Therefore, preparing teachers to face the challenges of e-learning enriched teaching and learning environment is crucial. Nigerian teachers need to be equipped with the fundamentals of how to use e-learning technology tools and to

have a sufficient understanding of how the integration of these tools in the teaching and learning process can be smoothly facilitated. Effort must be oriented towards changing the teacher mind-set by developing positive attitudes towards e-learning applications in teaching and learning. (Shyamal, 2005).

Challenges of Integrating E-learning Technologies in Business Education Curriculum

There are wide ranges of challenges to the successful integration of e-learning in business education Curriculum. These include ignorance about the important and need for e-learning, poor infrastructural supports, inefficient electricity supply and telephone system, illiteracy and lack of basic computing skills, capacity building and educational policy.

Ignorance: In most institutions, ignorance is a major challenge

facing the successful integration of e-learning, those aware mostly the few selected lecturers, students and literate officials in the school say as much as they appreciate the need and importance of e-learning. The economic situation and high cost of the new technology make it difficult for people to acquire them, thereby leading to restriction of access to the technologies. In business education programme, conservative attitudes are still in progress. Business educators are comfortable maintaining the status quo, doing things the way they are used to. The integration of e-learning technologies into business education programme threatens some teachers, that new technology (e-learning) will replace them. Since new technology enhances learning in a new experience, even the teachers, become co-learners and discover new things along with the students. In order for e-learning

technology to be successfully integrated into business education programmes, various competencies/skills must be developed throughout the programmes which include computer-based learning, web-based learning, virtual classroom and digital collaboration.

Lack of Basic Computing Skills: According to Anao (2003), most school teachers lack the skills to fully utilize e-learning technology in curriculum implementation, hence the traditional chalk and duster approach still dominates in schools pedagogy. Information transfer using e-learning technology is minimal or non-existence in schools in Nigeria. To fully integrate e-learning technology into business education programmes, the need for skilled and trained workers to install, maintain and support these systems cannot be over-emphasized. There is acute

shortage of trained personnel in application software, operating systems, network administrators and technicians to services and repair computer facilities. Those who are designated to use computer in Nigeria do not receive adequate training at worst, do not receive any training at all (Okebukola, 1997). In business education, many teachers lack skills to fully utilize technology in curriculum, hence the traditional method of "Book-teacher" model still dominates in business education pedagogy many teachers are reluctant to use new technology, especially computer and the Internet.

Hannafin and Savenye (1993) pointed some of the reasons for this reluctance, lack of administrative support, how to use it for teaching and the fear of losing their authority in the classroom as it becomes more learner-centered. Apart from the

fact that there are inadequate skilled and trained technicians to service and repair computer facilities, there is more maintenances culture, where manual computers are abandoned because of poor maintenance culture.

Funding: Funding as one of the challenges facing the integration of e-learning in business education, the use of e-learning in implementing business education programme is capital — intensive. For example, funding is required to pay -personnel at all levels involved in business education, purchase of needed consumables, hardware and software, training and retraining of personnel, collaboration, provision of infrastructure, provision of maintenance of equipment.

Poor Infrastructural Support: A country's educational technology infrastructure sits at the top of the

national telecommunication and information infrastructure. Computer equipment was made to function with other infrastructure such as electricity under controlled conditions. In a country where electricity supply is epileptic in nature makes it difficult to depend on the nation's new technology infrastructure. In Nigeria, many electronics equipment and computers have been damaged due to power fluctuation when electricity supply is not stable and constant, It is difficult to keep high-tech equipment such as computers. Functioning especially under extreme weather conditions as obtained in Nigeria. The high level of dust during the dry season in Nigeria also makes the electronic equipment to have short live span. Thus, in educational institution, before any new technology programme is launched, policy makers and planners must carefully consider the following:

- Availability of adequate supply of electricity, telephone system, safety and security
- Access to computers/internet connectivity.

Educational Policy: Attempts to enhance and integrate e-learning in business education curriculum require a clear and specific objectives, guidelines and time bound targets. There is need to mobilize the required sources at all levels to see the initiatives through. The essential elements of planning for e-learning should involve rigorous analysis of the present state of educational system. Specifically, drivers and barriers to e-learning use need to be identified, including those related to curriculum and pedagogy infrastructure, capacity building and financing.

Conclusion

E-learning is very vital to the development of any curriculum, of which business education which is

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the life wire of entrepreneurial skills needed for achieving the needed self-reliance is an integral part of using e-learning and employing the skills by teachers of business education and impacting the knowledge to students should be seen as important ingredients for tackling the challenges proactively.

Recommendations

Having identified the challenges in the integration of e-learning technologies in business education programme curriculum, the following recommendations are made:

- Business educators should be given in-service training on the use of e-learning to facilitate teaching & learning processes
- Business education laboratories should be established to encourage practical application of e-learning in office procedures and tasks usually faced in business education department
- Adequate structures and technologies should be provided to achieve the goal of the existing curriculum in business education programme
- There should be need to provide for computer care, repairs/maintenance in order to keep it operationally functional
- Constant electricity supply should be provided to all e-learning laboratories and of possible alternative power supply should be provided to argument that of EEDC (Enugu Electricity Distribution Company).

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