



E-LEARNING PLATFORMS IN BUSINESS EDUCATION FOR SKILL ACQUISITION

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Abstract

This paper examined the e-learning platform in business education, the work reflected on the collaborative learning, informal e-learning, computer-based training, (CBT) and well-based training as the e-learning platforms in business education. The work also discussed eXe, flexible learning toolboxes, i-learning, video conferencing, youtube, respondus and smart board interacting, white board as e-learning tools on the web suitable for business. The benefit of e-learning platform, as well as e-learning skills acquisition in Business Education were also discussed. The study concluded that adequate awareness on the potentials of e-learning platforms in Business Education and availability of facilities to motivate the students and business educators to adapt to the more efficient and effective use of e-learning. It recommended that requirements meant for e-learning platform in Business Education should be made available.

Keywords: *E-learning, E-learning platforms, Business education and skill acquisition*

Introduction

The world is speedily tending to a global digital society through the use of internet facilities. At the heart of this uprising is the ease through which information, ideas, innovations and life styles spread to all the world. It has revolutionized the nature and manner of instructional preparation and delivery in education generally and Business Education programmes are not exempted from this rapid change. The programme of business education which is the medium through which business education hopes to achieve her objectives is prone to changes linked with the innovations in technologies especially those used in modern offices and schools.

E-learning is an abbreviation for electronic learning. It is the use of computer terminals in preparing and delivering educational programmes using graphics, texts, video, audio and other electronic formats. E-learning is an aspect of information and



communication technology (ICT) which connotes deriving knowledge through the use of computer aided resources and programmes such as e-mail, text messaging, online chats, web pages, audio and video conferencing etc. E-learning is a tool for improving teaching and learning, it is also a good accessible tool for learning and research material (Nwagwu and Azil, 2016).

E-learning can be effectively integrated into any programme through the adoption of computer equipped classroom used for teaching and learning. Integrating e-learning into business education programmes will no doubt boost curriculum planning, development and implementation through the development and use of multimedia courseware and other computer equipment relevant to teaching-learning situations. Computer equipments needed in integration of e-learning into Business Education programmes include flash memories, optical discs, interactive electronic boards, video books, personal computers, multimedia projectors, etc. On the other hand, Multimedia resources used in e-learning include Learning Activity Package (LAP), diskettes, power point slides etc. These course wares may be developed by the teacher or exist as ready-made instructional software.

Holley (2012) is of the opinion that students in higher educational institutions engaged in E-Learning, generally performed better than those in face-to-face courses. He also discovered that students who participate in online and E-Learning achieve better grades than students who studied/using traditional approach. As result of this finding, E-learning is growing very fast and popular, hence, higher education institutions are adopting to e-learning.

E-learning

Lorraine in Nwagwu and Azil, (2016), refers to E-learning as the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance and or support learning in tertiary education. However, this encompasses an ample array of systems, from students using e-mail and accessing course materials online while following a course on campus to programmes delivered entirely online. E-learning can be different types, a campus-based institution may be offering courses, but using E-learning tied to the Internet or other online network (Nwagwu and Azil, 2016). E-learning is an education via the Internet, network, or separate computer. E-learning is basically the network enabled convey of skills and knowledge. E-learning refers to using electronic applications and processes to learn. E-learning applications and processes include Web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual classrooms and digital collaboration.

E-learning involves the use of electronic media to enhance learning including digital collaboration, satellite broadcasting, CD-ROMS, video and audio conferencing, mobile technology, interactive TV and web based technologies (Bennink, 2014). According to Bennink, many successes in outcomes of learning have been recorded as a result of combination of e-learning with face to face delivery. In the same vein, Eklund, Kay and Lynch (2013) noted that e-learning as a component of flexible learning is a wide set of



applications and processes, which use all available electronic media to deliver education and training. It provides people with a flexible and personalized way to learn. It offers learning-on-demand opportunities and reduces learning cost.

According to them, e-learning is individual, customized learning that allows learners to choose and review material at their own pace. They further opined that e-learning may be delivered via numerous electronic media, including the Internet, intranets, extranets, satellite broadcast, audio/videotape, interactive television, and CD-ROM. It is not confined to online learning but it includes computer-based learning, web-based learning, virtual classrooms and digital collaboration. Olaniyi (2016) opined that e-learning is all about learning that occurs at the computer. According to him, the convergence of the Internet and learning, or Internet-enabled learning is called e-learning.

Business Education

Business Education is often regarded as education for and about business. Aliyu (2011) described education for business as that training provided for some students to be effective workers and the education about business is for all students to be informed citizens. This implies that the Business Education programme is aimed at providing individuals with economic understanding which will further improve the individual's standard of living and in furtherance, the business system. Business Education has been defined differently by various people and writers. To the understanding of the man on the street often referred as the layman, Business Education could mean education about how to do business while to the illiterate, Business Education could mean course of study in schools with the emphasis on shorthand and typewriting.

Business education is also a vocational programme that equips the recipients with knowledge, skills, attitudes, knowledge and understanding needed for effective participation and contribution as producers and or consumers of business products. It therefore means that Business education prepares individuals who will adequately participate in business activities and also equip individuals with business knowledge and skills. One of the aims of Business Education is to produce graduates who are equipped with vocational skills and competency required in modern offices and schools, but the relevance of business education classrooms and laboratories in this regard are questionable. But this aim could be achieved when Business Education classroom and laboratories are modified to suit modern offices and school technological needs.

In support of the above, Amoor in Nwagwu and Azil, (2016) observed that graduates of business education have problems in using technologies in a work environment due to their inadequate exposure to information system, modern office technologies and other rudiments of managing modern offices. He stressed that lack of these office technologies affects the nature of programme offered to learners.

ICT providing flexibility, improvement in quality and quantity of learning instead of total dependence on textbooks and materials in prints as teaching and learning in business



education has done in the past. The advantages of using the e-learning technology as an education tool ranges from capacity of students to personally learn needed skills and information almost in any field imaginable. Through e-learning, students of business education would be able to communicate, collaborate and cooperate with other learners worldwide and assess worldwide libraries irrespective of their place of domicile and bring to fulfillment the goal of business education as enshrined in the National Policy on Education (2013). In the context of teachers' development e-learning can be used for both initial and continuing development through courses, workshops, and other activities, formal and informal, where students and practicing teachers learn about integrating ICTs across curriculum to support learning (Yusuf, 2007).

E-learning Platforms in Business Education

Since 1999, advancement of e-learning has taken different forms. Much of current experience is based on the use of web-based modules which are accessed at an individual's personal computer (Claudia and Popa, 2008). There are so many examples of current e-learning platforms. A critical examination of some of these e-learning platform revealed that they could be applied in vocational business education as follow:

Collaborative Learning: Collaborative Learning is online learning, based on interaction with other learner and instructors. (Siadaty and Taghiyareh, 2008). E-learning particularly gives room for collaborative and students'-centered learning. When using e-learning technology in business education, all the teacher does is to guide the learners in a virtual classroom environment, through interactive online learning, such as shared whiteboards, shared application software, chat functionality and audio and video over the network. Meanwhile, Brown (2008) noted that there are three ways in which e-learning technology facilitates learning principles: through self-directed learning, through collaborative learning, and through critical analysis.

Informal E-learning: E-learning can also help to facilitate informal learning in business education. Through internet and e-learning, the business education students can learn outside the course based materials, traditional classroom and can also learn about other important things that affect their lives. Students also have the opportunity to learn during holidays and vacations without necessarily being taught by his teacher. Martinez (2013) noted that incorporating technology like e-learning into education may provide students with experience that would otherwise not be available to them. For example, computer simulations allow students to discover principles through their own active engagement.

Computer-Based Training (CBT): Computer-based training (CBT) is any course of instruction whose primary means of delivery is a computer. A CBT courseware may be delivered via a software product installed on a single computer, through a corporate or



educational intranet, in this case, the teacher does not need internet or website. All that is needed is a computer, a projector, scanner and multimedia objects such as audio, video and speakers for the transmission of learning contents or it could be delivered over the Internet as Web-based training. CBT can be used to teach business education because it is especially good for keyboarding, word processing, information management, business mathematics amongst other subjects. Students can also take advantage of CBT to learn how to run computer applications, such as Microsoft Excel, MS-word, Power point and other Office packages that are related to their field of study.

Web-based Training: Web-based training (WBT) is an innovative approach to distance learning in which computer-based training (CBT) is transformed by the technologies and methodologies of the World Wide Web, the Internet, and intranets (Kilby, 2009). Web-based training could be used to present business education contents live and in a structure promoting self-directed and self-paced instruction on any topic at any distance. WBT could also be used in the provision of remedial lessons to students. The teacher can also use it for evaluation and assessment of the students objectively.

E-learning Tools on the Web Suitable for Business Education

There are so many e-learning activities and tools on the Web that are suitable for learning in education generally and business education is not exempted. The Australia Commonwealth (2007) enumerated some of these tools.

The teacher of business education could do well by considering using them to improve the quality and quantity of teaching and learning. Some of the e-learning tools are under listed:

1. **eXe:** The eXe project is a freely available authoring application to assist teachers and academics in the publishing of web contents without the need to become expert in HTML or XML mark-up. eXe project is an environment for allowing web-based e-learning content. With the eXe, users can develop learning structures that suit their content delivery needs and build resources that are flexible and easily updated. eXe is an Open Source Software project which is free to download and use and the source code is also freely available to allow customization to suit the teachers and students needs. Instructions in business education can be transmitted through this mode.
2. **Flexible Learning Toolboxes:** A Toolbox is a collection of high quality resources, suggested learning strategies and supporting material to support online delivery of recognized training packages which could be suitable for learning. They are high quality, cost effective interactive e-learning and assessment resources featuring scenarios, images and activities and support online delivery of recognized training packages for any training imaginable. Toolbox materials come in an



integrated learning program incorporating a number of units of competency which are available on a CD-ROM for installation on a server or for use on a stand-alone computer and a learning object format allowing users to download smaller self-contained components of content for free. Use of Flexible Learning Toolboxes in business education could motivate new students into the programme and also help the old ones to learn at their own pace. Teachers and trainers can use Toolbox materials to support traditional classroom delivery or as a learning object to help them deliver learning contents. Learning materials can also be customized to suit different learner's needs and interest at any time.

3. **iLearn:** This is a scaleable, open-source e-learning platform with rich functionality for course management, online communities, learning management, and content management. It is an academia platform where students can download learning content such as PDF courseware, laboratory exercises, teaching slides, ISO DVDs. Business education instructors can use iLearn to support their courses or teach an entire class online. On the other hand, they can decide to customize their use of iLearn features by combining it with other learning aids. Business education Instructors who desires to use iLearn can apply it to enhance teaching and learning by sharing online resources, facilitating student's interactivity and collaboration or by appraising student's performance and getting students feedbacks.
4. **Video Conferencing:** Video Conferencing is a collaborative communication tool which allows several individuals or groups to communicate in real time across distances using the data network to transfer packets of learning contents containing audio and video using the voice network. In business education classroom, video conferencing technology could be linked to cameras, computers and whiteboards. It is very suitable for distance and self-paced education. With the use of video conferencing in business education, the barrier of traditional method of learning is removed and this goes a long way to favour the goal of inclusive education. This is possible because video conferencing integrates video and audio to connect users anywhere in the world as if they were in the same classroom.
5. **YouTube:** YouTube is an online public communications site. The site allows for registered users to upload and have available for the public their videos for viewing. In that case, the teachers of business education and students who desire to use YouTube have to register online which is usually free. The teacher thereafter prepares the desired lessons including videos and upload online for the students to read. Anyone who goes to the site can view the lessons and videos that are posted on this site. The students also have the opportunities of having access to other relevant literature worldwide.



6. **Respondus:** Respondus is mainly an assessment tool which the business education teacher can use to assess students learning progress. Respondus is a program that interacts with blackboard, but is basically separate from it. Respondus can be used to compile tests offline, which can then be exported to one or more blackboard courses to be completed online. The teacher can create questions on-line using the Respondus program or he/she can import questions from MS-Word into Respondus and print out test questions. It supports so many question types, including calculated and algorithmic formats. Meanwhile the teacher can choose to import questions from MS-Word or use the Respondus Exam Wizard to create an assessment in minutes amongst other benefits.
7. **SMART Board interactive whiteboard:** An interactive whiteboard is a large interactive display that connects to a computer and projector. This is highly suitable for students' project, presentations and seminars. A projector projects the computer's desktop onto the board's surface where users control the computer using a pen, finger, stylus, or other device. The board is typically mounted to a wall or floor stand. They are used in a variety of settings, including classrooms at all levels of education, in corporate board rooms and work groups. Instructions in business education can be transmitted through this mode. It is impossible to apply all these packages to business education programme in one setting. They can be adapted to many aspects of the programme depending on the socio-economic, cultural and political setting where the programmes are operated.

Benefits of E-learning Platform in Business Education

E-learning should be seen as offering solutions to several challenges currently facing business education inclusive (Nwagwu and Azil, 2016). Through e-learning, students of business education would be able to communicate, collaborate and cooperate with other learners worldwide and assess worldwide libraries irrespective of their geographical locations and bring to fulfillment the goal of business education as enshrined in the National Policy on Education (2013). According to Panda and Swain(2009), e-learning will benefit teaching and learning in the following ways:

- ❖ for learners, e-learning knows no time zones, and location and distance are not an issue;
- ❖ in asynchronous e-learning, students can access the online materials at any time;
- ✚ synchronous e-learning allows for real time interaction between students and instructors;
- ❖ e-learners can use the internet to access up-to-date and relevant learning materials, and can communicate with experts in the field in which they are studying;



- ❖ situated learning is facilitated, since learners can complete online courses while working on the job or in their own space, and can contextualize the learning;
- ❖ online materials can be updated as per the needs of the learners, and learners are able to see the changes at once, and;
- ❖ when learners are able to access materials on the internet, it is easier for instructors to direct them to appropriate information based on their needs.

E- learning Skills Acquisition in Business Education

E-learning has the ability to enhance teaching and learning, hence it has self evaluation software programmes to evaluate instructors. Business education programmes at every tertiary institution must incline to technological skills which involves students and educators (Aguomo in Osamede & Omoni, 2010). Education system is dynamic, business education is not left out, for business education programme to meet the global standard hence e- learning incorporation. Jimoh-Kadiri in Osamede and Omoni (2010), articulated the need for e-learning in business education to involve:

- ❖ learning time is reduced and more knowledge is acquired within a limited period.
- ❖ Business teachers are encouraged to carry out joint research work which encourages teachers and students to carry out team work, where ideas, experiences and knowledge are shared.
- ❖ The teaching of a large class is less stressful and more efficient
- ❖ 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 learnt with the help of internet within the country.
- ❖ Students in distance areas can be trained through the use of internet, television and satellite disk.

Conclusion

With the information technological breakthrough in the 21st century, e-learning has become an invaluable technology tool for teaching, learning and research. E-learning involves the use of technology to enhance learning including digital collaboration, satellite broadcasting, CD-ROMS, video and audio conferencing, mobile technology, interactive TV and web based technologies (Nwagwu and Azil, 2016). E-learning has numerous advantages over the traditional method of teaching/learning. Despite these advantages however, the diffusion of e-Learning in business education is rather slow or imaginary in Nigeria (Dhume, Gondkar, Murgaiyah, and Sub has, 2016). One of the reasons for this may be lack of proper information, negative perceptions amongst students and teachers and non-availability of e-learning facilities.



Recommendations

This paper is of the opinion that adequate awareness about the potentials of e-learning in education and availability of facilities could motivate the students and teachers of business education to adapt to the more efficient and effective use of e-learning. The paper therefore, recommended that there should be awareness creation about the potentials and prospects of e-learning in education generally and business education in particular and Business Educators should be exposed to the utilization of each of the platforms.

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