

## Impact of Online Education in Making Global Learning Accessible

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### **Abstract**

In the midst of the rising integration of online education or e-learning into academic courses, there is strong need for realistic course of action and recommendations to make the improvement possible and release of pedagogically efficient e-learning environments. The objective of this paper is to make clear the educational advantages that take place while supplementing learning by means of online device. This article also suggested that the use of technology in our educational system in teaching and learning will allow educators to plan for courses and programs that will facilitate learning by distant students in the same way as campus based students as well as for each individual student's learning ability, and it offered some background that are essential to advance the objective of making education and learning accessible to all without necessarily disrupting their other daily activities as the learning is done at their own appointed time, place and pace.

It concluded with considerations of how the staff responsibility will, of necessity, revolutionize as a consequence of these advances in our understanding of using technology to improve learning outcomes. This is intended at answering basic questions on the subject of the nature as well as scope of online education, taking into consideration the state of e-learning in Nigeria today.

### **Introduction.**

It is very common today that most people have no time to attend regular and conventional schooling even when they have intention to get more degrees for career advancement, job promotion or simply to learn something new, which is why online education or learning is of importance.

Online education is a system of delivering educational information through the internet to students using their home computers as against the physical classroom. There are different applications for online learning, ranging from simple downloadable content (like iTunes U) to planned programmes that include evaluation and the award of degrees, diplomas, and certificates.

The continual deliberate actions in investing and upgrading of technology for online education will make learning opportunities more abundant, cheaper and more accessible; this will also cause increase in value on lifelong learning and more recognition of non-formal and informal

learning (<http://trends.ifla.org/>). Conventionally, universities hold the means to information and knowledge, in both physical and rational sense. University libraries, faculty domains and research institutes were where knowledge was created, stored and shared. The staff working in those domains typically held a privileged status as originators and keepers of knowledge. Now knowledge is open to anyone globally with a piece of equipment and connectivity, not just facts and figures, but also analysis, interpretation, and creation of knowledge. Access to universities has traditionally been dominated by a modest proportion of the society. Today, access to education is getting higher rapidly ([www.moe.gov.cn](http://www.moe.gov.cn)).

This development of access will make a worldwide 'education revolution' exceptional and this will change societies by creating chances for millions of people and their families to have access to higher education thereby increasing their standards of living. For higher institutions, this will force an innovative approach to schooling and learning, and they will have to fashion out opportunities for opening to new-fangled markets and new global partnerships. In addition, higher institutions will be forced to encourage new delivery approaches such as low-cost distribution in rural areas.

Educational institutes the world over, are now progressively moving toward the use of the Internet for delivery of their courses and lectures to their students both on campus and at a distance (Ally, 2004, p. 5; Kim & Bonk, 2006). The Internet provides appreciably unusual and remarkable promises for computer-mediated communication and education from other forms of educational technologies (Weller, 2002, p. 34). In some cases, courses are delivered absolutely online to students in distant places and accompanying resources may also be mailed out to them in their locations. The whole course group website can be duplicated into a CD-ROM format for the students who have slow and erratic Internet access in their locality. In other cases, the lecturer may use a class website as a complement to their face-to-face delivered lessons. Some lecturers make the most of the class website for the teaching of some specific skills and knowledge through computerized pre-programmed online actions that can offer precise feedback to students' answers (Scott & Judd, 2002). Therefore, there are many ways in which online education environments may be utilized based on educational needs of individuals, groups and even the courses that are taught. The advancement of instructionally efficient online learning environments that meet these learning needs require the application of suitable instructional plan philosophy (Siragusa & Dixon, 2005).

### **What is Online Learning?**

Online learning has different definitions, but an important element used for all is the application of computing and telecommunication technologies to convey and accept teaching resources. Online learning utilises the Internet or videoconferencing to create scholarship communities. Course materials for each class, lesson or/ and lecture are provided on a web location and are also found on CD-ROM, email, bulletin boards, forums, and chat rooms so as to stir up interactions with other students and teachers. Online learning can develop conventional forms of schooling. It may take place in the classroom or place of work, it may be performed at home, by online access centres, or at a public library. Online learning provides practical know-how by means of

information technologies and makes it easier for students to access education and personalised teaching.

Online learning is education that takes place using the internet as a means to communicate information and knowledge, likewise it refers to a variety of approaches, from making educational materials accessible electronically to the design of rich, interactive, online experiences relating to synchronous and asynchronous conferencing. The earlier emphasises the substance, the latter focuses on the dealings that buttress teaching and learning (<http://www.excelsior.edu/web/student-online-success-guide/online-learning>).

The method of online education has over the years struggled to get recognition in learned circles. Its disparity from the custom of campus-based schooling system has raised questions over the support presented to students and the advantage of the award. For some persons an online learning method of education is not fitting. They may get it tough to encourage themselves or not easy to learn at home.

Nevertheless, online educational system has helped many people, professionals, artisans, and government officials to achieve their academic desires in the places of comfort without sacrificing their lifestyle as much as a campus-based education would require them to (<https://www.study2u.com/online-learning>). Online education also refers to as open education, distance learning education as argued or agreed to by different scholars, have been seen in many parts of the world with different nomenclatures put forth by those who viewed the idea they supported and put forward. Among the different names and ideas world over is, open education. Open Education is a philosophic make-up which refers to the common intent of democratizing access to education and teaching. This implies the provision of fairness, that is, equal opportunities to formerly - underrepresented or communally debarred groups to take part in advanced learning. It also means that 'open education' is a "planned educational action, based on the use of instructional resources, within which constraints scheduled lessons are minimized either in terms of access, or of time and location, tempo, methods of study or any arrangement of these" (Perraton, 1997, in Perraton 2007, p. 12).

The United Kingdom Open University's openness ideas aspired to practice four ways scope to broaden access, which are "open as to people, open as to places, open as to methods, and finally open as to ideas" (Crowther, 1969, p.1). Nevertheless, in implementing this ideas, a range of organizations and programmes express themselves as 'open', although their version has been limited to one or a few of these dimensions of openness (Daniel, 2011). For instance, whereas the United Kingdom Open University focused on being open as to the public by not demanding on any proper entrance credentials for its programmes, a number of open universities in developing nations, such as the University of South Africa, the National Open University of Nigeria, and the Indira Gandhi National Open University, India, have not accepted this aspect of openness.

These higher education institutions understand the 'people' dimension of openness to connote increasing the numbers of involvement of candidates who have the recognised entrance qualifications obligatory to achieve admission into conventional higher education institutions. This is undoubtedly not owing to a lack of enthusiasm to entrust to openness by admitting candidates who may not meet the prescribed entry qualification. Reddy (1987), (in Biswas &

Gaba, 2002: 20) argues that: Open learning, therefore, is not always synonymous with Open University or distance education.

### **Impact of online education in making global learning accessible**

According to the report of the International Federation of Library Association (2014), the trend to democratize and disrupt global learning through online learning means that there will be:

- (i) Rapid global expansion in online education resources,
- (ii) Learning opportunities that are more abundant, cheaper and more accessible,
- (iii) Increased value on lifelong learning and more recognition of non-formal and informal learning. In the light of this submission, it is necessary to discuss how the democratisation and disruption of global learning can take place through online education.

### **Online Education Offers Access and Affordability**

According to Clark (2009), improvements in the feature of online lessons are luring lots of people to register. The timing could not be better. Just as millions of working-age Americans are realising they need extra education and skill-sharpening to thrive in a recession, a flowering of competition promises to dramatically drive down prices and raise the quality of online college courses.

Indeed, time-stressed Americans fed up with commuting costs are already choosing online education. More than 4 million enrolled in at least one online course last fall, up from fewer than 2 million in 2003. And some of the biggest online players, such as the for-profit University of Phoenix, say new enrollment has jumped by about 20 percent since the economy began its decline more than a year ago. While online courses have been primarily designed for working adults, younger students in increasing numbers are switching to e-learning. And several new internet start-ups are promising even lower-cost courses, though they do not yet have the stamp of approval from government-approved accreditation agencies.

According to Dwyer, Barbieri, and Doerr (1995), the followings are some of the benefits of online education as highlighted:

#### ***Enhancing student-to-student and faculty-to-student communication***

Web-based education tools provide many ways to increase communication between class members and faculty, including discussion boards, chats, and emails. Researchers have found that adding these elements to a course increases student motivation and participation in class discussions and projects. Students are “more willing to participate [and] a measure of anonymity, which serves as a motivator... people feel more empowered. They are daring and confrontational regarding the expression of ideas,” (Kubala, 1998).

#### **Students share perspectives**

Online forums, like course Information’s discussion board and chat, provide public areas to post information. Each student can view another student’s answers and learn through the

exposure to different perspectives. This benefits students because they can combine new opinions with their own, and develop a solid foundation for learning, (Alexander, 1997).

### **Students experience a sense of equality**

Another benefit of using web-based communication tools is that it gives all students a reinforced sense of equality. Each individual has the same opportunity to “speak up” by posting messages without typical distractions such as seating arrangements, volume of student voices, and gender biases. Shy and anxious students feel more comfortable expressing ideas and backing up facts when posting online instead of speaking in a lecture room. Studies prove that online discussions provoke more confrontational and direct communication between students.

### **Instructors are more accessible**

Online communication also benefits students by providing additional layer of instructor accessibility. Students in courses that are supplemented by products like course Information no longer have to worry if they cannot make an instructor’s regular office hours, as they still have the ability to submit inquiries via e-mail at any time. This is good for the instructor too, as he/she can respond at his/her convenience instead of being tied to a desk or office. This is particularly helpful when a student’s schedule conflicts with office hours or if a question arises at the spur of the moment.

For instance, consider this scenario for a course supplementing a mathematic course with Blackboard course Information. On a Sunday night, a student is reviewing an assignment, thinks of a question, and e-mails it to the instructor. The instructor reads the e-mail Monday morning; looks up the answer, brings up the relevant information to the class during the Monday lecture, and the entire class benefits. If the student waited until office hours on Tuesday, perhaps the integration into the lecture would not have occurred, or maybe if the student asked the question during class on Monday, the instructor would not have had the time to frame the question correctly.

### **Accommodating different learning styles**

An instructor can also present these materials in many formats to accommodate different types of learning styles. For example, if an instructor puts both lecture notes and slides online, both visual and auditory learners benefit. Students who prefer to focus on “listening” and “watching” during lecture do not have to worry that they are missing important concepts while scrambling to take copious notes.

They can focus on understanding the material and concepts as they are presented. Students with attention difficulties or those who get overwhelmed by organisational tasks also benefit, because materials provided show how the instructor has grouped and prepared materials in the handouts, and indicate what items are most important.

### **Encouragement of additional rehearsal time**

Additional benefits for those who “learn by doing” occur when students participate in online discussions, as students are exposed to an extra period of information rehearsal. Typically,

students rehearse information when they study for exams or complete assignments. However, they also rehearse information when formulating thoughts into sentences and typing those thoughts into the computer. When instructors post discussion questions or short essay assignments in the online portion of a course, students must attend to and reflect on the subject matter before responding. This results in reflection and articulation of content, as the very process of reporting and writing about what they have learned engages students in an activity learning experience.

#### ***Providing regular and up-to date accessibility to course materials.***

Students can on their own access course materials 24hours a day through their phones, laptops or/and any other computer device from anywhere in the world as long as they have access to the internet and electricity power.

#### **Continual access to materials**

When course content and activities are provided online, students no longer need to worry about accessing course materials. Students can complete assignments during their most productive times. Busy students can choose to download readings or take practice exams whenever it is most convenient, in the evening after kids are put to bed, or at 4am during a bout of insomnia. Continual access to course documents also ensures students can obtain materials at any time, removing the opportunity for frustrations such as “The library was closed,” “All the copies of reserve readings were checked out,” or “I missed that handout during your lecture.”

#### **Removal of physical attendance**

In traditional education, students working on group projects must coordinate schedules. In distance learning environments, this may not even be possible, forcing participants to work independently. When web-based collaborative tools are available, coordination is no longer an issue. Providing a project team with asynchronous discussions and file uploads, students can work in groups without the constraints of meeting together at a certain date, time, and location.

#### **Add pedagogical benefits**

Web-based testing features also have educational profit. From the student viewpoint, frequent assessment provides concept reinforcement and increases motivation. Instructors can post practice exams and end-of-chapter reviews without worrying about finding the time and resources to analyse results. Students can access these assessments at any time, privately and in the comfort of their home. Since grading is computerised, students receive immediate feedback. This may also help students who suffer from test anxiety relax and minimise embarrassment for those that do poorly.

#### ***Reducing amount of faculty time spent on “administrivia.”***

In addition to the educational profit of online education, there are also a number of time and money saving advantages. Students can save and print items as desirable when provided aid and readings online. The direct result is a reduced institutional expense for both the cost and

time associated with copying, collating, and distributing these materials. Instructors can also use e-mail to send messages directly to students or use the announcements feature to communicate with the entire class. Not only does this ensure that students receive the materials, but it is also environmentally appealing, as it drastically reduces paper waste.

### **Utilize time efficiently**

The time saving elements introduced by web-based education tools like course information apply to both the instructor and the student. Students benefit because they have immediate access to course materials at any location. They do not have to spend time walking across campus to the instructor's office or searching for a reading in the library. Instructors can reduce time spent in office hours, and attend to student concerns online in its place.

### **How the Nigeria education system is affected by online education system**

High educational institutions in Nigeria have become more and more aware of the potentials of distance education. They appreciate that distance education would broaden their ability to make an educational impact and to expand the reach and scale of operations, with the possibilities of greater financial gains for their universities. Currently, the number of students that benefit from distance education is statistically very low as compared with those that attend conventional face-to-face university courses. Only three Universities (Abuja, Ibadan and Lagos) of the 30 federally owned old Universities offer dedicated distance education courses at degree and sub-professional levels. Others like Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria provide extension and sub-professional courses in education, agriculture and health to meet local demands. ABU also makes extensive use of radio and television to reach farmers, which University of Ibadan also uses to reach her students. All Universities provide in-service education in one form or the other. These are often described as distance education. Recently, many Universities operated "outreach centres" in many locations across the country, mainly for financial gains. These centres are not well coordinated and do not provide quality education. The Federal Government has moved in to limit their activities by laying stringent conditions on their operations.

### **Current Practices in Nigeria**

There are currently three major kinds of institutional practice that are described as distance education in Nigeria. All but one exists in the federal university system:

1. 'Outreach' as Distance Education. A strong trend amongst universities has been to establish 'outreach' centres around the country, which have then generally been described as distance education centres. Such practices do not really fall within the broad ambit of distance education, as it is internationally understood.

It is apparent that the quality of education offered through these centres is generally low and uncoordinated.

2. Dual-Mode Institutions. There are notable examples of distance education delivery forming part of a 'dual-mode' institution. Within this are varying degrees of formalisation.

For example, the Universities of Abuja and Lagos operate structured dual-mode distance education. In other examples – such as the Centre for Continuing Education at the University of Ibadan – distance education practices are organised by a unit originally set up to provide education to working adults.

3. **Dedicated Distance Education Institution.** The only current example of a dedicated distance education institution in Nigeria is the National Teachers' Institute (NTI), which falls outside of the University System. However, the establishment of an Open University is a key component of a renewed government commitment to developing distance education programmes at the tertiary level of education.

Distance education has faced numerous challenges in implementation during its three decade history. First, distance education provision constitutes a very small component of higher education provision within the Federal University System. Second, the two dual-mode institutions at Lagos and Abuja seem encumbered by existing university rules and traditions. Third, it appears that the main motivation for offering the variants of distance education described above is financial. Under such conditions, the quality and reevaluation of distance education course materials and practices tend to stay static or decline over time.

## **Conclusion**

The combination of web-based teaching method with the relevant software brings added value to traditional education whereby students and faculty benefit from using the communication and assessment tools within the system. Students will have a customized approach to knowledge acquisition that suits learning styles and busy schedules. Continual access to resources through online delivery and automated management tools minimized the faculty's cost and time associated with the experience of classroom and face to face teaching and learning. The advantages of online education made a significant impact in higher education today and, as technology evolves, promise to deliver even greater benefits in the future.

Redesigned efforts to create new ways to teaching and learning online will push us further away from the comfortable and thus-far dominant model of the instructor who has mastered discipline and who imparts his or her knowledge either through face to face lecture or/and classroom discussion. In this new world of higher education, rather than delivering prepared lectures to all students regardless of their foundational knowledge, the instructors role will be to monitor students' progress and to intervene appropriately when students are unable to advance to the next stage in the curriculum. As students work through materials delivered online, the role of the instructor will not be to teach all topics to all students but rather, to monitor which students are having trouble mastering which concepts, so the specific help can be provided to those students at the right time. Emerging technologies and approaches in online education enable all instructors to practice what the teachers have always known, that students are enabled or limited by their prior knowledge, and that teaching involves discovering multiple pathways that will move students from where they are to the desired learning outcomes. If a student comes to the course knowing a great deal already, the online instructor will be able to assist that student to



accelerate in the completion of a course. If another student needs more help and time to acquire the needed knowledge and skills, the instructor can augment the student's learning to fill in some of the basic knowledge required before moving forward. While these features could, of course, be integrated in an online course designed by an individual instructor, the truth is that most faculties simply do not have the time, resources, or expertise to recreate what can be integrated far more simply into course management systems for online education.

There will be some who find the seeming loss of faculty autonomy in this new world of higher education profoundly disturbing. Such voices will likely be widespread and, particularly for traditional institutions without extensive experience with online courses and programmes, may present a barrier to adopt the new technologies and approaches examined in this paper. Other faculty members, however, will welcome a work environment in which their time is not consumed by preparing learning materials and grading students work.

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