E-LEARNING AND HIGHER INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

Ifeanyi Odinye & Ifeoma Odinye
Xiamen University, China
Email: ifeanyiodinye@gmail.com & ifeomaodinye@gmail.com

Abstract
The world is moving at an unimaginable speed in the area of information use and dissemination. We live in an e-world. Networks facilitate virtually all learning. Through the use of information technology, knowledge and information can be transferred and cross-fertilized in real time. E-learning is a modern method in promoting education in many parts of the world. This paper examines the concept of e-learning, its use in higher institutions in Nigeria and the challenges facing e-learning in Nigeria. Finally, recommendations are given and conclusion is drawn.

Introduction
Today nearly everyone is familiar with e-mail, e-banking, e-commerce, e-business, e-trading, and equally e-learning. According to Jay Cross 2004):

> "Before anyone called it e-learning, in late 1997, learning guru Elliott Masie said, 'online learning is the use of network technology to design, deliver, select, administer, and extend learning.' In 1998, I wrote, 'e-learning is learning on the internet time, the convergence of learning and networks.' E-learning is to traditional training as e-business is to business as usual."

Education has been acquired over the years either by the traditional system or by corresponding system otherwise known as distance learning. The environment of higher education is evolving. Rising costs, shrinking budgets and an increasing need for distance education (New Media Consortium,2007) are causing educational institutions to examine the way that education is delivered. In response to this changing environment, e-learning is being implemented more and more frequently in higher education, creating new and exciting opportunities for both educational institutions and students.

With the advent of information technology, e-learning is now being widely adapted as the mode of teaching and learning in most developed countries and some developing countries like China and India with the world's highest population. E-learning technology is presented as the convergence of the learning process and the internet. The convergence of the internet and learning or internet-enabled learning is called e-learning and this uses network technologies to create, foster, deliver and facilitate learning, anytime and anywhere.

What is E-learning?
E-learning or electronic learning has been defined a number of different ways in the literature. For a better understanding of the concept of e-learning, let's see different definitions of e-learning by different authors.

The applications and process of e-learning include computer-based learning, web-based learning, virtual classroom and digital collaboration where contents is delivered via the internet, intranet/extranet, audio and or video tapes, satellite Tv and CD-ROM (Islam, 1997).

It is the delivery of content via all electronic media, including the internet, intranets, extranets, satellite broadcast, audio/video tape, interactive Tv, and CD-ROM (Urdan and Weggen, 2000).

E-learning is a broader concept (than online learning), encompassing a wide set of applications and processes which use all available electronic media to deliver vocational education and training more flexibly (Australian National Training Authority, 2003).

E-learning is the use of internet technologies to create and deliver a rich learning environment that includes a broad array of instruction and information resources and solutions, the goal of which is to enhance individual and organisation (Resenberg, 2006).

E-learning is an instruction delivered electronically wholly by web browser, through the internet or an intranet, or through CD-ROM or DVD multimedia platforms (Hall, 1997).
From the above definitions, e-learning includes the use of internet, intranet, extranets, audio tapes, video tapes, satellite broadcast, interactive Tv and CD-ROM for the purpose of teaching, training and learning. By its name, e-learning can best be understood as any type of learning delivered electronically. More recently, this definition can be further expanded to include mobile and wireless learning applications (Kinshuk et'al, 2003).

Benefit s of E-learning.
E-learning appears mainly to serve those who cannot or do not want to make use of classroom teaching. Demanding professional commitments and timely responsibilities of many adults often make attending a conventional, full-time, face-to-face course with fixed time tables a rather unrealistic proposition, and the reasons why adults choose distance education are primarily ''the convenience, flexibility and adoptability of this mode of education to suit individual students' needs'' (Holmberg, 1989).

It offers students considerable benefits including increase access to learning opportunies, convenience of time, and place, making available a greater variety of learning resources, improve opportunities for individualized learning and emergence of more powerful cognitive tools (Khan, 1996).

E-learning has definite benefits over traditional classroom training. While the most obvious are the flexibility and the cost savings from not having to travel or spend excess time away from work and home. There are also other benefits:

1. **It's self-paced.**
    Most e-learning programs can be taken when needed. This allows the learner to go through smaller chunks of lesson or training that can be used and absorbed for a while before moving on.

2. **It's faster.**
    E-learning courses progress up to 50 percent faster than traditional courses. This is partly because the individualized approach allows learners to skip materials they already know and understand and move unto the issues they need to learn.

3. **It's consistent.**
    E-learning eliminates the problems associated with different instructors teaching slightly different material on the same subject.

4. **It's time and location boundless.**

   E-learners even go through training sessions from anywhere, usually at anytime. This Just-In-Time (JIT) benefit can make learning possible for people who never would have been able to work it into their schedules prior to the development of e-learning.

5. **It's easy and quick to update.**

   Online e-learning sessions are especially easy to keep up-to-date because the update materials are simply uploaded to a server. CD-ROM based programs may be slightly more expensive to update and distribute but still cheaper than reprinting books and manuals, and training new and retraining old instructors.

6. **It increases retention and understanding of the course.**

   This is because of the many elements that are combined in e-learning to reinforce the message, such as audio, video, quizzes, interactive Tv, etc. There is also time to revisit or replay sections of the lessons over many times.

7. **It reaches more people and traditional method.**

   One of the aims of e-learning is to educate more people at their own conveniences and time. E-learning assists many people both in urban and rural areas to get their desired life-long educations.

E-learning in Nigeria Higher Institutions

The e-learning models of higher education today find their roots in conventional distance education. Initially introduced to allow individuals in remote and rural areas to gain access to higher education, distance learning has evolved significantly over time. Technological advancement has been the major inspiration for change, beginning with the integration of radio broadcasting in the 1920's (Huynh et'al, 2003). More recently, the advent of the internet has enabled tremendous innovation in the delivery of post secondary education (Gunasekaran et'al, 2002). As time goes by, more and more people gain access to the internet, the cost of computer ownership decreases, and overall computer literacy increase (Huynh et'al, 2003). These trends provide higher institutions an ideal channel for the delivery of educational content.

The history of distance education in Nigeria dates back to the correspondence education as a means of preparing candidates for General Certificate in Education, a prerequisite for the London Matriculation Examination. The first indigenous distance learning program was the English by Radio programme of Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation that followed the independence in 1960. The first higher institution which started distance education in Nigeria is the University of Lagos. The Correspondence and Open Studies Unit (COSU) of University of Lagos started in 1974 which later changed to Correspondence and Open Institute (COSI) and presently called Distance Learning Institute. The Distance Learning Institute of the University of Ibadan which started in 1979 is second higher institution which adopted the distance learning mode.

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) was established in July, 1983 to run as a distance education institution. The vision was not achieved because the institution was closed down few weeks after its establishment by the Federal Military Government that overthrew the civilian government. NOUN was resuscitated in 2002.

In Nigerian higher institutions, the commonest type of e-learning adopted is in form of lectures notes and training manuals on CD-ROM which can be played as at when the learner desires. Some higher institutions have begun to adopt the use of video and internet. There is no single

higher institution in Nigeria that operates full modern e-learning education like ones obtainable in most developed countries. The condition is present because of many challenges.

Challenges of E-learning in Nigeria

E-learning in higher institutions in Nigeria is still a dream due to many reasons. The major problems facing the proper implementation of e-learning in higher institutions in Nigeria are as follow:

1. **Electricity**

    Electricity is a perennial problem in Nigeria. It is a major setback to the country's technological development. Until there is a regular supply of electricity, e-learning will not prosper in Nigeria.

2. **Internet Access**

    Without internet, e-learning is not complete. The cost of accessing internet is still high in Nigeria and many people do not even have access to it especially the rural dwellers.

3. **Computer Illiteracy**

    Before one can maximize the benefits of e-learning, s/he needs a basic computer literacy. Many people even students in higher institutions do not have the basic knowledge of computer. This is a challenge to the development of e-learning in higher institution even in NOUN.

4. **Higher cost of hardware and software**

    Both computer hardware and software are essential in running e-learning institution. In Nigeria, these are almost imported thereby the cost is very expensive.

5. **Shortage of Skilled Manpower**

    For a good and efficient e-learning in higher institution, technicians and computer engineers are needed. In Nigeria, these professionals are still not much as equal to the demand.

6. **Lack of government support**

    Private sector is not enough in providing internet access, training of manpower and education of the citizens. Government involvement is needed. In Nigeria, government support is not highly recognised.

7. **Lack of adequate infrastructures**

    In Nigeria, many institutions especially government owned lack good infrastructures for effective e-learning.

8. **People's attitude towards e-learning**

    Many people still prefer traditional teaching and learning mode to e-learning. Also some people are afraid of using internet because different reasons like internet fraud.

Recommendations

Considering the population of about 150 million people in Nigeria, the inability of the existing higher institutions to admit all the qualified candidates and the other people who seek higher education but not a traditional full-time face-to-face education; these prove the needs for e-

learning in higher institutions in Nigeria. The author recommends the following for an efficient and effective e-learning in higher institutions in Nigeria:

1. Government should address the problem of electricity.
2. Government and private sectors have to assist in educating the masses on the use of computer.
3. Government should encourage foreign investors in the areas of electricity, internet access and infrastructures.
4. Government and higher institutions should train more personnel in the area of ICT.
5. Government should invest more on infrastructures in the higher institutions.

Conclusion
E-learning is a large and growing market with great potential in higher education. The survival of higher education in the 21st century is heavily relied on e-learning. E-learning is now widely used in most of the developed countries. In Nigeria, e-learning is yet to be embraced, adopted and implemented. The government has a lot to do before e-learning is achieved in higher institutions in Nigeria. The private sectors and foreign investors are encouraged to invest in the large growing market of e-learning.

References

Australian National Training Authority (2003). Developing e-learning content (Australian Flexible Learning Framework Quick Guide Series).

Cross, J. (2004). A History of E-learning and the Future of E-learning. Berkeley, California.

Gunasekaran, A. et'al (2002). E-learning: Research and Applications. Industrial and Commercial Training.

Hall, B. (1997). Web-Based Training Cookbook: Everything you need to know About Online Training. John Wiley & Sons, NY.

Holmberg, B. (1989). Theory and Practice of Distance Education. New York: Routledge.

Huynh, M. et'al (2003). E-learning as an Emerging Entrepreneurial Enterprise in Universities and Firms. Communications of ALS.

Islam, M. T (1997). Educational Technology for 21st Century. Observer Magazine, Dhaka.

Khan, A. (1996). Utilization of Communication Technologies for Distance Education In K. Murali Manohar (ed.) Distance Education Theory and Practice. Media and Communication Technology, Hyderabad.

Kinshuk et'al (2003). Mobile Technologies in Support of Distance Learning. Asian Journal of Distance Education.

Urdan, T.A. & Weggen, C.C. (2000). Corporate E-learning: Exploring a New Frontier (Report for W.R. Hambreeht and Co.).

Rosenberg, M.J. (2006). Beyond E-learning. John Wiley & Sons, Inc: Pfeiffer.