E-LEARNING: A TOOL FOR DISTANCE LEARNING IN BUSINESS EDUCATION

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Abstract
This paper focuses on e-learning as a tool for distance learning in business education. The paper considered the comparative analysis of the traditional and e-learning approaches of teaching and learning, concept of e-learning, principles of e-learning programmes, benefits of e-learning as a tool for teaching and learning business education courses, example of institutions that have adopted e-learning strategies, institution-wide use of e-learning and types of provision, groups of learners targeted with e-learning, the need for e-learning in teaching and learning of business education, e-learning as a tool for distance learning in business education. The paper recommended that; (i) E-learning approach should be used in the teaching and learning of business education courses in the Tertiary Institutions, (ii) E-learning culture should be built into the teaching – learning process of business education, (iii) Government should provide e-learning infrastructure needed in the department of business education.

Keywords: E-learning, Tool, Distance learning, Business education

Introduction
Distance education is the mode of teaching in which learners are removed in time and space from the teacher. It uses a variety of media and technologies to provide and/or improve access to good quality education for large numbers of learners whenever they may be (FRN, 2004). Its major goal in Nigeria is to provide access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied (FRN, 2004). The issue of distance learning in business education is a matter of great concern and is worthy of consideration. This is because business education plays a very important and indispensable role in the development of individuals and nation. It enables individual acquire practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life (FRN, 2004). The State of Utah Education (2010) declared thus: “By taking business education courses, students develop the academic knowledge and technical skills to successfully advance to the fast-paced business world”. The British Columbia Ministry of Education Skills and Training retrieved from internet (2015) summarized that the learning experience of business education helps students understand the interconnectedness of jobs, work and individuals place in the national and global economy. They also provide students with the practical
skills that they can apply in their daily lives now and in the future and enhance students’ employability skills.

Out there in the society are teeming populations of people intending to undertake business education courses in tertiary institutions. There are people who could not avail themselves the opportunity but are still interested in acquiring knowledge of business education in view of its goals and importance. There are also people who want to update their knowledge in the discipline for continuing professional entrepreneurial development but cannot access it due to factors such as time, distance, work, accommodation and other boundaries that constitute barrier or restriction to the learning of business education in tertiary institutions. It is worthy to note that the above mentioned barriers are posed by the traditional teaching and learning process. E-learning, as compared with traditional approach of teaching and learning, has the potential of removing all boundaries and barriers between individuals, departments, and institutions. In the light of this, Daff (2010) declared thus: Time, distance and other boundaries between individuals, departments, and organizations (institutions) are irrelevant in today’s business world. Collaboration is what it’s all about. Information technology can connect people around the world for sharing and exchange of information and ideas.

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<th>Areas of Difference</th>
<th>Traditional Approach</th>
<th>E-learning Approach</th>
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<td>Classroom</td>
<td>* Physical limited size</td>
<td>* Unlimited</td>
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<td></td>
<td>* Synchronous</td>
<td>* Anytime, anywhere</td>
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<td>Content Delivery</td>
<td>* PowerPoint/Transparency, etc</td>
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<td>Personalization</td>
<td>* One learning path</td>
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An evaluation of the similarities and differences of the traditional and e-learning approaches above revealed e-learning as the ultimate tool that can be use for distance learning in business education.

**Concept of E-Learning**

The term e-learning is a generic (comprehensive or general) expression for all learning which is based on the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to support both learning and teaching. The term may also refer to the use of various technologies and tools to support learning and teaching in different contexts, including
face-to-face settings and distance learning, separately or in combination in which case e-
learning is usually called blended learning (European University Association
educational technologies in learning and teaching. It makes use of modern tools such as
computers, digital technology, electronic media, networked digital devices and associated
software and course were with learning scenarios, worksheets and interactive exercises
that facilitates learning. Rosenberg (2001) summarized e-learning as the use of internet
technologies to deliver a broad array of solutions that enhance knowledge and
performance. E-learning exploits interactive technologies and communication systems to
improve the learning experience. It has the potential to transform the way we teach and
learn across the board. It can raise standards, and widen participation in lifelong learning.
It cannot replace teachers and lecturers, but alongside existing methods it can enhance the
quality and reach of their teaching (Joint Information System Committee Development
Group, 2004). E-learning enhances learning by extending and supplementing face-to-face
learning rather than replacing it. It enables learning to take place when it is most needed
(just in time as distinct from just in case) and when it is most convenient. Learning can be
provided with specific learning objectives. It is `learner-centric’ in that it can be
customized to suit an individual’s learning needs – learners can choose different learning
objects within an overall package (Armstrong, 2012). Pollard and Hillage cited in
Armstrong (2012) saw e-learning as ‘the administration of learning opportunities and
support via computer, network and web-based technology to help individual performance
and development. E-learning according to JISC development groups (2004) is learning
facilitated and supported through the use of information and communications technology
which may involve the use of some, or all, of the following technologies:

a. Desktop and laptop computers
b. Software, including assistive software
c. Interactive white boards
d. Digital cameras
e. Mobile and wireless tools, including mobile phones
f. Electronic communication tools, including email, discussion boards, chat facilities
and video conferencing
g. Virtual learning environments
h. Learning activity management systems

They further assert that e-learning can cover a spectrum (a range) of activities
from supporting learning, to blended learning (the combination of traditional and e-
learning practices), to learning that is delivered entirely online. The Department for
Employment and Learning (DEL) in Northern Ireland viewed the integration of e-
learning into the curriculum and the development of strategic leadership as the key to
transform educational institutions.
Principles of E-Learning Programmes
Armstrong (2012) point out the following as the principles for e-learning programmes:

a. Learners must be stimulated by the learning process.

b. The programme and content should be seen to be intrinsically relevant, the method of presentation should be interesting, use should be made of graphics, animations, audio, interactive simulations, scenarios, case studies, projects, question and answer sessions and problem-solving activities where appropriate – the programme should not simply involve ‘page turning’.

c. Learners must be encouraged to respond to stimuli and should be engaged in learning process.

d. Learners should understand their learning goals, preferably working them out for themselves but with help where necessary.

e. The programme should be constructed in incremental steps and presented in ‘bite-sized chunks’ or modules, each with clear objectives and outcomes.

f. Learners should be able to plan their own progress but should be given feedback as well.

g. Learners should be encouraged to reflect on what they are learning by reference to their own experience.

The advantages of e-learning gave it an edge over the traditional approach. Usun (2003) outlined the following as the advantages of e-learning for learners.

1. Reaching learners outside classroom
2. Using learning time efficiently
3. Sustaining motivation
4. Individualizing instruction
5. Providing access to information tools

Benefits of E-learning as a Tool for Teaching and Learning Business Education Course
The benefits of e-learning are as following;

a. convenient due to minimal disruption of family and work life.

b. elimination of space, time and geographical constraints.

c. increased peer interaction due to a collaborative rather than competitive learning environment.

d. increased interaction with more accessible teachers with decreased feedback turnaround time.

e. increased quality of learning with deeper critical reflection and systematic scaffolding of ideas taking place (Berge, 1995 and Hiltz, 1994 cited in Usun, 2003).

Multimedia University (2015) also outline the following as the benefit of e-learning:
1. **Convenient:**
   a. Self-service
   b. On-demand (anytime, anywhere)
   c. Private learning
   d. Self-paced
   e. Flexibility (modular package)

2. **Cost-effective:**
   a. Virtual (simulated or role play) learning environment
   b. Share lessons among schools
   c. Reduce material cost
   d. Reduce travel / accommodation

3. **Consistent:**
   a. Central control of content
   b. Same quality of content for all
   c. Same quality of education for all

4. **Media-rich:**
   a. Easier to understand and more engaging

5. **Repeatable:** As many times as you like

6. **Easier to monitor progress:**
   a. Less administrative work
   b. Can be more precise

JISC Development Group (2004) identified six key benefits of e-learning
1. **Connectivity:** access to information is available on a global scale
2. **Flexibility:** learning can take place anytime, anywhere.
3. **Interactivity:** assessment of learning can be immediate and autonomous.
4. **Collaboration:** use of discussion tools can support collaborative learning beyond the classroom.
5. **Extended Opportunities:** e-content can reinforce and extend classroom based learning.
6. **Motivation:** multimedia resources can make learning fun.

They further declared in addition, benefits to practitioners which include increased efficiency of tracking and monitoring learner’s progress. E-learning offers considerable opportunity for meeting the need of business education because learning can be delivered in places other than classrooms, facilitate the efficient use of precious learning time, sustain the motivation of business education students and reach many different types of learners in the ways they can learn best. It has the potential to eliminate some barriers to participation in the study of business education.
Example of Institutions that have adopted E-learning Strategies

In Europe, different types of higher education institutions have adopted the strategy of e-learning in teaching and learning in their various disciplines. The example of such type of higher education institutions include among others:

a. Comprehensive Universities
b. Specialized Universities (covering institutions for teacher training, medical, music and art schools, and specialization in language, agriculture/life sciences, etc).
c. Technical Universities
d. Open Universities

A Europe-Wide Study on e-learning at schools conducted in 2013 reported its findings on institutional use of e-learning thus, “E-learning is implemented by the vast majority of respondents (96% - 238 out of 245 institutions). Just one institution stated that it does not engage in e-learning, while six others reported that they are “only now” starting to develop it (these respondents came from France, Italy, Portugal, Russia, Spain and Turkey)”. The report also asserts that the usage of e-learning in the institutions varies to an extent. 53% use e-learning throughout the entire institution and 33% in individual faculties and departments. It further reveals that 10% of individual teachers use it and 2% of the institutions about to start-up.

Institution-Wide use of E-learning and Types of Provision

No less than (96%) of the institutions surveyed use e-learning, mainly in blended learning (91%), but also for online learning courses (82%). However, there is potential both for expanding its development, given that only 53% of them use it across the board, and for exploring other types of application such as inter-institutional collaboration in the field.

Groups of Learners Targeted with E-learning

E-learning covers all categories of learners. Gaebel, M.; Kuprinova, V.; Morais, R. and Colucci, E. (2014) identified the following categories of learners that e-learning covers in mapping survey conducted 2013 in Europe:

a. On-campus students or students from other parts of the university, including those temporarily unable to engage in on-campus study (because of training placement or for health reasons).
b. Post-graduate students, including international students from other countries or regions.
c. Full or part-time employed students
d. Learners intending to pursue training for continuous professional development and unemployed people wishing to re-skill.
e. Other lifelong and adult learners, including those taking courses as a leisure activity.
The National Policy on Education (2012) also stated the under listed categories of learners.

i. Those who have graduated from school and desire to update their knowledge and skills in disciplines or courses of their choice (as a “first chance” opportunity) for their continuing professional entrepreneurial development.

ii. Those who left school for one reason or the other but who having matured would want to make a re-entry into the knowledge arena.

iii. Those who did not avail themselves the opportunity to go to school but who are still interested in acquiring basic education in view of the goals of education for all.

iv. Those who were not successful when they finished school but now wish to remedy their deficiencies and proceed for further studies.

The Need for E-learning in Teaching and Learning of Business Education

Business education plays a prominent and an indispensable role in the development and acquisition of sustainable economy of individuals and nations. It provides employability and entrepreneurial skills that make individuals and nations self-reliant economically, thereby proffers solution to the economic problem of unemployment. People will become self-employed, creators of jobs instead of job seekers and add to the development of the nation. It therefore, follows that the tool for teaching and learning of such all important course should be such that makes it accessible to all. All barriers / restrictions to accessing it should be removed. And this can only be done by adopting distance learning (education) tool which has its major goal as provision of access to quality education for large numbers of learners whenever they may be (FRN,2004). E-learning is associated with distance learning. The term e-learning is a generic expression for all learning which is based on the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to support both learning and teaching. E-learning exploits interactive technologies and communication systems to improve the learning experience. It has potential to transform the way we teach and learn across the board. It can raise standards, and widen participation in lifelong learning (JISC, 2004). With e-learning, lecturers/teachers, students and administrators are connected to the world around and can share and exchange information and ideas. Advancing business education knowledge and skills for effective functioning in the modern world of information and communication technology becomes globally possible and easy. There is therefore, need for the use of e-learning in teaching and learning of business education so as to reach the teeming population outside campus for one reason or the other.
E-Learning as a Tool for Distance Learning in Business Education
The Joint Information System Committee Development Group (2004) declared that: “E-learning is no longer simply associated with distance or remote learning, but forms part of a conscious choice of the best and most appropriate ways of promoting effective learning”. The National Policy on Education (2012) asserted that:

i. the concept of distance education should be all inclusive contact, no contact and Part-time education.

ii. open/distance education is the mode of teaching in which learners are removed in time and space from the teacher.

iii. it uses a variety of media and technologies to provide and/or improve access to good quality education for large numbers of learners wherever they may be.

The assertions above are all integral parts of e-learning. These confirm e-learning as a tool for effective distance learning in business education. For the nation to achieve the goals of business education as stipulated in the National Policy on Education (2012), there is need for the adoption and building of an e-learning culture for the teaching and learning of the course.

E-learning Tools for Distance Learning

E-Mail: Every teacher and student should have an e-mail account. E-mail account enables the teachers, students and parents to communicate. It enables students to have attachment and submit assignments.

Online Forum: Asynchronous discussion occurs here. Different learners at different places share ideas and information together. The teacher creates discussion groups and post a question and request students to comment. Students can post also their comments. The online forum encourages community participation and foster collaborative learning.

Web: This makes available a wide range of materials. It is a resource centre and allows sharing of resources, creating and posting web page with text, images and hyperlinks by teachers and learners. Web is an interconnected set of persons, places or things. It helps to interconnect the various set of learning globally to the instructor(s). Web as e-learning tool is supported by images, audio, simulation and multi-media.

Desktop and Laptop Computers: These are equipment used in conjunction with the software and course ware to facilitate training. Computer based training (CBT) involves the use of a personal or networked computer for the delivery and access of training programmes. It can be synchronous or asynchronous as well as online, web-based, mobile and distance learning.

Teleconference/Teleseminar: Is the live exchange and mass articulation of interaction among several persons and machines remote from one another but linked by a telecommunication system.
Internets: These are equipment used to assist teaching and learning. These include internet telephone conferencing, video conferencing, web conferencing and so on so forth.

Video Conferencing: This tool is used to conduct live lectures. It is supported by audio, chat and white board. Learners can record the lecture which later can be used for on demand lectures.

Virtual Learning Environment: This is a virtual classroom that allows teachers and students to communicate with each other online. Class information, learning materials and assignments are typically provided via the webs. Students can log in to the class website to view this information and may also download assignments and required reading materials to their computers. In a virtual or digital classroom, the teacher may communicate with the students in real time using video or web conferencing. With this, question and answer session can take place.

Learning Activity Management System (LAMS)
LAMS are used for designing, managing and delivering online collaborative learning activities. This is done through a visual authoring environment for creating sequences of learning activities. These activities include a range of individual tasks, small group work and whole class activities based on both content and collaboration.

Conclusion
Hutcheson cited in Kumuyi (2015), commenting on the leadership ability to understand the mood of people and be thus propelled to take appropriate and timely action, said that “action is best which procures the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers”. There is emergency need for the school management to take appropriate and timely action in adopting e-learning approach in the entire schools / faculties and or departments of business education so as to have wider coverage of learners and intending learners not only across the country but the world. E-learning as a tool provides opportunity to those who could not avail themselves opportunity to go to school but are interested in acquiring knowledge of business education for individuals and national self-reliant and sustainable economy. E-learning provides access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities to those who otherwise would have been denied. With the use of e-learning large numbers of persons will access business education courses wherever they may be.

Recommendations
The paper recommends that;

i. E-learning approach should be used in the teaching and learning of business education in the University to reach the teeming population willing to undertake the course of study in the higher institution.
ii. E-learning culture should be built into the teaching – learning process of business education.

iii. Government should provide e-learning infrastructure needed in the department of business education.

REFERENCE


