

CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF VIRTUAL LEARNING IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The 21st century woke up to the challenges of a global pandemic known as COVID - 19 which impacted the world in every sphere of development. Education is one of such aspects. The attendant lockdown and restriction of movement forced schools to be closed for many months. Teaching and learning could no longer take place in the traditional classroom environment. There was a surge in the use of Virtual learning globally to revolutionize education in order to curtail the negative effects as a result of disruption of schooling due to long periods of lockdown. This paper is therefore a critical review of the challenges and prospects of virtual learning in Nigeria. The paper concluded that virtual learning has emerged as a necessary revolution in education during and in the past Covid-19 era. It is recommended among others that government as well as stake holders in education, should as a matter of urgency improve on power supply, ICT facilities,

Introduction:

The covid-19 pandemic brought with it an era where Information Communication Technology (ICT) is used to drive and revolutionize education in many ways, one of such ways is in the form of virtual learning. There was a surge in the use of Virtual learning globally in education sectors in order to curtail the negative effects as a result of disruption of schooling due to long periods of lockdown.as aptly put by mobile guardian 2020, schools have had to face immediate rise of fully virtual classrooms in the wake of the pandemic. That this has not only amplified existing digital

internet connectivity and training for teachers if Nigeria is to move with global trend.

Keywords: *Virtual learning, challenges, prospects, Nigeria*

Challenges, but presented a host of new challenges to schools educators, parents and students.

Virtual learning is a learning experience that is enhanced through utilizing computers and/or the internet both outside and inside the facilities of the educational institutions. The instruction most commonly takes place in an online environment. Teaching activities are carried out online whereby the teacher and students are physically separated (in terms of place, time or both). (Racheva, V 2017).

Virtual learning can be seen as a distance learning conducted in a virtual (online) learning environment with electronic study content designed for self-placed (asynchronous) or live web-conferencing (synchronous) online teaching and tutoring. (Racheva, V 2017)

Specifically, virtual learning uses computer software, the internet or both to deliver instruction to learners.

Simonson & Schlosser (2006) also defined virtual learning as learning which can functionally and effectively occur in the absence of traditional classroom environments. Furthermore, the author stated, Virtual learning has some related terms or can also be called, E-learning, online learning and Digital learning

Virtual education is an important tool in future students professional development for it gives them interactive access to digital libraries, provides powerful search engines, can study at home or anywhere there is an internet access. Also referred to as E-learning, virtual learning generally refers to a course taken entirely over the internet. The teacher and students do not meet face to face. All coursework and communication is done via email, forums, chats or video conferencing. (<http://www.cipcourses.com>) . In virtual learning, instruction:

- can be delivered through the internet, software or both.

- can be inside or outside the physical building of an educational institution
- makes use of computer and an online program to enhance learning experience
- can be used in a self-pacing format, individualised or live web conferencing between students and instructors
- students have remote access to content and interact with other students and instructors online (www.conexed.com>are-online)

NEED TO ADOPT VIRTUAL LEARNING IN NIGERIA

There is need to adopt the 21st century learning process in Nigeria. Till date our educational system in the country is a kind of backward. With the advent of covid-19 which shakes the entire world, the educational halt, economic recession/meltdown, religious and social distancing, lockdown, and loss in human fatality, virtualization especially in education cannot be over emphasised.

All over the globe educational institutions from primary to secondary schools and also higher institutions were shut down around March 2020. There was a complete and total stoppage of physical (real-time) teaching and learning. Globally and in Nigeria particularly the percentage of the affected learners (pupils and students) could be very high. Keeping such huge percentage out of school conclave could be costly both socially and mentally (mental health). It could lead to so many social vices and total collapse of the education system.

Nigeria being a developing country has yet to achieve technological advancement in the area of ICT to enable the use of virtual learning in its schools. Access to internet facilities, power supply and cost of software remain major challenges. A developing nation such as Nigeria is categorised as generally less industrialised and have lower per capita income levels.(study.com>academy>lesson>eco... that) Compared to developed countries Utoikamanu (2013) stated less developed countries have over 40% of out of school children and adolescents. Further, stating that in terms of hardware, there is gross lack of high speed

connectivity which prevents access to broadband applications for education as well as global knowledge networks. Digital technology is vital for educational social and economic development. With this gap in technology, Nigeria faces numerous challenges in adapting to virtual learning. This calls for critical thinking and serious reflection.

Oyesoji (2016) outlined some critical questions to be asked:

- Should covid-19 motivated restrictions continue, would our schools remain shut?
- What happens to learning in-between the period the pandemic would last?
- How would the society account for the mental and developmental losses during the pandemic?
- How about the deterioration in human capacity?

These and many other questions, without even mentioning the challenges of internal security that may be endangered due to lack of learning especially among the youths who are naturally restless, calls for critical concern .Consequently the need for stake holders in Nigeria to look inward and adopt virtual learning for the betterment of the system, learners (pupils and students), teachers (lectures inclusive) and the future of the country as a whole.

Thus this paper focused on the need for virtual learning as an alternative school environment during and post COVID 19 era. The challenges and prospects in Nigeria were critically discussed, conclusions drawn and vital recommendations were given to ensure its functionality

CHALLENGES OF VIRTUAL LEARNING IN NIGERIA

The paper identified several challenges facing virtual learning in Nigeria as a developing nation. This is seen in the writings and research works of many scholars. Some of the challenges faced by Virtual learning in Nigeria as identified by Oye . Salleh & Iahad (2011) include:

- Lack of adequate power supply (electricity) : irregular and frequent interrupted power supply is a perennial problem affecting almost

every aspect of the economy including education. Ajadi et al (2008) also observed that irregular power supply is a major setback to the country such that most rural areas are not connected to the national grid, consequently such students residing in the rural areas cannot access ICT effectively.

- High cost of accessing the internet in Nigeria : the cost of ICT facilities necessary for virtual learning is a limiting factor as most students cannot afford it. This is compounded by misappropriation of funds meant to provide such facilities in the schools.
- Lack of technical know-how in the society (which includes both the learner and the teacher): most Nigerian students and teachers are not knowledgeable on the use of computers and internet.
- Lack of commitment from both the teachers, learners and the government (Stakeholders): Folorunso et al (2006) observed that gross ignorance , low computer literacy and cost are critical factors affecting the acceptability of virtual learning in Nigeria.
- Shortage of internet facilities: Poor technical infrastructure means that phone lines and internet connections are unreliable or slow due to narrow bandwidth. Most users access the internet in cyber cafes, with shared bandwidth as not everyone can afford a personal computer.
- Limited expertise: lack of adequate expertise in the field.

Daniel (2009) also describes four obstacles affecting the implementation of virtual learning/e-learning in developing countries such as Nigeria. They are:

- 1- Connectivity: Limited or lack of connectivity in many developing countries, including Nigeria, in educational institutions, impedes access to virtual learning/online learning
- 2- Equipment: Virtual learning/e-learning requires equipment that can facilitate learning but in some of the Nigeria's educational institutions equipment such as computers, digital technology. And the internet is not available for proper utilization.
- 3- Software: Software enables educators to design and develop learning content. This software is costly and not available for use in

some Nigeria's educational institutions to facilitate virtual learning programmes.

- 4- Training: No combination of connectivity, equipment and software will achieve anything if people are not trained to use them.

In a case study carried out by Anderson (2008), students identified major challenges in the areas of interactions, assessments, lack of hands on practice and lack of peer collaboration. Similarly Asogwa (2011) found that major challenges for optimising virtual learning is lack of requisite skills, stating that many teachers lack skills in ICT, and are not proficient in operating their laptops, sending e-mails, attaching files and other peripheral issues.

PROSPECTS OF VIRTUAL LEARNING IN NIGERIA

Nigeria as a country has a lot to gain from virtual learning as it is the trending form of learning. About a million students apply to be enrolled in Nigeria's limited higher institutions every year but barely 10% of them get enrolled (Jamb, 2016). Among the reason for such is the limited availability or lack of space and inadequate infrastructure in those institutions (i.e limited hostels, libraries, classes, theatres, lectures etc.). Virtual learning can be applied to raise the above percentage of student that gets enrolled in a year in those institutions. Students can participate in class activities online (online programs) where they can also obtain degree (certificates under the terms and conditions of the universities).

Also there will be no need to invest or spend much in building some learning structures such as lecture theatres, halls, rooms and hostels for students as they can access their class activities from the comfort of their homes, thereby reducing/saving the government some cost. It also provides ease of learning.

Some scholars also stated its prospects to includes

- Personalized instructions, content standardization, accountability, on-demand availability (Bhuasir, Xaymong khoun, jeung and cignek, 2011).
- Cost effectiveness, enhanced responsiveness to change, consistency, timely content, flexible accessibility and providing customer value (Olomo, 2001).

Virtual learning should be seen as a major tool to improve and eliminate several challenges facing educational institutions in Nigeria.

Salawudeen (2010) stated that this new technology in teaching allow for more flexibility in learning and a wider reach for education thereby increasing access to education by a larger proportion of population. It provides for consistent content, is faster and works anywhere and at any time, Collaborating this fact, Turban et al (2010) connotes the flexibility of virtual learning stating that students can even refer back to previous lectures without affecting the learning pace of other students.

CONCLUSION

Virtual learning remains the emerging technology in learning/teaching globally, Nigeria as a country should not be left behind in the current trend. Presently covid-19 has exposed the backwardness in our education system with regards to virtual learning as schools are mostly closed making the society vulnerable to many societal and social vices. It is time stakeholders in Nigeria look inward to improve and adopt virtual learning in the nation's education system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the review made in this paper, the following recommendations are made:

To fast-track the use of virtual learning in Nigeria, the following measures should be taken as recommendations:

1. The government should do the needful to provide a constant power supply (electricity) as it is one of the major setback to virtual learning in Nigeria and many others.
2. Cost of accessing internet services should be reduced. i.e The government should be able to subsidies or persuade the service providers to reduce the cost of data subscriptions
3. Adequate training should be given to both the teachers and the students on how to use IT facilities such as smartphones, computers, and laptops and so on.
4. Educational institutions should be properly and adequately equipped with ICT facilities and infrastructures
5. Both the federal and state government should provide more funding to our educational institutions to facilitate speedy and adequate provisions of the above (ICT facilities)

6. At the backbone of virtual learning also, is a fast and reliable internet service. Fast internet with a wide bandwidth and reliability should be made available and at affordable cost to all in the country.
7. More online tutors should be trained to provide more collaborative online activities.

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