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Internet Technology as Tool for Academic Development of Schools in Zamfara State

Ahmad Jaafar

DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURAL TECHNOLOGY
ABDU GUSAU POLYTECHNIC TALATA MAFARA ZAMFARA STATE NIGERIA

ABSTRACT

This research aims at investigating Internet technology as an electronic medium of instruction: its access, usage and impact on the academic performance of staff and students of office technology in some selected Polytechnics. The objectives are to investigate the level of internet literacy of staff and students of office technology and ascertain how they use internet in order to gain the tremendous opportunities of information generation, storage, the technology offers in order to cope with modern office technology practice. The education sector is not left out of this wave of changes. In the last few years, the internet, which is a key factor in information and communication technology developments, has made in-road to the paradigm of today's education such that the business of education generally is gradually becoming electronically driven. The study therefore examined the need for integrating this technology into educational training of office technology students as a way of enriching their learning process, and implementation of e-curriculum by the teachers, digitizing and application of academic activities with internet applications as well as other latest technologies to keep tract of modern information management and processing in the organisations. To achieve these objectives, both descriptive and non-parametric analysis were employed in the study. The findings of this study contributed positively to the productivity of academic staff, students and graduates of office technology.

INTRODUCTION

Without doubt, the Internet is fast altering the processes and nature of conducting human activities/affairs, be it business, politics, administration, education, social and religion. Every process is gradually moving to the Internet where things are done electronically. The Internet has been increasingly involved in human affairs to the extent that every government, industrialist, international organization etc, is daily establishing its presence on the Internet for the purpose of effective information dissemination and service delivery. It is surprising that a technology that first started as a military strategy with a very long period of obscurity, has in the last few years became a household name globally. There is no gainsaying it that the Internet has burst into international scene playing an increasingly ever widening roles in a spectrum of activities having unquantifiable impacts on the social, economic, political and cultural lives of millions of people. Looking around us today, it is crystal clear that the Internet is not merely fitting into old order of doing things, but actually transforming the entire process of traditional ways of conducting human activities. The urge to be on the Internet today has increased to on the Internet today has increased to a level that every enlightened mind desires to have at least e-mail address to feel his presence on the net.

Today, the new development brought about by the technology of Internet is increasingly allowing easy, quick and efficient access to global information in all fields of knowledge. This in effect has made access to recent information and research results worldwide available at users fingertips. Since information has always being a key resource in the success of any education enterprise, access to it, which the Internet offers, becomes crucial to all stakeholders. Hafaied (1996) noted that the "new ICT has given rise to new modes of organizing the educational environment at schools and new concepts of the teaching process, and recasting of the roles played by the participants of educational process.

By this assertion, it is clear that in an era of global information and knowledge sharing, the technology to create, manage and use information is of strategic importance to teaching and learning. The opportunity offered by the Internet technology is like a race where everyone can win a prize. In fact, it has been argued severally that scientific discoveries and technological innovations in ICTs are moving at a pace and with impacts that are unprecedented. Those with access to these innovations and those who have the capacity to absorb them and use, will have opportunities to reap social and economic advantages. While those without access and the appropriate capacities risk being marginalized in the 'knowledge societies' of the future.

JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY

The study will further seek to examine the following problems:

(i) That computers with Internet facilities are inadequate, hence many of the students did not have access.

(ii) That though quite a number of the students were aware of the immense benefits of its use to academic studies, they lack the necessary searching skills to make effective use of the Internet, and because of lack of effective searching skills, those who had access used it essentially to search and

retrieve information on entertainments, sports, and news from around the world, and

(iii) Schools can greatly influenced the students' use of the Internet to access information.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The population of the research would comprised academic staff and students of office technology department of the selected polytechnics. The sample size for the study is 120 students and 25 academic staff in the different Institutions. These would be randomly selected from the selected Polytechnics. The techniques to be used for data collection are questionnaires and interviews. The questions centered on the internet technology, access, usage and impact in relation to their training and even post-training competency, proficiency and productivity. Both descriptive and non-parametric tools would be employed in the study. The non-parametric technique to be used is correlation analysis. The descriptive tools to be used are

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Available facts as indicated above suggest that ICT has in the 21st century changed the paradigm of teaching and learning that most educationists see it as the best thing to happen in the education sector because of its positive roles in creative teaching and personalised learning. Scarcella (2001) while looking at how the Internet affects society and education confirmed the tremendous impacts the Internet technology is bringing into education in the following words:

It is changing the business of education ... Many subjects will continue to develop online, with the advantage of education gaining both new and reinforcing content. It is changing the relationships between students and teachers ... information is now sufficiently available for all citizens to generalize and conclude about what they read In addition, various combinations of business, industry, education and organisations are collaborating on using the Internet to establish long-term, coordinated efforts to improve education at a national broad based level. The Internet affects the business of education in how, when and where students now learn about the world

McManu (2002) made similar assertion when he posited that there is every necessity of incorporating Internet technology into teaching and learning today as reading, writing or mathematics are best learnt through practice in many different ways, the advantage which Internet skills provides. He went further to state that the application of Internet in teaching and learning creates motivational power, resources based learning, collaborative learning, and control over learning, interactivity, potential for easy and inexpensive publication and up-datability.

It must be noted that global developments in the area of lT shows that Internet connectivity is almost becoming unavoidable in all human endeavours, hence it is common knowledge seeing e-learning, e-commerce, e-banking, etc., as a means of conducting business and other human activities electronically today. It is therefore, increasingly becoming important by the day that academic institutions in Nigeria should participate actively in an event such as the Internet that could lead Nigeria to attaining the so much sort technological ascendancy. There is no gainsaying that the Internet technology is an embodiment of world information, which allows access to nearly unlimited resources both graphic, text and audio. Such information can be enhanced and manipulated for the purpose of the development of local teaching and learning materials.

Furthermore, the avalanche of information available on the net eases access to wide range of learning resources with little or no hindrance. Beyond access to wide range of teaching and learning resources there exist the possibility of world class expert, educators, authors and industrialists interacting to share recent discoveries and knowledge in their various fields of specialization. The currency of information on the Internet makes it stand out as the best medium for sourcing for information for personal and national development. There is no doubt that sole dependence on printed materials could be counterproductive as its currency would have diminished because of the time it takes to get to the reading public. Such problem is removed with the Internet. Other benefits derivable from Internet connectivity and use are:

(a) Removal of distance related barriers that have hitherto traditionally delimit the provision of educational services worldwide.

(b) Electronic publishing (e-publishing),

(c) Avenue to launch/carry-out a research work with interested individuals or groups.

(d) Improved communication with various stakeholders in education sector.

(e) Wide range of opportunity to both the learned and learners, especially in access to and use of information.

(f) It allow teachers and students engage in real-time online conversation,

(g) Allows the ownership of both hard/soft copies of information document.

(h) Capacity to reach large number of people simultaneously with conversation not being influenced by physical contact.

The totality of the above is that the Internet connectivity and use in an academic environment allows the use of technology to deliver educational products in ways that make them more flexible, accessible and cheaper to all.

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