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Influence of Digital Learning Tools and Social Networking Services on Learners' Academic Achievement in National Open University of Nigeria

By

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Abstract

The paper examined the influence of learning tools and social networking services on learners' academic achievement in National Open University of Nigeria. The descriptive survey research design was adopted while a sample size of 100 respondents were randomly for the study. A 13 items questionnaire titled: Perceived Use of Social Networking Services (PUSNSI) was used for data collection. Data were analyzed using simple percentage of frequency count, mean and standard deviation. The findings revealed that out of the five variables of Facebook, Youtube, Zoom, Kahoot and WhatsApp; only Zoom and WhatsApp significantly contributed to learners' academic achievement in institution. Therefore, in order to achieve vision and mission of distance education in Nigeria, there is the need to raise the level of awareness and utilization of learning tools and social networking services in the institution.

Keywords: Influence, Learning Tools, Social Networking Services, Open and Distance Education

Introduction

In attempt to provide a suitable framework for effective distance learning across the world, distance learning institutions are increasingly adopting different digital learning tools and social networking services to properly situate the programme within the context of educational system obtainable in different countries. These social networking services that have made learning easier for most are readily available to all except the ignorant and unwilling who refuse to move with the new wave of technology development. However, the number of information students are forced to absorb today is also leaving students feeling overwhelmed. Part of this is due to technology, which at face value would appear to offer easier access to research. However, these social networking services have made learning easy and have given learners more control over what they learn, when they learn, and how they learn. In other words, with the rapid increase of technology in two decades, the way students learn and teachers teach have changed. Luckily, today a wealth of social networking services can supplement one's ability to bring new information to students while providing students with many different options for learning input and output.

With the aid of modern online digital technology tools, which include computers, internet facilities, teleconferencing, videophones, projectors, multimedia systems and mobile technology, teachers can now attend to students' work quickly and easily, thereby saving more time for classroom instruction. Digital technology, especially social networking services, is spreading fast into educational instruction and assessments with each passing day. Students are also getting more entangled with technology for social media interactions and research work since it enables them to search and do their assignments. Classrooms have changed drastically where smart boards, laptops, smartphones, and other digital devices are now in use for teaching/learning processes. The growing skills gap is also forcing more working professionals to explore the use of ICTs in education as the demand for untraditional skills is growing. This has also changed the face of contemporary student demographics. Advances in artificial intelligence, digitalisation, and technology have also forced many adults in the workforce to have a rethink in their careers as the job market evolves and their roles are no longer needed. Many have also watched their roles quickly transform, and require a new set of soft skills. These situations have helped welcome fast-paced learning with highly specialised topics into the fold, such as online courses

and micro-learning. Now, there are older students on campus, with a growing number of part-time learners joining the ranks.

On the other hand, the use of digital learning tools has raised the level of education practice in recent times. Today, it has become an integral aspect, and a popular tool, in the broader landscape of higher education. The flexibility and interactive nature of online learning makes it highly effective in career advancement by increasing the education accessibility of students and making faculty members better prepared to work in the digital age. However, despite the increasing benefits of online tools in classrooms and outside the classroom (online), many Nigerian distance learning institutions either fail to see the potential of these various online tools or they choose to ignore their utilization (OECD, 2020) As a result of this, learning in many distance learning institutions has been reduced to rote learning which does not meet up with what is expected in the 21st century distance learning environment. Though, this can be attributed to ignorance, financial constraints in investing in online tools or a dearth of professionally trained and skilled tutors/facilitators for the use of these many online learning tools. Based on this, this paper examined the influence of digital learning tools and social networking services on learners' academic achievement in National Open University of Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

The emergence and proliferation of new information and communication technologies (ICT), has introduced an unstoppable revolution into education particularly in the areas of teaching and learning in Open and Distance education. The internet and the web have further raised the revolutionary tempo especially through the enhancement of e-learning. For most open and distance learning providers, e-learning had added another dimension to the issue of access. While Open and Distance Learning, ODL, itself is hailed by nations as bailing them out of the problem of providing access to education to the masses and most especially the distance learners, e-learning is further extending the frontiers by further removing distance from education and helping individuals who can, to access education anywhere, anytime, at their own pace and at any place.

The flexibility and interactive nature of online learning make it highly effective in teaching and learning, increasing access to education for all including those in remote locations and making faculty members better prepared to work in the digital age. However, despite the increasing benefits of online tools in classrooms and outside the classroom (online), many Nigerian distance learning institutions either fail to see the potential of these various online tools or they choose to ignore their utilization. Based on this, this paper aims to ascertain the perception of the distance learners on the use of learning tools and social networking services in teaching/learning process in relation to their academic achievement in National Open University of Nigeria.

Research question

The following research question guided this study:

1. What is the distance learners' perception of the use of learning tools and social networking services in relation to their academic achievement?

Literature Review

Social Networking Services in Open and Distance Education

Social Networking services are Web 2.0 technologies that facilitate social interaction and collaboration, and foster a sense of community (Bingham & Conner, 2010). The pervasiveness of online social networking enables adult learners to interact with others on the internet in real time, while new learning uses of web application that can be used to enhance their digital media skills. Digital tools such as blogs, videos, and image editors can be incorporated into the collaborative online environment and used in conjunction with Social Networking services (SNS). Therefore, learners are not only retrieving any ready web content, but are all creating content and providing feedbacks to others (Solomon & Schrum 2010).

The emergence, growth and use of SNSs are rising not only among the general population but also among higher education students (adult learners) (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Andrews, Tynan and Backstrom (2012) claim that some distance education learners are actively and deliberately using popular, non-institutional social media tools to augment and improve their learning experiences. For instance, Özmen and Atıcı (2014) found that distance education students have positive attitudes towards the use of social networking sites, which positively affect the quality

of communication between instructors and students and their academic performance. Callaghan and Fribbance (2016) examined Facebook at Open University of UK and found that Facebook can be used to build a community for distance education students. Additionally, a great many instructors and institutions of higher education have started to combine distance education delivery with SNSs (Brady, Holcomb, & Smith, 2010; Ractham, & Firpo, 2011; Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, & Witty, 2010; Tess, 2013).

Distance education is generally offered to students through learning management systems (LMSs) in which instruction is delivered in a structured manner (DeSchryver, Mishra, Koehler, & Francis, 2009; Lee, & McLoughlin, 2010; West, Waddoups, & Graham, 2006); however, some research findings indicate that these platforms fail to fulfill the social experience which is a significant ingredient of learning (Brady et al, 2010; Lee & McLoughlin, 2010; Mazman & Usluel, 2010; Schroeder, Minocha, & Schneider, 2010; Whitworth, & Benson, 2010). Accordingly, as a social software, SNSs exist beyond traditional LMSs and potentially open up the learning environment to a public space. By using SNSs and similar Web 2.0 tools in the teaching and learning processes, academic content, discussions and other interactions no longer live in the safe, structured and controlled world of academia, and they become accessible in online social environments (Rodriguez, 2011). Recent literature indicates that, as a very intensive and collaborative environment in nature, Facebook can be used as an alternative to an LMS (Maleko, Nandi, Hamilton, D'Souza, & Harland, 2013; Wang et al., 2011) with some major advantages over traditional LMSs in promoting collaborative and active learning (Meishar-Tal, Kurtz, & Pieterse, 2012).

Social Networking Services (SNSs) also support formation of virtual communities of practice and enable students to connect, communicate, interact and collaborate on online networks (McCann, 2009). Additionally, SNSs provide students with the social communication tools that allow for freedom, flexibility, fluidity and digital identity in learning processes (Brady et al., 2010; Lee, & McLoughlin, 2010; Webb, 2009). Other studies have shown that social media not only increased interest and engagement but also creativity.

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The design is appropriate because it allows researchers to report and analyse all variables as they occur without manipulation of any variables. The study was conducted in distance learning-based institution (National Open University of Nigeria, NOUN). A sample size of 100 distance learners was randomly selected from Ibadan study centre of NOUN participated in the study. Self – developed questionnaire titled: Perceived influence of the Use of Social Networking Services Inventory (PUSNSI) with reliability Coefficient 0.76, was used to collect data for the study. The Likert format with options ranging from Strongly Agree (SA)= 4, Agree (A)= 3, Strongly Disagree (SD)= 2, Disagree (D)= 1. The instrument is divided into two parts A & B. Part A deals with respondents' personal information while Part B collected data on the variables under study. Descriptive statistics of frequency counts, simple percentages, mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the data collected.

RESULTS

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Participants

Variables		N	%
Gender of Participants	Male	48	48
	Female	52	52
	Total	100	100
Age of Participants	16-20 years	35	35
	21-25 years	31	31
	26-30 years	30	30
	31 and above	4	4
	Total	100	100
Course Level of Participants	100 level	28	28
	200 level	33	33
	300 level	30	30
	400 level	9	9
	Total	100	100
Religion of Participants	Christian	36	36
	Islam	66	66
	Traditional	2	2
	Total	100	100

Table 2: Frequency Count, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation Values of Perception of the Distance Learners on the Implementation of Online Learning Tools in Teaching/Learning Process in the Institutions.

N= 100

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	Making use of Facebook has become the most important information resource to my studies.	14 (14%)	12 (12%)	51 (51%)	23 (23%)	2.17	.943	Rejected
2.	Making use of Facebook has improved academic performance	20 (20%)	7 (7%)	35 (35%)	38 (38%)	2.09	1.120	Rejected
3.	The use of Facebook in the institution is favourable to my academic performance	18 (18%)	24 (24%)	27 (27%)	31 (31%)	2.29	1.094	Rejected
4.	Making use of YouTube has become the most important information resource to my studies.	10 (10%)	10 (10%)	41 (41%)	39 (39%)	1.91	.944	Rejected
5.	Making use of YouTube has improved my academic performance	16 (16%)	12 (12%)	34 (34%)	38 (38%)	2.06	1.071	Rejected
6.	Making use of Zoom has become the most important information resource to my studies.	35 (35%)	24 (24%)	34 (34%)	7 (7%)	2.87	.981	Accepted
7.	Making use of Zoom has improved my academic performance	30 (30%)	32 (32%)	19 (19%)	19 (19%)	2.73	1.090	Accepted
8.	The use of Zoom has made me more competent and self-reliant in my studies	38 (38%)	39 (39%)	16 (16%)	7 (7%)	3.08	.907	Accepted
9.	Making use of Kahoot! has become the most important information resource to my studies.	6(6%)	4(4%)	48(48%)	42 (42%)	1.74	.799	Rejected
10.	Making use of Kahoot! has improved my academic performance	7 (7%)	3 (3%)	49 (49%)	41 (41%)	1.76	.818	Rejected
11.	Making use of WhatsApp has become the most important information resource to my studies.	26 (26%)	30 (30%)	28 (28%)	16 (16%)	2.66	1.037	Accepted
12.	Making use of WhatsApp has improved my academic performance.	30 (30%)	30 (30%)	27 (27%)	13 (13%)	2.77	1.024	Accepted

13.	The use of WhatsApp has made me more competent and self-reliant in my studies	28 (28.4%)	40 (40%)	26 (26%)	6 (6%)	2.90	.882	Accepted
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Mean Criterion= 2.5

The above table showed the perception of the distance learners on the use of digital technology learning tools and social networking services in teaching and learning process in the institution.

The analysis of results presented above indicates the following:

The use of Facebook has not been adopted by the institution for learners and tutors' engagement in teaching and learning as majority of the respondents disagree on the statement that Facebook serves as the most important information resource to their studies. Similarly, the results also indicated that the use of YouTube has not been adopted by the institution for learners and tutors' engagement in teaching, and majority of the respondents disagree on the statement that YouTube serves as the most important information resource to their studies neither making use of YouTube has improved their academic performance and achievement. Again, it is observed from the above results that the use of Kahoot! has not been identified and adopted by the institution for learners and tutors' interaction for teaching and learning and learners' academic achievement. Whereas, it is observed that the use of both Zoom and WhatsApp have become the most important information resource to learners' studies and improved learners' academic achievement.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study revealed that majority of learners in the institution attested to the effectiveness of Zoom and WhatsApp in attaining some educational improvements. This in essence, showed the level of engagement of learners in the use of these tools in the institution. These learning tools are available and commonly used among the learners and general public for social interaction but not for educational purposes. It is observed from the findings that Facebook and YouTube are some of the commonly used social networking services but yet learners have little or no awareness of the usage through the institution for academic excellence. Callaghan and Fribbance (2016) examined Facebook at Open University of UK and found that Facebook can be used to build a community for distance education students. Additionally, a great many instructors and institutions of higher education have started to combine distance education delivery with Social Networking Services (Brady, Holcomb, & Smith, 2010; Ractham, & Firpo, 2011; Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, & Witty, 2010; Tess, 2013). 2006). However, adaptivity and personalization are the key issues for its utilization and implementing mechanisms to foster and increase activities in open distance learning and lifelong learning networks (Klamma et al., 2007; Nawaz and Kundi, 2010c).

Typically, students have different learning styles: Some learn fast and advance rapidly while others prefer to learn at a slower pace and repeat. In addition, some like working alone whereas others prefer to working in groups. ICTs also allow customization of the learning environment and accommodate different learning styles (Sirkemaa, 2001). The social grounds for an information system development project cannot be neglected in open and distance learning delivery (Ågerfalk et al., 2006). Through the use of digital technology tools and social networking services, according to Raba (2005), objectives can be accomplished in the shortest time with least amount of effort. Both learners and instructors can accomplish and keep up with development as they obtain and share experience that is provided by numerous specialists in the

various field of knowledge. However, according to Algahtani (2011), the likely benefits of digital technology tools and social networking services are greater than the benefits of traditional learning if digital technology tools and social networking services are used and applied in proper ways.

Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that the National Open University of Nigeria has adopted WhatsApp and Zoom while the use of Facebook, Youtube and Kahoot are yet to be well utilized digital tools to improved learners' academic achievements in the ODL-based institution. With the analysis and discussion above, it was observed that the use of digital learning tools and social networking services have the potentials to meet the educational needs of all. Therefore, there is the need to encourage distance learning institutions in Nigeria to raise their capacity in terms of utilization of these learning tools to revamp our educational standard especially in this era of new normal world.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are hereby suggested:

- i Facebook, Youtube and Kahoot should be recognized and emphasized among learners as tools for teaching and learning in the institution.
- ii More awareness on the use of Zoom and WhatsApp as important information resources to learners should be encouraged and improvement in facilities to encourage the use of these learning tools to improve learners' academic achievement in the institution.
- iii Further studies should endeavor to capture more distance learners across the country for better generalization of findings.

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