

M-Learning: An Emerging Trend in e-learning and its Application in Nigeria.

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Introduction

The recent rapid development in Information and Communication Technology (I.C.T) evolving learner behaviours require learning institutions to assess and evaluate their approaches to pedagogy, both in physical and virtual classroom spaces. The current increasing availability of relatively cheap mobile cost (both in devices and services) has brought hitherto another opportunities and challenges for Nigeria educational institution, systems and their teachers and learners. The questions of what I want to learn, where I want to learn, how I want to learn, when I want to lean, from which source do I want to learn, and other germanin questions are current opportunities that are being explored with new requirement not only to the technological and educational perspectives alone, but also to the social interaction that is involved. Therefore, it is true to say that technology creates new conditions for learning for all and Sundry (Ibara 2007).

Meaning of M-learning.

By the term M-Learning, it is the common abbreviation for the term Mobile Learning Quite a number of specialists and academics in the field of M-Learning have through their respective perspectives given meaning to this term. Quinn (2003, 3-5) defined M-Learning as learning that takes place with the help of mobile devices. M-Learning wikipedia (2008, 1) opined that it is the learning that happens across locations, or that takes advantages of learning opportunities offered by portable technologies It also refer to any sort of learning that happens when the learner is not at a fixed predetermined location, or learning that happens when the learner takes advantage of learning opportunities offered by mobile technologies. Mobile learning, applications are best viewed as mediating tools in learning. It also applies to learning with portable technologies where the focus is on the technology, learning across contexts, which brings focus on the mobility of the learners, interacting with portable or fixed technology, and learning in a mobile society, with a focus on how society and its institutions can accommodate and support the learning of an increasingly mobile population.

According to Traxler (2005, 3), he commented that mobile learning can be defined as educational provision where the sole or dominant technologies are handheld or palmtop devices. Also, those flexible tools as that can be adapted to suit the needs of a variety of teaching and learning styles (curtis et al 2002, 30).

Technologies in M-Learning.

The School of thought that has viewed educational technology as the combination of these two terms: “Technology of education and technology in education” is vindicated. The only difference in the two terms above is the use of preposition “of and in”. But they mean out rightly different things. The former recognizes the fact that the use of systematic and scientific procedures in educational practices, while the latter, emphasizes the use of equipment or hardware machine like handheld in teaching-learning activity.

The devices that are used in M-Learning include: mobile phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), laptops and tablet PC technologies. The common mobile devices include multi-purpose mobile phones with colour screens, web access and e-mail, but may also incorporate PDA functions, digital radio and interactive digital television.

Technologically assisted learning on which this concept M-Learning depends, builds on a long tradition of distance education. This mode of learning is directly related to an activity centered perspective, essentially considering new practices against the existing ones.

Mobile learning applications are best viewed as mediating tools in learning which this paper seeks to explore. Considering what factors and design requirements are crucial to the M-Learning environment, and suggest how M-Learning applications can be defined with an understanding of these factors and requirements. The essence of this is to make the learning process more flexible, accessible and personalized. Emphasis should also be drawn on two prominent importance of mobile technologies. They are personal and portable.

- (a) personal – this affords individuals respective opportunity to have their own equipment, such as a mobile phone.

- (b) Portable – this feature brings the opportunity to the owner/carrier of such technology access to static resources (M-Learning in Education – 2006).

M-Learning will achieve great feat in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Nigeria because of the daily increasing access to mobile technologies with improving mobile functionality.

Typical Examples of Mobile Internet Connect Connectivity

Multimedia Messaging System (M.M.S) – the successor to SMS, this enables subscribers to compose and send photo, audio, video.

Short Message service (S.M.S) – available on most digital mobile phones, a service that permits the sending of short messages or simply text between mobile phones and other hand held devices.

Instant Messaging (IM): It connects a client that hooks up a user to an instant messaging services.

General Packet Radio Service (G.P.R.S) – a mobile data services available to users of G.S.M (Global System for mobile – telephone). It also provides internet access to phones.

Personal Area Network (PAN) a network for communication among computer devices and telephones like intercom.

Third generation (3a) mobile: designed to offer a consistent set of services to mobile computer and phone users.

Public access WLAN and mobile telecommunication Convergence this access technology allowing users and devices to move between telecommunications technology and public access.

(Wager, 2006 (2005).

Open and Distance Learning and Usability of M-Learning Devices in Nigeria

Bruns, A (2006, 1) presented that the use of mobile learning potentially brings the rewards of placing institution at the pedagogical practice that addresses student needs for flexibility and ubiquity, that is, anywhere, anytime and any device learner engage on. He further stressed that this trend makes learning highly situated personal, collaborative and ideal learner-centered.

As this generally in Nigeria bias gradually affecting they populace to be digitally literate, through the use of mobile phones and other handheld devices which has affected their orientation entirely. More importantly, mobile devices have been realized could held significantly to improve literacy and numeracy skills, encourage independent and collaborative learning opportunities, identify learner areas of need and assistance. This, therefore, promotes self confidence in open and distance learners.

Greenberg (1998,36) defined open and distance learning (ODL) as a planned teaching learning experience that uses a wide spectrum of technologies to reach learners at a distance and is designed to encourage learner and certification of learning. To Kegan (1995, 7) ODL result from the technological separation of teacher and learner which frees the student from necessity of traveling to affixed place at a fixed time to meet a fixed person, in order to be trained. This definition serves as an eye opener that the use of compressed video or audiovisual like the one by MTN Nigeria to deliver DSTV Via mobile phones, as GLO mobile too is getting set to do so.

However, learners have the opportunity to choose where, when and how they learn. The use of mobile technology will provide the tools to help learners construct knowledge throughout their daily learning. When learning occurs in contexts outside the classroom, whose learning importance of community becomes important. Ibara (2008, 1) categorically stated that the demand on the conventual's higher education delivery system in Nigeria is high and persistently on the increase that the system itself cannot guarantee. Sadly, the level of infrastructural decay in the convention education system is remarkable. Hence, need for open and distance learning with the use of common tools like mobile phone to achieve this feat. M learning is out to solve the problems of admission and accessibility the education. a prominent example of ODL in Nigeria is National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). This institution has not started using M-learning devices, but this is an opportunity to explore the benefits endowed in this method of learning. There are more wireless network services and devices in Nigeria now than ever. Network like Celtel, MTN Glo mobile, starcom, and other can sever such

propose in order to bring to fulfillment the goal of distance education as entrenched in the revised National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria) (FRN) 2004 that.

- To provide access to quality education and equity in educational opportunity for those who otherwise would have been denied.
- To meet special needs of employers by mounting special certificate courses for their employees at their work place.
- To encourage internationalization especially of tertiary education curricula
- To ameliorate the effect of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing Nigeria experts as teachers regardless of their locations or places of work.

Potentials prospects and problems of M-learning in Nigeria. The following potential benefits are inherent in the use of mobile devices in teaching learning not only as good tools in administration, organization and teaching aids for practitioners and learning support tools for learners, other include.

- Learners can interact with each other and with the practitioner instead of hiding behind large monitors.
- It is much easier to accommodate several mobile devices in a classroom than several desktop computers.
- PDAs or tablets holding notes and e-books are higher and less bulky than bags full of files, paper and textbooks, or even laptops.
- Handwriting with the styles pen is more intensive than using keyboard and mouse.
- Its is possible to share assignments and work collaboratively; learners and practitioners can e-mail, cut, copy and paste text, pass the device around a group, or beam the work to each other using the infrared function of a PDA or a wireless network such as Bluetooth.
- Mobile devices can be used anywhere anytime, including at home, on the train in hotels this invaluable for work-based training.
- These devices engage learners young people who may have lost interest in education like mobile phones gadgets and games devices such as game boys
- This technology may contribute to combating the digital divide as this equipment is generally cheaper than desktop computer. (Mobilelearn project 2006)

The prospects of M-learning in Nigeria are doubt out for real. The percentage of Nigerians carrying various categories of mobile phones both in conventional institutions and outside is enormous. Succinctly put, mobile devices are still underutilized in Nigeria because all inherent potentials have not been fully utilized. The quest to use these devices for learning will unfold other benefits embedded in the mobile devices. Also the available network suppliers have not been resting on their hoarse, but have been striving to render a world class standard services like moving to the 3G era. The use of Nigeria satellite communication 2 can also be a useful platform to champion this course.

Even with the recent level of development over 70% of Nigeria has been covered with different network services. Since this idea has succeeded in other countries like Japan, Britain, USA, Denmark among others. It is unlikely to fail in Nigeria too.

Nevertheless, the likely problems that can arise can be viewed through these two perspectives. Namely problem with the technologies and operation of the entire system.

The following are the disadvantages of the technologies in use:

- Reduced screen size
- Limited audiovisual quality
- Virtual Keyboarding
- One way of data entry
- Limited Power
- Limited Message Length
- Cultural Context
- Limited Social Interaction

With the system problems as:

- Quality of Instruction
- Hidden Costs
- Misuse of Technology
- Role of Instructor
- Network/Equipment problem (Dong, 2002).

Expectation from mobile learners

Indiana University (2003, 1-6) identified the following as requirement from online distance learners to include.

- Time management
- Balancing responsibilities and Setting Priorities
- Managing Stress
 - Know your deadlines
 - Plan ahead
 - Ask for help and other resources
 - keep in touch with your instructor
- Understand Expectation
- Become an active learner
- Develop self-discipline
- Set goals
- Ask for what you need
- Responding vs reacting

Conclusion

As the wave of technological development keeps on sweeping through every facet of human endeavour through the use of mobile devices and other allied equipment, in the next few years the mobile phone will be the primary source for radio and television signals as well as the link to up to the minute information.

Mobile learning as the natural evolution of e-learning, which completes a missing component of the solution adding the wireless feature, or as a new stage of distance and e-learning. As learning becomes more standardized, technology imposes this requirement and more accessible to all the shared knowledge base to people who are geographically or nationally divided expands. M-learning with affect concept of culture and civilization, thus paving way for the emergence of a unified culture in learning naturally.

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