
Learning Needs for Internally Displaced Youth in Northern Nigeria: Role of Distance Learning System

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ABSTRACT

Insecurity such as increasing number of Boko Haram attacks, heavy-handed counter insurgency operations and many more have placed Nigeria to be Africa's largest country with over 3.3 million internally displaced persons as at December 2015. This has affected the educational progress of many youth especially in North-Eastern Nigeria. The issues affecting education being an important factor in bringing social, political and economic development need special intervention. The paper has identified educational technology through Distance Learning System as solution to providing quality education to tertiary institutions' students in the insurgency affected areas. The paper suggests that tertiary institutions in the affected areas through collaborative effort should provide students with mobile devices (tablets) that can be used for easy communication and transfer of soft materials for a peaceful and smooth teaching-learning process.

Key words: Insecurity; Distance Learning System; Mobile Devices; Internally Displaced Persons

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is experiencing many forms of insecurity ranging from kidnapping, abduction, suicide bombing, and robbery among others. Insecurity challenges denied many Nigerians the privilege to attend schools especially in North-Eastern part of the country where over 3.3 million Nigerians have been internally displaced (Adejumo, 2014). This has seriously affected the political, social, educational and economic well-being of people in the region and Nigeria at large. Unemployment, illiteracy and political unrest are what coursed insecurity in Northern Nigeria, particularly in North East (Nadabo, 2013; Odidi, 2014). Poverty is a factor that needs immediate remedy as it leads to crisis in different countries of the world (Zumunta Report, 2012). High level of illiteracy is what gives politicians the chance to brain-wash the minds of youth in Nigeria. This has adversely affected the economic status of our dear country Nigeria. The insurgents around this geo-political zone and other

parts of the Northern region are described as Boko Haram.

The Africa Report (2014) discovered that the Boko Haram's four-year-old insurgency has eroded neighbor against neighbor, cost more than 4,000 lives, displaced close to half a million, destroyed hundreds of schools and government buildings and devastated an already shrunken economy in the North East, one of Nigeria's poorest regions. The region, comprises the States of Borno (epicenter of the insurgency), Yobe, Adamawa, Bauchi, Gombe, and Taraba. The situation about the insurgency became so critical that it extended to other parts of the North such as Kano, Kaduna, Plateau, Sokoto, and so on (Higazi, 2013). Boko Haram is both a serious challenge to educational process and manifestation of more profound threats to Nigeria's security (Africa Report, 2014). Distance Learning Education (DLE) is one of the system of education considered relevant in the time of insecurity.

Distance learning plays crucial role in uplifting the standard of education (Peratton, & Hulsman,

2003). This system of education helps reduce the cost of schooling especially to students living in a far distance (Mitchell, 2004). Distance learning allows remote classrooms to reduce overcrowding and improve teacher to student ratios. It also gives students the opportunity to interact with a diverse group of fellow students. Instructor preparedness and student attitudes are the two main factors that determine what the outcome of distance education would be (Batley & Golek, 2004). Mobile learning through the utilization of handheld devices (mobile phones) is identified as one of the best forms of DLS.

Mobile learning is a form of learning that gives students the opportunity to have access to quality education regardless of location. Mobile learning entails the ability to obtain or provide educational content through personal pocket devices such as PDAs, smart phones and tablets (Frei, Gammill, & Irons). This is a two-way process; either a student learns instructional content through mobile technologies, or the instructor delivers the content (knowledge and skills) to the learner(s) through the mobile technologies. In any case, learning becomes virtual, self-instructional, mobile and more effective. Iliyasu (2013) has applauded the utilisation of Distance Learning Education (DLE) as a possibility to eliminate gender disparity in education. The educational challenge faced by the internally displaced youths in the Northern Nigeria is beyond the issue of gender disparity. Special intervention that gives the youth equal access to quality education irrespective of their locations is highly needed. Moreover, no research in the area considered the ubiquitous nature of handheld devices (mobile phones) and recommend it as best technology for Distance Learning System (DLS). Hence the researcher intends to address the learning needs of the internally displaced youth in Northern Nigeria through Distance Learning System.

Educational Technology as Panacea to Effective Teaching-Learning Process

The Association of Education and Communication Technology (AECT) had in 2008 defined Educational Technology as the study and

ethical practice of facilitating learning and improving performance by creating, using, and managing appropriate technological processes and resources. In this definition, key terms need to be clarified. Ethical practice: this term focuses on the fact that the professionals of the field must maintain the high level of professional conduct (Reiser, & Dempsey, 2008). The AECT code of ethics includes principles intended to help members individually and collectively in maintaining a high level of professional conduct. Facilitation of learning includes the designing of environment, organizing of resources and the provision of tools. It also entails the use of direct instruction within the pre-specified framework in some cases, or the use of open-ended enquiry methods to guide further learning in other cases (AECT, 2008). Improve performance: performance simply means learners ability to use and apply the new capabilities gained (AECT, 2008).

Reiser, and Dempsey, (2012) established the fact that the authors of the 2008 definition emphasized that it is not just enough to help learners acquire passive knowledge. Instead, the instructional goal should be to help learners apply the new skills and knowledge they have gained (Oyibo, 2013). Technological processes are the processes involved in the systematic application of scientific and other organized knowledge to accomplished practical task. Technological resources are referred to hardware and software that are really associated with the field, such as still picture, video, computer program, mobile devices, etc. Information and communication technology is the tool that helps to actualize the educational technology dream (Ibrahim, 2015). Educational technology is a field of study which is concerned with the practice of using educational methods and resources for the ultimate goal of facilitating the learning process (Resier, 2008)⁸³.

Roles of Educational Technology in Learning

The importance of educational technology in teaching and learning cannot be over emphasized, it helps play the following roles:

1. Arouse and sustain the attention and interest of students.
2. Concretize concept and ideas to promote meaningful learning.
3. Make learning more permanent by providing rich experiences.
4. Provide activities for independent learning.
5. Promote continuity of thought.
6. Increase the quality of learning while decreasing the time spent.
7. Check student's preparedness.
8. Make learning more interactive.

Concept of Insecurity

To give a clear definition of insecurity, it is important to know what security is. Security is defined as a dynamic condition which involves the relative ability of a state to counter threats to its core values and interests (Imhonopi & Urim, 2012). It is government's responsibility to protect the lives and properties of its citizens. Insecurity on the other hand is the antithesis of security and has attracted such common descriptors as want of safety, danger, hazard, uncertainty, want of confidence, state of doubt, inadequately guarded or protected, instability, trouble, lack of protection and being unsafe and others (Achumba, Ighomereho & Akpor-Oboro, 2013). Achumba et al., (2013) have further defined insecurity as a state of not knowing, a lack of control, and the inability to take defensive action against forces that portend harm or danger to an individual or group, or that make them vulnerable.

Insecurity is the state of fear or anxiety stemming from a concrete or alleged lack of protection." It refers to lack or inadequate freedom from danger (Beland, 2005). This definition reflects physical insecurity which is the most visible form of insecurity, and it feeds into many other forms of insecurity such as economic security and social security. Insecurity is also perceived as a situation where human and national security of a state is compromised by internal or external forces or interests exacerbated by the former's weak or poor economic, military and/or human resource development conditions (Nwagboso, 2012).

The insecurity challenge in Nigeria has become a formidable challenge for the Nigerian government and peoples (Dike, 2010). The governance challenges facing the polity have trickled into the society, resulting in moral decadence. The growing dissatisfaction, discomfort and distress within the larger society coupled with the unabating official corruption, high unemployment rate, economic crisis, decaying infrastructure and a futile national integration project have heated up the socio-political environment (Nwagboso, 2012). Consequently, armed conflicts, terrorism, ethno-religious issues, kidnapping, political assassination and other violent crimes have become a bottleneck to Nigerian growth and development. The government has made efforts to contain the insecurity inferno raging in many spots in the country, but until the moral foundation on which the Nigerian state is founded is regenerated, Nigeria may be walking the precipice (Onifade & Imhonopi, 2012).

Insecurity has seriously retarded, and in places even stopped the crucial task of educating young persons (Dike, 2010). The problem is particularly acute outside of larger urban areas and off major roads, although early 2006 saw new attacks on previously secure schools in urban areas. In North-Eastern Nigeria, where a new rash of suicide bombings and targeting of teachers and schools has directly put schools in the line of fire, insecurity has cast an even more serious pall (Nwagboso, 2012). Even when schools continue operating, students may not attend after a threat or an attack. Each incident affects the risk assessment that parents and students undertake nearly every day (Imhonopi & Urim, 2012). Single episodes, even from far away districts, accumulate to establish a pattern: in a country as traumatized by violence as Nigeria, teachers, parents, and students are keenly attuned to fluctuations in this pattern and decide to continue or stop their education based on how they view the general climate of insecurity and how it will manifest itself in their immediate environment (Dike, 2010).

Insecurity not only impedes education when it keeps youth and teachers at home, it also shuts down schools, and prevents the government and NGOs from

opening new schools, it also exacerbates other factors that keep youth from enrolling in or staying in school in North-Eastern Nigeria. Boko Haram have constituted a serious security challenge in contemporary Nigeria as the group has even been linked to the dreaded ISIS terror group (Nwagboso, 2012). It has been accepted that the criminal and evil agenda of the Boko Haram terror envoys in Nigeria, including the introduction of suicide bombing on Nigerian soil, has not only crippled economic and social activities in North-Eastern region, but has also made Nigeria unsafe for investment and tourism (Imhonopi & Urim, 2012).

Mobile Technology and Teaching-Learning Process

Mobile technologies are computers; this does not mean any machine that supports portable versions of the learning activities especially applications (software) used on desktop (Ogunduyile, 2014). Mobile devices are portable, handheld and support social interaction among learners (Shehu, 2014). Najmi and Lee, (2014) identify five properties of mobile devices (PDAs, smartphones, tablets, iPods) that produce unique educational affordances:

Portability: - the small size and weight of mobile devices means they can be taken to different sites or moved around within a site.

Social interactivity: - data exchange and collaboration with other learners can happen face-to-face. With reference to Dewey's emphasis on the need to facilitate face-to-face interactions, posits a new philosophy of mobile learning that points to mobile technologies as facilitators for the innate anthropological need to communicate.

Context sensitivity: - mobile devices can both gather and respond to real or simulated data unique to the current location, environment and time.

Connectivity: - a shared network can be created by connecting mobile devices to data collection devices, other devices or to a common network.

Individuality: - scaffolding for difficult activities can be customized for individual learners.

Mobile device refers to any device that one can carry to perform a wide variety of tasks. It is

technology that allows those tasks to be performed via cellular phone, PDA, smart phones etc (Mikre, 2011). A standard mobile device has gone from being no more than a single two-way pager to being a cellular phone, a GPS navigation system, a web browser, and instant messenger system, a video gaming system and much more (Voogt, Knezek, Cox, Knezek & Brummelhuis, 2013). It includes the use of a variety of transmission media such as: radio wave, micro wave, infrared, GPS and Bluetooth to allow for the transfer of data via voice, text, video, two-dimensional bar codes, etc. A mobile device is a handheld tablet that is made for portability, and is therefore both compact and lightweight. These include smart phone, PDA, tablet, etc (Otieno, 2015).

Concept of Distance Learning System (DLS)

Distance Learning System represents the process of training, learning or online educational programme, mostly through the Internet (Peratton, & Hulsmann, 2003). It is based on the use of modern computer and communication technology. It also implies classes and exercises via the mobile devices, CD or DVD menu, consultation with teachers through the Internet, e-mails between participants, forums, group chatting, video conferences (Batley & Golek, 2004). The introduction of distance learning can be seen as the evolutionary development of the new educational form. Distance learning also represents the challenge and tool for improving and promoting educational process in our country and it is also one of fundamentals for new and better knowledge governing forms. The intensive introduction of information technologies into the educational processes has become a priority of modern institutions of high education throughout the world (Podgorica, 2014). DLS is best implemented when the technology (computer or handheld device) is connected to cable or wireless network.

Learning through internet (cable or wireless) can be defined as a form of learning in which the teaching material is presented to the students via the Internet. In that process, the basic demand to the participants of the educational process is to possess a

device capable of receiving data in a PDF format which is connected to the Internet (Podgorica, 2014). DLS is increasing every year. Many students are going into it for convenience, attainability and simplicity. It is so convenient that working students can have their education during breaks, or when there exist unrest in the environment. In the 21st century, education is taking a new shape, teaching and learning is not restricted to classroom situation any more. One can obtain a certificate without seeing a classroom for learning purpose. If distance learning courses are properly designed and delivered, students can learn as much as in traditional on-campus courses (Batley & Golek, 2004). Some features of DLS include:

1. Provision of communication that allow interaction between teacher and student.
2. The use of media (courseware) such as computer, television, radio or mobile devices for easy transfer of teaching- learning materials.
3. The separation of the teacher and the learner in place or time, or both place and time.

DISTANCE LEARNING SYSTEM STRATEGIES

Harper, Chen, and Yen, (2004) have listed the followings as ways to adapting distance learning system when need arises:

New Patterns of Interaction

The rationale behind using the World Wide Web to deliver course material as well as to promote classroom interaction, is based on the potential of this technology to provide 24 hour access to information from any device (computer or mobile) connected to the Internet (Mitchell, 2004). However, technology and the availability of course material are the prerequisites for distance-learning programs. Unlike traditional face to face education programme, distance learning gives the student room to learn at his/her pace through interaction with computer or any other device (Jegade, 2000).

Participants

The success of DLS depends upon the effort of those to partake in the programme. DLS requires

time, knowledge of computer, internet connection, dedication, etc. Compared to traditional course delivery methods, distance learning demands a disproportionate amount of effort on the part of instructors.

Changing Instructional Pedagogy

The methodology to use in the time of DLS is entirely different from that of traditional face to face method of teaching. It is no more a verbal instruction, while the former requires the use of very precise and simple materials, the later may requires the use of bulky hard material such as textbooks, etc.

Managerial Commitment

Management is the backbone of every organization, it plays an important role in the successful implementation of distance learning programs. It is imperative that employees fully understand and go along with a company's strategic plan because these plans can affect the pedagogy of these programs. Mitchell (2004) states that dialog between managers and employees accomplishes two important aims: (1) The ability to generate feedback among employees about planned changes, and (2) to create consensus among employees to ensure that the strategies are implemented, not undermined because of the lack of employee support or understanding.

Curricula Change

To successfully adapt DLS, content, learning experiences, organization and evaluation pattern need to be revisited (Jegade, 2000). This involves looking into the old approach (traditional face to face method) and make necessary modification to suit the preferred method.

DISTANCE LEARNING SYSTEM IN THE TIME OF INSURGENCY

It is an undeniable fact that insecurity challenges had led to the economic and education slump in many countries of the world. Education is the greatest social leveler and that education is the most potent instrument for mental and social emancipation.

In recognition of this, nations sought to provide quality education for majority of their citizens in an equitable and accessible manner (Jegede, 2000). This reality has led many countries, developed and developing alike, to make huge investments to educating their people (Omoniyi, 2013). Moreover, the greatest challenge assailing many nations facing insecurity issues is how to provide educational opportunities for many of their displaced youth. This phenomenon is particularly disturbing in developing nations of the world like Nigeria where there is a multitude of high population growth rate and poor economic status.

Considering the roles education plays to promoting political and socio-economic development and providing equal education to all citizens as stated in the National Policy on Education, an intervention measure needs to be put in place. Education as defined by many authors is a continuous process that does not need distractions. Distraction is an inevitable phenomenon especially when a nation is not secured facing insecurity challenges. The best education pattern in this kind of situation is the approach that gives students access to receiving lectures wherever they are irrespective of distance. It is as a result of this that distance learning system has been identified as the panacea to the perennial problems of equitable access to education, equality of opportunities as well as providing a second chance for those who had once been in the system but had to leave due to insecurity challenges.

CONCLUSION

The North East geo-political zone of Nigeria has been described as the most educationally backward due to rebellion attacks on all educational facilities, teachers, students and schools. Many more students were kidnapped and joined into attacks in different parts of the North. Despite the fact that Nigeria has spent a lot in the fight against insurgency, it does not mean that the internally displaced youth in the affected regions should not get access to quality education. This paper aimed at providing avenue through which this phenomenological problem is addressed. Hence describes distance learning through

the utilization of mobile phones as key approach to addressing the learning needs of internally displaced youth in Northern Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the foregoing discussions, the following recommendations are hereby presented:

1. More dedicated centres of distance learning should be established in the North-Eastern Nigeria.
2. Government should make effort to providing wireless network that is accessible to students in the affected areas.
3. Workshops should be organized for both the facilitators and the students (internally displaced youth) to make distance learning system more effective.
4. Students should be enlighten on the use of mobile phones for learning and social media chats should be discouraged.
5. Tertiary institutions in the affected areas through collaborative effort should provide students with mobile devices (tablets) that can be used for easy communication and transfer of soft materials for a peaceful and smooth teaching-learning process.

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