Chapter 11
Digital Library and Distance Learning in Developing Countries:
Benefits and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discussed the digital library and distance learning benefits and challenges in developing countries. It started with the general introduction of digital library and distance learning, and went further and discussed the nexus between the digital library and distance learning. The chapter further highlighted the benefits of digital library in distance learning. It also pointed out the challenges of distance learning in developing countries, such as finance, lack of conducive learning environment, poor policies on education, inadequate instructional materials, among others. The chapter further discussed the challenges of digital library in developing countries to include insufficient funding, high cost of instructional materials, insufficient and digital local content, and so on. The paper concluded that there is an urgent need for all stakeholders to take urgent attention in addressing the challenges of digital library in distance learning to create a full opportunity of what digital library provides in distance learning in developing countries.

INTRODUCTION

The journey to self-discovery, achievements and continuous relevance of man could be associated with the level of education, be it formal or informal. Science, politics, technology and other elements that relate to existence, survival, and relationship of humans with the environment are greatly influenced by the level of education and exposure to relevant information. It, therefore, suffices to note that national development may not be possible without quality education. Acemoglu and Autor (2012) identified the tangible contributions of education to economic growth, asserting that education is at the fulcrum of development. Educational activities that involve teaching, learning, research, and community development may, however, be hampered without relevant educational resources. This underscores the relevance of the library which focuses on selection, acquisition, processing, storage, preservation and dissemination of electronic and print education resources for meaningful educational activities.

The traditional approach to teaching and learning process has been predominant for several years in higher education. It focuses on face-to-face interaction between the teacher and the learner in a fixed location at a specific time. However, its limitation became conspicuous with the growth in the population of person seeking higher education. Other factors that revealed its weakness include but not limited to infrastructural challenges, incapability of educational stakeholders to maintain required workforce for traditional learning system, and the increasing number of potential learners that their work schedules would not permit to attend the traditional educational system.

To mitigate some of these challenges, reading by correspondence was instituted. The first university to commence studying by correspondence was the University of London in 1858 (Rothblatt, Muller, Ringer, Simon, Bryant, Roach, Harte, Smith & Symonds, 1988, Idiegbeyan-ose & Akpoghome 2009). Other western institutions also patterned after this form of higher education system. Distance learning in Africa could also be traced to the early 1950's (Leary & Berge, 2007) with majority concentrated in South Africa. Distance learning is an educational system in which learning takes place without physical contact between student and the lecturer. This is a direct opposite of the traditional education that insists on physical presence of students in the class. The principle behind distance learning focuses on ensuring that willing and qualified persons have uninhibited access to education within affordable cost. It also focuses on ensuring equality among persons.

Some social-demographic factors such as marriage, work status, financial status etc. has also been considered as one of the impetuses for distance learning.

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