

Chapter 26

Poverty and Phobia of Internet Connectivity and Usage among University Students in Southwestern Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The impact of the Internet on teaching and learning processes has taken previously unimaginable dimensions, by curriculum specialists and educational technologists, from both developed and developing societies. Though the Internet has transformed the way knowledge is created, presented and acquired, it has also deepened the fundamental inequalities which have affected the quality of higher education provision in the 21st century, especially in developing societies like Nigeria, where poverty and underdevelopment are still an integral part of the social realities. This chapter examines the phenomenon of poverty and phobia regarding Internet connectivity and usage among university students in south-western Nigeria. Using the descriptive survey research method, a five-point likert-type structured questionnaire was administered on 362 randomly selected students from 7 universities in south-western Nigeria. Findings indicated that respondents have a high confidence level of 78% for Internet usage, with the major challenge being the cost and low quality Internet connectivity, notwithstanding the urban locations of the institutions. Internet access by students is generally low due to high costs of Internet connectivity, access, sporadic and unstable electricity. There is general absence of financial aid mechanisms and this makes it difficult for students to procure reliable Internet access, even though they have high confidence level to utilize it.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60960-046-4.ch026

INTRODUCTION

In thinking about agents of change and development, online education remains the most potent force imaginable. All that humans have achieved throughout history can be attributed to one form of education or the other, and what they have to what they do not have. Arising from its central role in social and infrastructural development, technological education quickly gained importance in North America and Western Europe in the eighteenth century. For instance, many universities can be found online with virtual classes (i.e. e-learning), learning management systems, use of social networking tools, e-portfolios, etc.

Following developments in the technological landscape leading to a shift from industrial to information and currently knowledge society, emphasis shifted to the use of computer-mediated telecommunications and their influence on society. This is a simplistic rather than an exhaustive description of the knowledge based society in which we are currently operating. However, it provides a viewpoint of the nature of learning in a technology driven age. At the heart of this digital age is transformative learning.

Transformative learning is the heart of significant adult learning and central to adult education (Mezirow, 2000). As a theory it was created to capture the unique adult experience that occurs as a result of a shift in perspective. Mezirow's concept of transformative learning encompasses three themes: the centrality of experience, critical reflection, and rational discourse in the process of meaning structure transformation (Taylor, 1998). Given these functions, it is important to note that transformational process can be enhanced with the Information and Technologies (ICTs) tools especially the Internet. Online learning has significant implications for transformative learning and can contribute to the expansion and understanding of the theory. Individuals who tap into the unlimited information available through the ever-growing numbers of websites have the potential to expand

their knowledge, synthesize information, deepen understanding about various issues and topics and able to transform learning. In order for learning to be well transformed, Internet must be used effectively.

BACKGROUND

The use of the Internet to transform online education has been handicapped in some parts of the world; there are many factors contributing to the ineffective use. Some factors specific to the samples study in this paper are difficulties with Internet connectivity, social economic factors and Internet phobia and all these can be attributed to the so called "digital divide".

The digital divide is a phenomenon linked not only to the topic of use of ICT, access to the Internet, but also to usage and benefits of ICT (Fuchs & Horak, 2006). One of the biggest developments in expanding access to information and communication technologies (ICT) in most African countries involves communications infrastructure. According to International Telecommunication Union (ITU) World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators (2007), Africa has 280 million total telephone subscribers, of which some 260 million (over 85%) are mobile cellular subscribers, representing the continent with the highest ratio of mobile to total telephone subscribers of any region in the world. It is the region with the highest mobile cellular growth rate (over the past 5 years averages almost 65% year on year). The continent accounts for 14% of the world's population, but for only around 7% of all fixed and mobile subscribers worldwide. It also has some 50 million Internet users, for an Internet penetration of just 5%; however, Europe's Internet penetration is 8 times higher. This data suggests that Africa has immense potential to improve its infrastructure deployment and telecommunications usage.

The following paragraph presents literature reviews on some of the difficulties in the use of ICT.

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