

Enhancing E-Learning in Higher Education: A Ghana-Centric Approach

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ABSTRACT

E-learning, also known as open learning, technology-mediated learning, online learning, and virtual campus, is a promising tool for expanding access to quality education and training, reducing costs, and improving communication. Ghana has begun promoting e-learning in its educational review policy. E-learning involves using digital tools for teaching and learning, enabling learners to study anytime and anywhere. It encourages interaction, exchange of views, and communication, improving relationships that sustain learning. Despite challenges, e-learning has made a strong impact on teaching and learning, increasing access to information for faculty and learners. A rich environment for collaboration among students can improve academic standards. The literature suggests the need for effective implementation in higher education in Ghana to fully benefit faculty, administrators, and students from the benefits of e-learning.

Keywords: E-Learning, Higher Education, Ghana, Technology, ICTs

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of multimedia and information technologies, as well as the usage of the internet as a new teaching technique, have resulted in significant changes in the traditional teaching process [1]. According to [2], advancements in information technology have resulted in additional educational options for today's students. Agendas of schools and educational institutions have identified e-Learning as having the potential to transform people, knowledge, skills, and performance. According to [3, 4, 5], colleges, universities, and other institutions of higher learning are racing to expand online course capabilities in a rapidly developing cyber education market. E-learning is becoming increasingly significant in higher education institutions. The introduction and spread of a variety of e-Learning tools has triggered various changes in higher education institutions, particularly in their educational delivery and support systems [6, 7, 8]. There are various forms of e-Learning, as well as various approaches to using the concept in education. [9], observed three separate models of employing e-learning in education in his evaluation of E-learning effectiveness and experience in Saudi Arabia, including "adjunct, blended e-Learning, and online" in his evaluation of E-learning effectiveness and experience in Saudi Arabia. As a result, "adjunct e-Learning" is defined as "the situation in which e-Learning is used as an assistant in the traditional classroom, providing learners or students with relative independence [9]. [9, 10], characterized blended e-Learning as a strategy of using e-Learning in which course materials and explanations are shared between traditional learning methods and e-learning methods in a classroom setting. The third option, online learning, is devoid of traditional learning or classroom interaction. In this case, the e-Learning is complete, allowing the learners or students to be as independent as possible [9, 10]. [10], goes on to say that the online model is separated into individual and collaborative learning, with collaborative learning also including synchronous and asynchronous learning [10]. The purpose of this research is to investigate the chances for boosting e-learning across Ghana's higher education institutions.

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The e-Learning Concept

E-learning is a relatively recent word in the field of education, particularly in developing nations [11]. Its roots can be seen in previous sectors such as distance education or distance learning. It is an educational method that has grown in popularity over the last 15 to 20 years [12]. E-learning is thus a generic term referring to different uses and intensities of uses of ICTs, from web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual classrooms, and digital collaboration [11]. E-learning is the computer- and network-enabled transmission of skills and knowledge, with content provided via the internet, intranet/extranet, audio or video cassette, satellite TV, or CD-ROM (ibid). E-learning can take several forms. There could be complete online learning where students work independently. There could be another partial model in which learners work autonomously while also communicating with others studying the same subject on a frequent basis. Blended learning, which blends face-to-face tutorials with distance learning, is a third paradigm gaining traction in the area. Electronic technology improves opportunities for dual contact between the learner and the instructor or education agency in each model [13].

The influence of electronic facilities on distance education has contributed to its description, with terminology such as open learning, technology-mediated learning, online learning, and virtual campus all meaning the same thing as e-learning [12]. E-learning has been hailed as a promising instrument for increasing and broadening access, providing high-quality education and training, and lowering costs [14]. Ghana has begun to promote e-learning in its recently revised educational strategy.

Promoting E-Learning in Higher Education of Ghana

Unquestionably, Ghana's ongoing search for an education system that permits increased access, adequate rural development, and modernization of its agriculture-based economy began with independence. Due to insufficient infrastructure, the country has only approximately 32% on average eligible applicants admitted into Ghanaian universities and about 40% admitted into Polytechnics [15]. In 2004, the government formed an Education Review Committee to examine the country's education policies. This was in response to the country's deteriorating quality and rapidly increasing demand for higher education, as well as the country's limited comparable facilities [12]. Instead of traditional face-to-face education, the group advocated for independent ongoing lifetime ICT-based learning via open and distance learning modes. Since then, the country has made a concerted effort to design policies aimed at incorporating ICTs into the Higher Education system in order to improve educational provision in the country [16]. Over the last decade, the government has established a number of strategic partnerships with international organizations and governments to advance ICT initiatives in higher education in support of e-learning and ICT programs, with the goal of addressing the challenges confronting the country's Higher Education sector.

For example, the Ghana Academic and Research Network (GARNET) was launched in 2006 by the Government of Ghana, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the University of Oregon. This Network strives to advance collaboration and communication in Higher Education teaching, learning, and research. The E-Campus Network is a broadband wireless Internet and voice telephony network that currently connects 12 public and private colleges. As it provides members of the university community with in-room and on-campus wireless internet and voice telephone, the facility has the potential to revolutionize the style of teaching and learning on and off campus. The initiative is the initial phase of a comprehensive e-learning strategy aiming at connecting all educational institutions to the worldwide ICT network, with Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) serving as a hub. The project also aims to digitize all library resources so that students can confidently and creatively use e-learning tools and resources to build the necessary skills and knowledge to be active participants in the global information society [17]. Currently, the project is fully operational among four of the country's leading public colleges. In another development, the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE), with funding from the World Bank Teaching and Learning Innovation Fund (TALIF) and the Ghana Education Trust Fund (GetFund), has provided infrastructural support to distance learning programs, including computers and connectivity to the global network. Over the years, the Ministry of Education, NCTE, International Extension College of the United Kingdom and Simon Fraser University Distance Education Centre of Canada, British Overseas Development Administration (ODA), and others have provided training assistance. The Commonwealth of Learning provides services in the areas of instructional material development, formatting, and editing, learner support services, and general administration and management of remote learning programs [12]. These initiatives attempt to increase local capacity and knowledge in e-learning. The program, which aimed to provide the majority of Ghanaians with universal access to high-quality, cost-effective higher education, is now functioning.

In addition to the GARNET program, the Ghanaian government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Indian government in 2007 to develop a virtual classroom network for tele-education and telemedicine. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited

(Pan African e-Network) centers in Ghana. The project incorporates collaborations between six Indian elite universities, five African universities (including KNUST and the University of Ghana, UG), and 53 African e-learning institutions. The primary goal of the Pan-African e-Network project is to assist Africa in expanding its capacity and cost-effectiveness by providing quality education to 10,000 students in each African country over a 5-year period from some of the best Indian Universities/Educational Institutions for the names and courses from Indian Universities. If completely implemented, this proposal would cut government spending on supporting Ghanaian students to attend specialist training programs outside of the country.

Benefits of adoption of e-Learning in Education

When time and location are taken into account, e-learning is adaptable. Every student has the freedom to choose the location and time that works best for him or her. According to [18], the adoption of e-learning gives institutions as well as their students or learners with a great deal of flexibility in terms of the time and place of delivery or receipt of learning information. Second, e-learning improves the efficacy of knowledge and qualifications by facilitating access to a vast amount of material, as well as by facilitating relationships between learners through the usage of discussion boards. Through this, e-learning assists in removing barriers to participation, such as the fear of speaking with other learners. Similarly, e-learning encourages students to communicate with one another while also exchanging and respecting other points of view. E-learning facilitates communication while also improving the relationships that support learning. [19] observe that e-Learning provides additional opportunities for interaction between students and teachers throughout material delivery. Furthermore, e-learning is cost effective because there is no need for students or learners to travel. It is also cost effective in the sense that it provides learning opportunities to the greatest number of learners while avoiding the need for several structures. Individual characteristics in learners are always taken into account in e-learning. Some students, for example, choose to focus on specific sections of the course, but others are willing to go over the full course. Finally, e-learning helps to compensate for academic personnel shortages, including instructors or teachers as well as facilitators, lab technicians, and so on. The usage of e-Learning also enables for self-paced learning. For example, the asynchronous method allows each student to study at his or her own pace and tempo, whether slow or fast. As a result, it boosts happiness while decreasing stress [9, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24].

Drawbacks of e-learning in Education

Despite its advantages, e-learning has significant drawbacks when used in education. [25- 32] are among the studies that demonstrate the downsides of e-learning. Despite assertions that e-learning can increase educational quality, [25] suggest that making learning materials available online improves learning only for specific types of collective evaluation. [26] has questioned whether e-learning is only a supplement to traditional means of learning. The most common criticism leveled at e-learning is the loss of critical personal connections, not only between learners and instructors, but also amongst colleague learners [33, 34]. Various research has identified the following disadvantages of e-learning:

- i. As a technique of education, e-learning causes learners to experience introspection, remoteness, and a lack of connection or relation. To reduce such impacts, one must be highly motivated and have excellent time management abilities.
- ii. In terms of clarifications, explanations, and interpretations, e-learning may be less effective than traditional learning approaches. Face-to-face instructors or tutors make the learning process easier.
- iii. When it comes to improving learners' communication abilities, e-learning may be detrimental. Though students may have exceptional academic knowledge, they may lack the necessary abilities to transfer that knowledge to others.
- iv. Because examinations and evaluations in e-learning are sometimes overseen by proxy, controlling or regulating actions such as cheating may be difficult, if not impossible.
- v. Piracy, plagiarism, cheating, insufficient selection skills, and inappropriate usage of copy and paste may also occur in e-learning.
- vi. E-learning may have a detrimental impact on socializing skills and limit the role of instructors as educational process administrators.
- vii. Not all fields can benefit from e-learning in school. Scientific areas, for example, that require hands-on practical experience may be more challenging to study through e-learning. Researchers have claimed that e-learning is more appropriate in social science and humanities than in sectors such as medical science and engineering, where practical skills are required.
- viii. E-learning may also cause overcrowding or excessive use of some websites. This may result in unanticipated time and financial expenses [27, 22, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 20].

CONCLUSION

E-learning is a digital tool used for teaching and learning, enabling learners to study anytime and anywhere. It involves training, knowledge delivery, and feedback, motivating students to interact and respect different perspectives. Despite challenges, e-learning has made a strong impact on teaching and learning, increasing access to information for faculty and learners. A rich environment for collaboration among students can improve academic standards. The literature suggests the need for effective implementation in higher education in Ghana to fully benefit faculty, administrators, and students. This paper clarifies the role of e-learning and its potential benefits.

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