Undergraduates Perception of Internet Usage for Learning in the University of Ilorin

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Abstract

This article presents a student-centered approach of teaching by making use of internet based projects. Whereas many educators enthusiastically embrace the use of Internet-based resources, little theoretical and empirical researches that demonstrate how to make use of such practices in a sound pedagogical way exist. This study investigated Internets' merits in learning process as perceived by University of Ilorin undergraduates. A sample of four hundred and twenty students (420) was randomly selected for the study. A researcher designed questionnaire was the instrument used to obtain relevant data from the respondents. The result indicated that internet improves quality of learning and its usage was therefore recommended.

Key Words: Internet, student-centered approach, undergraduates' perception, learning progress.

Introduction

The internet is a worldwide network of networks which is made up of several computers linked together around the world in such a way that information can be sent, retrieved and processed from any connected computer. Usually, such computers are found in schools, homes, offices and business organisations.

The rapid advancement of Internet technology is creating opportunities and challenges for teachers (schifter, 2000). Web-based enhanced instruction has become standard practice in many institutions of higher learning in developed nations today. Notonly for the purpose of instructional delivery, internet also serves as teaching and

learning tools. Bruce and Levin (1997) posit that the Internet can be viewed as providing the following three basic types of tools in the educational domain:

- Tools for inquiry
- Tools for communication
- Tools for construction

The Internet is a complex repository containing a huge maze of information from a variety of sources. It has become a prominent source of information for many people worldwide. The Internet wave has also hit the educational landscape in many big ways. The use of technologies such as the Internet as a teaching tool in schools is not the issue now since it is pervasively used. Rather, the issue is how to effectively employ such technologies and harness fully the new opportunities created by them to promote positive student learning experiences.

Today, students perform various tasks on the Internet both inside and outside their school environment. They make use of the Internet facilities to send and receive mails, chat online, send e-cards while some of them meaningfully employ the Internet services to perform their academic activities (Olawale, 2008).

Due to improved awareness of the importance of the internet usage, more cybercafé centres have been opened (For instance in Nigeria) to contain the high number of students searching for information on the net within and outside the school community.

Purpose of the Study

The investigation was specifically carried-out to:

1. Determine the relevance of the Internet to lecture rooms in University of Ilorin, Nigeria.
2. Determine the availability of the Internet in the University of Ilorin environment.
3. Determine the capability of internet services in aiding students' critical thinking.
4. Determine whether the Internet service is rich enough to improve learners' academic performance.
5. Determine the cost effectiveness of the internet usage for academic activities in University of Ilorin, Nigeria.

Research Questions

These questions were formed and answered in-line with the purpose of the study.

1. Is the internet applicable/relevant to the University of Ilorin's lecture rooms?
2. Is the internet service readily available for students' consumption in the University of Ilorin environment?
3. Does the internet usage help to sharpen learners' critical thinking ability?
4. Is the internet usage capable of improving learners' academic performance?
5. Is the internet usage cost effective for academic tasks in the University of Ilorin?

Methodology

Survey method was employed for the study. The entire University of Ilorin undergraduates formed the research population and simple random sampling procedure was employed to select four hundred and twenty samples (420).

A researcher-designed questionnaire was used to obtain needed information from the samples. The questionnaire was validated by two lecturers in the Department of Science Education, University of Ilorin. The administration of the questionnaire was done by the researcher and the analysis of data obtained was carried out using simple percentage.

Results

Research Question 1: Is the internet available in the University of Ilorin Lecture rooms?

Table 1 reveals that 340 out of 420 respondents representing 80.9% responded that the internet was available in University of Ilorin lecture rooms. This is in agreement with Ellsworth, (1994) that new knowledge is always available on the Internet which makes it useful for instructional purposes.

Opinion	Respondents	Percentage	Total
Strongly Agree	180	42.8%	
Agree	160	38.1%	80.9%
Disagree	40	9.5%	
Strongly Disagree	40	9.5%	19.1%
TOTAL	420	100%	

Research Questions 2: Does the Internet usage help to sharpen learners' critical thinking ability?

Table 2: Respondents' opinion on the Internet's ability in sharpening learners' critical thinking.

Opinion	**Respondents**	**Percentage**	**Total**
Strongly Agree	180	42.9%	95.3%
Agree	220	52.4%	
Disagree	-	-	
Strongly Disagree	20	4.7%	4.7%
Total	420	100%	

Table 2 reveals that 400 out of 420 respondents representing 95.3% responded that the Internet usage can help to sharpen critical thinking ability of learners.

Research Question 3: Is the Internet usage capable of improving learners' academic performance?

Table 3: Respondents perception of the Internet as improving students' academic performance

Opinion	Respondents	Percentage	Total
Strongly Agree	120	28.6%	59.6%
Agree	130	31.0%	
Disagree	100	23.8%	
Strongly Disagree	70	16.7%	40.5%
Total	420	100%	

Table 3 reveals that 250 out of 420 respondents representing about 60% respondent agreed that the Internet usage is capable of improving learners' academic performance. This is in agreement with Onasanya (2004) that Internet programmed instruction is capable of facilitating learning at all levels of education.

Research Question 4: Is the Internet usage cost effective for academic tasks in University of Ilorin?

Table 4: Cost effectiveness of the Internet usage

Opinion	Respondents	Percentage	Total
Strongly Agree	40	9.5	26.2%
Agree	70	16.7	
Disagree	120	28.6%	73.8%
Strongly Disagree	190	42.5%	
Total	420	100	

Table four reveals that only 110 out of 420 respondents representing 26.2% were of the opinions that internet usage for academic purpose within University of Ilorin is cost effective. In other words, internet usage is not financially tasking. That is to say that internet is readily available and cheap in the University of Ilorin environment.

Summary of Findings

The findings of the investigation are summarised thus:

1. The Internet is available and relevant to teaching and learning in the University of Ilorin.
2. The Internet technology is also capable of sharpening students' critical thinking ability.
3. Also, Internet usage is capable of improving learners' academic performance.
4. The use of the Internet for instructional activities is cost effective.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the Internet is a powerful tool to be used in the lecture room instructions. It is full of visual materials which serve as an aid to understanding and successful learning. As learners are involved in real communicative situations and have to make many decisions and choices for themselves, they take more responsibility for their own learning which leads to increase in learner's autonomy.

Millions of instructional resources i.e. virtual library, e-library, e-services and the rest exist on the Internet and such could be effectively utilised to supplement and complement lecture room instructions.

Researching on the Internet for homework, sharing ideas and answering questions using chat-rooms and textmessaging on mobile phones and exchanging ideas about school work by email are all available via the Internet. All these advantages make the Internet relevant and good learning tool in the classroom environment.

There is no gainsaying the belief therefore, that the use of the Internet in teaching and learning process helps to improve the quality of instructions and learners' academic performance if properly harnessed. However, the cost effectiveness of using such technology for instructional purposes is a major factor that will determine its usage in Nigerian Universities lecture rooms.

Recommendations

1. Adequate internet resources should be supplied to lecture rooms for qualitative learning to take place.
2. Since many students considere the innovation financially demanding, efforts should be made by school authorities and appropriate bodies to assist students procure needed Internet resources. This can take the form of direct supply or financial assistance to the students.
3. School authority should lay down rules and regulations that will ensure that the Internet facilities in lecture rooms are not abused but mainly used for academic activities.

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