E-GOVERNANCE: ILLUSION OR OPPORTUNITY FOR NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY'S ADMINISTRATION

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ABSTRACT: *The use of e-Governance in administration is fast becoming an indispensable tool for the success and development of both public and private organisations. Universities across the globe were not left behind in this development. Its ability to incorporate ICT made it indispensable as it promotes transparency, accountability, simplicity, fastness, and accuracy in the administration of universities and all other organisations. This paper examines Nigerian universities position in this development, opportunities it needs to tap as a result, impending challenges that must be surmounted and the prospects of e-Governance towards the development of university institutions in Nigeria. The paper uses documentary analysis to arrive at conclusion that the introduction of electronic governance in Nigerian universities is highly recommended and necessary in the achievement of transparency, accountability, simplicity, accuracy and reduce corruption. However, the university authorities and the government of Nigeria must address its infrastructural defects such as instability in the power sector and poor manpower expertise as well as embarking on efficient and effective training of staff and students concerned. The paper concludes that there is a lot of hope on the potential of e-governance to transform Nigeria's university administration.*

KEYWORDS: E-Governance, University, ICT, Administration

INTRODUCTION

e-Governance, the adoption of web-based technologies to deliver and conduct government services, has become a global trend in public administration (Gasco, 2003). e-Governance often comes with a promise to improve public administration in terms of efficiency, one of the primary values in public administration (Lee and Perry, 2002). The potential for electronic government to transform public administration has been heralded at various points throughout the past half-century. Even by the 1960s and the 1970s, as computers started to appear in government organisations, some public officials and commentators predicted that information technology would bring a revolution to public administration. As increasingly sophisticated information and communication technologies (ICTs) spread across all organisations in Nigeria today.

The role of ICT, like e-Governance, in teaching and learning is rapidly becoming one of the most important and widely discussed issues in contemporary world. This is why universities like all other institutions of learning have to incorporate in themselves the new dimensions. Most academic experts agreed that when properly used, ICT hold great promise to improve teaching and learning in addition to shaping workforce opportunities. Poole (1996) has indicated that "computer illiteracy is now regarded as the new illiteracy". This has actually gingered a new and strong desire to equip universities with computer facilities and qualified

personnel necessary to produce technologically proficient and efficient students in all countries of the world. There is no doubt that computer and internet related facilities can aid the instructional process and facilitate students' learning and administrative works of universities.

E-Governance: Meaning and Scope

The term 'e-Government' was born out of internet boom. However, it is not limited to internet use or publicly accessible systems for direct use by customers or citizens. e-Governance started as a practitioner field, basically convening practitioners struggling to meet the new challenges of the internet medium by implementing new systems creatively (Gore, 1993; Salem, 2003). e-Governance is a broader concept that encompasses all interactions and exchanges between the government and the governed and includes e-voting, e-democracy and e-representation. e-Government relates to the use of ICTs to transform and support services provided to the generality of people concerned. In other words, e-Government can be seen as the transformation of internal and external public sector relationships, through ICT in order to optimize service delivery and people's participation.

E-Government according to European Union is the use of Information and Communication Technologies in public administrations combined with organisational change and new skills in order to improve public services and democratic processes (EU, 2004). e-Governance is a process of reform in the way management's work, share information, engage people and deliver services to external and internal clients for the benefit of both the managers and the clients that they serve. e-Services such as e-Tax systems, e-Registration, e-Payment system, etc. are e-Government services and their adoption and their process of execution is referred to as e-Governance.

Although e-Government is often defined as "online government" or "Internet-based government", many non-Internet "electronic government" technologies such as the telephone, fax, short message service (SMS), multimedia messaging service (MMS), wireless networks, bluetooth, television and radio-based delivery of government services can be used in the context of e-Government (Anttiroiko & Malkia, 2006; Heeks, 2004).

Objective of e-Governance

The strategic objective of e-Governance is to support and simplify governance or administration for government, managers/administrators, people and businesses. The use of ICT can connect all parties and support processes and activities. Other objectives are to make administration more transparent, speedy and accountable, while addressing the society's needs and expectations through efficient public services and effective interaction between the people, businesses and government. Akinfenwa (2014) added that e-Governance objectives are to cut down on wasted paper and space by converting important documents and files to electronic files, increase efficiency of administrative processes, lessen the administrative burden faced by personnel, reduce labour, time and cost of repetitive task and improve productivity and performance.

University Administration and ICT

Various literature reviews reveal that Information administration is one part of overall administration of education institutions which mainly covers general and day-to-day operational activities. Hence, it could be concluded that Information administration cycle

includes three major components namely; Student Administration, Staff Administration, and General Administration. A theoretical model for Information administration is depicted below:
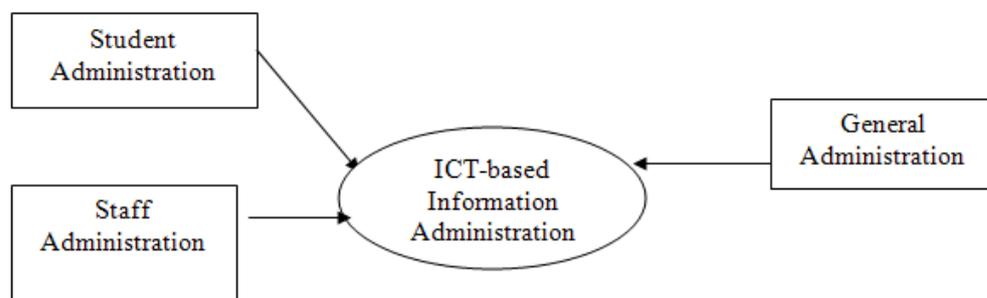
Source: R.Krishnaveni and J.Meenakumari, (2010)

Based on the literature reviewed, the three main functional areas of information administration that are of great significance for day-to-day management of higher education institutions were identified as follows:

- Student administration

- Staff administration

- General administration

Student administration involves various activities commencing from the admission process to learning activities till processing of results and performance analysis. The integration of ICT into this process enhances the overall admission activities of higher education institutions by making it more accessible to many (Obeng, 2004). The important items identified under this category includes admission enquiry by students, registration/enrolment using computers, course allotment, and availability of information like timetable/class schedule in electronic form and attendance monitoring/maintenance through e-media.

Staff administration includes recruitment and work, allotment of faculty and staff in the institution, their attendance and leave management, and performance appraisal. This also includes relevant communication to and from the institutions and among peers. Staff administration done through ICT helps in processing of voluminous records in a quick, meticulous, and impeccable manner thereby making data retrieval easier (Obeng, 2004).

In general, a good communication system should also be in place for the overall effectiveness of administration. ICT helps in providing a good communication system in higher education system (Magni 2009). ICT helps in providing timely information to all concerned. Communication could be for internal and external information acquisition and dissemination. It includes communication between the important stakeholders of the system such as sending e-circulars to students, faculty and staff.

Items Categories Generated for Information Administration

S/n	Construct	Content categories
1	Student Administration	• Usage of electronic media by students to apply for admissions • Usage of computers for student registration/ enrolment • Availability of timetable / class schedule in electronic form • Usage of computers for maintenance of attendance of students • Communication of academic details of students to their parents / guardians through e-media • Usage of e-media for notifications
2	Staff Administration	• Usage of computers for recruitment and work allotment of staff • Automation of attendance and leave management of staff members • Usage of electronic media for performance appraisal • Communication with staff using e-media • e-circulars from the institution regarding official matters
3	General Administration	• Usage of e-media for scheduling / allocation of halls for examinations • Dissemination of information in the institution through e-kiosks • Usage of e-media for the processing and display of results of students • Facility for students to make fee payments electronically

Source: R.Krishnaveni and J.Meenakumari (2010)

E-Governance in relation to Universities

Adekigbe (2005) defined university as a place of enlightenment, a place for exploring the frontiers, and an institution in which people through the process of socialization, are imbued with the ability, not just to discern things but also to apply theories to explain events, values, the knowledge of the natural order for the pursuits of the common good, and the individual well-being. University is also a place for training high-level manpower and for equipping the individuals to determine their level of performance of future roles.

It is a clear fact today that it is inevitable for university system to progress and compete without ICT facilities. Universities are in desperate need of e-systems in almost every activity. Staff and Students feel excited with internet facilities because it eases their activities. Administrators found communication and information retrieval easier, guaranteed and secured through ICT usage. It is due to such benefits that Universities across the globe have been struggling to implement e-Governance system.

Ehikhamenor (2002) stated that ICTs are changing the ways in which academics seek information, communicate with each other, conduct research and distribute research results. All these point to the fact that information and communication technologies are very important for effective teaching, learning and research activities in an academic environment. As A. Gunasekaran, Ronald D.Mcneil and Dennis Shaul (2002) suggested that the emergence of digital technologies has increased the interest in the computerized delivery of higher education, which led to e-learning through electronic mail, internet, World Wide Web and multimedia.

It can be seen today that academicians must adopt ICT directly or indirectly. Lecturers of 21st century encourage students to use internet for assignments and other information retrieval. These categories of people feel displeased whenever internet seems not good in the university environment. ICTs are increasingly becoming one of the strategic and critical resources for a university after financial and human resources. Rapid developments of ICTs have led to many changes in the responsibilities of the academics in tertiary institutions.

The state of universities in Nigeria seems to be poor. This may be partly as a result of the use of obsolete equipment in data collection, processing, storage, and retrieval. The consequences of this may include delay in information dissemination, mistakes in computations, inadequate communication, etc. The prevalent use of obsolete equipment, such as drawer, cabinet, notice board, and stationeries for staff and students' services has made universities in Nigeria to lag behind in the world university ranking. This is evident from the latest world universities ranking of 2014-15 in which no university in Nigeria was ranked among the 400 universities in the world as provided by Times Higher Education – (http:// www. timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2015/world-ranking#). Therefore, it is expected that if ICT will be used, it will help meet the challenges of modern-day university administration. Application of ICT in university will enhance administrative work, reduce occupational stress, and improve students' academic performance. The prominent role of ICT could be seen in advancing knowledge and skills necessary for effective functioning in the modern world. There is therefore the need to integrate ICT in universities for effective management.

E-Governance in Nigerian Universities

e-Administration and e-Management have been given much attention in recent policy debates of NUC, in particular in the context of the so-called *Intel-Institutions* with the twin introduction of Universities Program Accreditation Portal (UPAP) and Nigerian University System Management Portal (NUSMAP). Its aim is to develop an e-management model that would specify the benefits and the objectives for the user's community, as to (Ogbonna *et al,* 2011);

- address the challenges of delivery and success of the model,

- highlights the special futuristic concerns of Universities and

- map out policies that guide implementations.

- foster a better University management and standards,

- offer better Institutions (e-) services,

- enhance internal database creation and

- improve decisions and policy-making from a participatory perspective.

Research on e-Administration is now on the increase because of the mandate by the NUC that Universities should be viewed and ranked through the level of the functionality of its website, network structure and its associated academic portal. Most of these studies (Ogbonna, 2011; Berra, 2003; Chadwick and May, 2003; and Fountain, 2001) address many challenging aspects of this model such as information intelligibility, data sourcing and accessibility, database

security, data interoperability, learning and adaptation through virtual platforms, adoption of expert systems (Xs), and awareness creation for an e-Institution.

Many Nigerian university libraries are striving to be fully automated while some are still in the process of computerization. Oduwole et al. (2003) sought to know the electronic resources provided by Nigerian libraries. When asked what electronic resources they provide, Nigerian university libraries identified Online Public Access Catalog, CD-Rom databases, electronic mail (e-mail) and Internet browsing. A study by Nwezeh (2010) found that students constitute the major category of users of electronic services in the university libraries surveyed. In a survey of cyber cafes which are facilities established in the university environment to aid learning and research, Adomi et al. (2003), reported that 77.8% of the customers/users cafes were students.

At present, Ogbonna (2011) stated that 78% of Nigerian Universities are hoisted on the web with a functional on-line presence for most basic online services such as registration of student's personal data profile, course registration, payment of various levels of fees, and examination manager which are fully interactive, running on a relational database. It is expected that all these services will generate high benefits for the user communities and these will enhance the quality and efficiency of university administration at all levels. Olaniyi (2006) was of the view that most of the institutions of higher learning in Nigeria have started building their ICT centre but they focus mainly on internet facilities without considering other components that make up ICT Centre.

Global Competitiveness of Nigerian Universities

Nigerian Universities have no doubt produced world award winners in the Arts and Sciences, international civil servants, respected researchers and accomplished businessmen and women. However, most Universities in Nigeria today are in pathetic and deplorable state. There are of course, some good ones, but if you look hard enough, you will find graduates that lacked the right computer skills needed to perform the task required in their chosen field making it difficult for them to get employment or cope with modern challenges.

In the recent African Universities ranking of first 100 universities, only 4 Nigerian universities are mentioned – University of Lagos (31st), Obafemi Awolowo University (35th), University of Ilorin (37th) and University of Ibadan (46th), while South Africa produces the first 4 leading universities (This Day Live: 29th June, 2015). Recently, the Times Higher Universities Ranking of 2014-15 depicts that no Nigerian University is featured in the Top 400 universities of the world, yet there are universities from India, China, Morocco, Hong Kong, Chile, Taiwan and South Africa among other developing countries. (http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2015/world-ranking#). Furthermore, the QS Top Universities Rankings depicts that South African Universities are topping the African continent, followed by Egyptian universities, then universities from countries like Morocco, Uganda, Tanzania, Ghana and Kenya (http://www.topuniversities.com/where-to-study/region/africa/guide).

Application of e-Governance in University Administration

Universities can use electronic governance in managing records, tests/examinations, results and managing human and financial resources and management of various assets. e-Governance if effectively and efficiently implemented in the university administration with proper

maintenance and expertise, as well as proper supervision and usage, can transform both academic and administrative pursuits. It can be implemented through the following ways:

1. **e-Learning/e-Education**: e-Education or e-Learning is electronic mode of knowledge sharing and transmission, which may not necessarily involve physical contact between teacher and student. The role of ICT's e-Governance in teaching and learning is more pronounced in institutions which have adopted full ICT services. Various services and products such as course outlines, digitally recorded materials, discussions, assignments, lecture notes, live lectures for later viewing and re-viewing, link to specific websites, online tutorials, supplementary readings and virtual office hours for teacher student consultations.

2. **e-Participation**: e-Government here offers expanded opportunities for strengthening relationships between management/administrators and staff/students for them to become part of decisions. This is referred to as *e–Participation*. e-Government can establish new electronic mechanisms through which students and other target beneficiaries can comment in the development of policy, and provide input and feedback related to provision of services by a particular university authority.

3. **e-Procurement:** e-Procurement is another new paradigm taking lead into financial administration as a result of development in information technology. It can be said to be the online purchases and payment of goods and services in virtual market by a particular university. Its successful adoption will lead to potential benefits, which include the reduction of transaction costs, operational efficiencies and a better foundation for decision making.

4. **Data Management:** Administrators are custodians of data or records of activities, finance, and so on. Without compromise or bias, a computer is viable and versatile enough to handle all these records with an advantage of prompt access, correction, and easy manipulation. There is also potentials and relative, secrecy of information.

5. **Data Analysis:** Analysis and manipulation of data become virtually daily administrative practices. ICT have offered all it takes to get these done with appreciable ease and convenience. For instance, using Microsoft Excel.

6. **Word Processing:** Computer offers immensurable cost relief services to administrators in the aspect of word processing. Word processing programmes enable administrators to compose, address, edit and produce written copy in a wide variety of formats.

7. **Information Communication:** In universities, departments or sections can be connected together through computer and telephone networking system. This arrangement enhances quick and continuous interactions and monitoring of activities in all units within the system. For instance, using e-mail and telephone lines.

8. **Better access to information**: ICT would make available timely and reliable information on various aspects of administration easily. For instance, using a central website where many if not all the relevant information of the university will be accessed.

9. **Simplicity, efficiency and accountability**: Application of ICT to universities administration would lead to simplification of complicated processes, weeding out of redundant processes, simplification in structures and changes in statutes and regulations.

The end result would be simplification of the functioning of administration, enhanced decision-making abilities and increased efficiency in the university administration.

Major constraints to e-Government implementation in Nigerian Universities

Although the implementation of e-government has begun in Nigerian universities, e-government activity in Nigeria is still low. There are profuse challenges impeding full implementation of e-Government in Nigerian Universities. Some of such barriers are:

1) Low ICT literacy rate: While there is much hype about ICT among the younger generation, the overall professionalism about ICTs among the staff and students is low, especially as new things always emerge in this IT world. Personal computers are still regarded as an elitist commodity. In fact, staff and students in some of Nigerian universities still prefer access to documents and circulars manually because of ignorance and under-civilization especially in the northern part of the country. Low ICT literacy rate is a serious impediment for the adoption of e-Government in Nigerian universities as it hampers both the appreciation and appropriation of e-Government services.

2) Lack of necessary regulatory framework: The IT regulatory framework in some Nigerian universities has not yet been restructured to fully accommodate e-government. Within some universities for instance, an e-mail has no official value and digital signature are not accepted. Again, there are no serious laws on electronic governance. Before seeking ICT solutions to problems of governance, appropriate policy design must be developed and set in place, in order to facilitate seamless information exchanges in each of the universities.

3) Poor ICT infrastructure: The ICT infrastructure requirement for e-Government takeoff in Nigerian universities are still rudimentary. There are no available computers, internet facilities, computer laboratories, among others. Despite the boom of computer and GSM services, which has increase accessibility and provided less demanding interfaces for people to connect to government provided services, there are still higher number of staff and student lagging behind who are unable to obtain enough due to poverty and illiteracy. Moreover, the cost of internet usage remains too high for a majority of people. Therefore, not only the infrastructures will be standardized, but also the cost of accessing them.

4) Corruption: Corruption has had negative effect on many projects in Nigerian universities and ICT is no exception. Embezzlement or siphoning of funds allocated for projects is a common feature among university administrators.

5) Lack of Committed Leadership: The paucity of committed leadership with the capacity to articulate broad e-government vision and also galvanize the necessary resources needed to implement e-government projects and programmes in Nigerian universities. The role of committed leadership in e-government adoption and implementation can never be overemphasized.

6) Epileptic Power supply: Nigeria is a nation of more than 160 million people, a home to one-quarter of Africa's population but its leaders failed to provide 4000 megawatts of electricity to this populous nation (Cheri, 2013). In Nigeria power outages are recurrent and the power sector operates far below its capacity. With very few Nigerians having

access to electricity, and since there are yet no computers or ICT device that currently runs without electricity, it becomes very difficult for e-Government in Nigeria and Nigerian universities.

7) Financial implications: Installing ICT based e-governance requires huge capital. Fund is required to train staff and to release them from normal duties for training. Fund is again required to be able to pay computer teachers. Fund is also required to execute projects, such as establishing e-learning centers, organising workshops, seminars, etc.

CONCLUSION

From the findings, it is clear that institutionalizing ICT infrastructures for efficient and effective e-Governance is necessary in the development of any Nigerian University. However, the constraints in the path must be surmounted. Nigerian universities not only need the infrastructure available, but also the skills to use the ICT gadgets. It is evident from the literature that unless the issue of ICT competency is addressed, it can itself be a barrier to progress. Therefore, it can be concluded that the introduction and maintenance of e-Governance leads to the transformation of university administration.

RECOMMENDATION

Universities should establish ICT related courses and centres in their universities. Universities should also declare the use of ICT services as compulsory on every staff and student while establishing training and guiding centres. Enabling environment for attracting the right level of investments should also be ensured so as to attract investors. Universities should also develop their central websites while linking all the sections, units and the departments for easy access and communication in the institution.

Government should be encouraged to review the existing educational curriculum to include ICT education at all levels. Government should ensure the establishment of ICT departments and units at the Federal, State and Local government ministries, departments and agencies. The citizen's level of literacy is also an area where government is expected to play a vital role through skill acquisition and voluntary training from the elementary level.

Awareness campaign and sensitizations are necessary steps in developing ICT infrastructure and usage in Nigerian Universities. Organisation of seminars, conferences and workshops for top management and other critical staff within the universities and with other stakeholders are necessary in ICT infrastructure development. This should be aimed at raising the level of awareness of the infrastructural challenges, to discuss the users need and various infrastructure options, to promote and encourage multi-stakeholder approaches, to solicit feedback from management and staff.

Strong leadership and vision is required if at all e-Governance will be established. It also requires a comprehensive strategy that is not only benchmarked on global best practice but also sensitive to existing political and economic realities. Therefore, university authorities and other relevant bodies must take a positive position towards realizing this and the factors which influence it should also be put into consideration.

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