

e-Learning Platforms for Community Development: A Tool for Prospective Students

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Abstract: Community development is an academic discipline as well as a practice-based profession that promotes sustainable development, participative democracy, equality and rights. e-Learning platforms are media that allow the use of a computer-based educational tool or system in learning anywhere and at any time. This study focused on e-Learning platforms that can facilitate the study of community development as an academic discipline and practice-based profession. It is worth noting that no meaningful progress can be made today in solving human problems without using the internet and online platforms. Therefore, the importance of e-Learning platforms in community development cannot be overemphasized. Several e-Learning platforms for the study of community development include Teachable, WizIQ, Ruzuku, Educadium, Thinkific, Academy of Mine, CourseCraft and Skillshare. These tools are relevant for both educators and prospective students interested in community development specialty.

Key words: e-Learning, community development, technology, prospective students, rights, WizIQ

INTRODUCTION

e-Learning platforms are media that allow the use of a computer-based educational tool or system in learning anywhere and at any time. Recently, e-Learning is mostly accessed through the internet, though in the past it was accessed using a combination of computer-based methods like CD-ROM. Technology has improved, so much that, the geographical gap is reduced due to the use of tools that gives you the same feeling as the classroom would. e-Learning can facilitate the sharing of necessary learning materials for the study of community development in all kinds of formats such as slideshows, videos, PDFs and word documents. There are many other options available to students such as conducting webinars or live online classes and message forums and communicating with professors via. chat (Anonymous, 2014). To understand how to tackle the growing challenges of community development, there is a need to understand communities themselves by studying them. By studying communities, researchers recommended the use of integrated enterprises as a tool for economic empowerment in coastal communities (Darma *et al.*, 2018). Also, students seem to have varying levels of acceptance of e-Learning ranging from low to high acceptance

(Tawil *et al.*, 2012). Thus, providing useful information about e-Learning can affect how much prospective students in community development would be willing to study the course using the e-Learning platform.

e-Learning platforms are important for the study of community development course. According to Aliway and Satar (2018), e-Learning is significant in developing nations to help chart new directions in the educational sector. Due to the barriers to adoption of e-Learning in developing nations of the world as pointed out by previous studies (Ahmed *et al.*, 2016), this study was deemed necessary to gather and review materials exploring e-Learning platforms that can be used to facilitate the study of community development as an academic discipline and practice-based profession by prospective students in Nigeria. This study promotes an awareness of the various e-Learning platforms among prospective students who are interested in community development specialty but are constrained to do so, due to work or time factors among others. Moreover, as communities are faced with the problems related to development having experts who understand how best to engage and transform the communities can help them achieve their developmental goals. Therefore, this study focused on exploring how e-Learning platforms can be

used to facilitate the study of community development as an academic discipline and practice-based profession. The aim is to make the information in this study a relevant tool for prospective students of community development discipline.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study utilizes a literature review approach to offer a perspective on some e-Learning platforms for the study of community development. This approach provides materials which can serve as a tool for prospective students in community development discipline. Institutional websites, journals and websites for e-Learning programmes were explored to gather information for this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In recent time, e-Learning is seen as an educational technique which has influential force in tertiary education and this is because the convergence of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) offers powerful tools to introduce novel educational technologies and the utilization of online applications (Tawil *et al.*, 2012). The e-Learning platform can benefit different category of students including those with special needs who might be interested in studying community development.

Hashim *et al.* (2018) observed that web-based education for the deaf and hearing impaired students has the highest overall rank according to studies related to e-Learning models. Our literature search further revealed that there are several institutions that offer university education programmes in community development which prospective students can enrol in. Table 1 showing some institutions that offer programmes in community development.

Table 1 list of some institutions that enrol students to study community development using e-Learning system. According to Qwaider (2017), e-Learning environments are dependent on a series of interactive services. Therefore, Qwaider proposed a rule-based e-Learning Portal D2L Recommender System (PEPRS) for supporting learners to access educational materials and courses that suit their requirements. Sutopo and Zulhawati (2018) conducted a study to ascertain a suitable model of e-Learning design as academic learning material. These researchers tested web display, quality of instructional media, expediency, classroom interaction and knowledge adsorption and found a significant relationship among the variables and also demonstrated a significant result towards increased knowledge adsorption. In a recent study, Raveenthiran and Ismail (2018) examined the association between learner motivation and perceptions of an e-Learning platform among undergraduate students in a university in

Table 1: Some institutions that offer programmes in community development

Institutions	Course	Programme	Duration
University of the Philippines Los Banos	Community development	M.Sc	2 years
		Ph.D	-
University of the Philippines Visayas Western Mindanao State University Misamis University University of Eastern Philippines	Community development	BA	4 years
		B.Sc	4 years
		B.Sc	4 years
		B.Sc	4 years
De La Salle University Dasmariñas Mindanao State University-Main Campus	Community development	M.Sc	2 years
		Ph.D	-
		AB	4 years
University of the Philippines Diliman	Community development	M.Sc	4 years
		Ph.D	2 years
		B.Sc	4 years
		Diploma	1 years
		MA	2 years
		M.Sc	2 years
Western Mindanao State University-Ipil Campus University of Southern Mindanao Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University-North University of Southeastern Philippines-MintalCampus Benguet State University-Open University Mindanao State University-Maguindanao Pangasinan State University in Santa Maria University of Glasgow	Community development	B.Sc	4 years
		B.Sc	4 years
		M.Sc	2 years
		B.Sc	4 years
		M.Sc	2 years
		B.Sc	4 years
		B.Sc	4 years
		B.Sc	4 years
		BA	4 years
		M.Sc	1 year
University of Aberdeen Queen’s University Belfast Leeds Beckett University	Community development	PGDip	9 months
		BMus	4 years
		M.Sc	1 year
Leeds Beckett University	Community development	BA (Hons)	3 years
		MA	18 months

Malaysia via. the university's e-Learning platform (PutraBLAST). The researchers found that respondents were moderately motivated when using PutraBLAST were also satisfied with the e-Learning environment using PutraBLAST and there was a moderate positive relationship between motivation and perceptions of the e-Learning platform. Furthermore, our literature search identified a list of e-Learning platforms for an online programme in community development as follows.

Teachable: Teachable is a course website that can be used to add video, image, text, audio, PDF files easily create a quiz with a native feature to reinforce learning (Teachable, 2019).

WizIQ: WizIQ is an easy way to teach and train online. It's a cloud-based learning delivery platform with a suite of integrated features including course management, virtual classroom, video streaming, content authoring, insights and analytics, tests and assessments and mobile learning.

Ruzuku: Ruzuku is a platform that allows you not just to create a good course platform but avails you the opportunity to become a part of a team that delights in building and designing good course platforms that focuses on promoting your course, creating inspiring content and engaging your students.

Educadium: Educadium is an online learning platform aimed at assisting organizations and individuals of different capacities to create, manage and gain from online teaching and training via. affordable learning management tools which are simple to handle and operate (Educadium, 2018).

LearnWorlds: LearnWorlds is a premium learning platform that allows you as a teacher to create and sell online courses on your own website all-in-one enabling learners to have great learning experiences. The website can be created with almost no design or development skill needed (LW., 2019).

Thinkific: Thinkific is an online learning platform that allows education entrepreneurs to create, market and sell online courses under one brand name with <90% of subscriber's questions being answered in <5 h while engaging a large customer base that calls for a community of like-minded individuals. Thinkific as an online community development tool currently has over 36,000 course creators, 16 million students enrolled and more than 200 million dollars generated, so far.

Academy of Mine: Academy of Mine is an all in one e-Learning platform designed for all devices with many great features such as integrated e-Commerce, customer analytics and reporting, onboard other organizations, customizable and scalable Learning Management System (LMS) in-person and virtual courses and an all-inclusive course builder (AM., 2019).

CourseCraft: CourseCraft is an e-Learning platform, specially, designed for beginners while considering experts alike as no technical know-how or design experience is needed in creating a good online course. With CourseCraft, all activities such as taking payments, tracking signups, managing quizzes and scheduling lessons and surveys can all be done from a central dashboard (CC., 2019).

Skillshare: Skillshare is an e-Learning platform that helps the user to create great projects worthy of sharing as it also affords the opportunity to collaborate and shear with a dynamic community of over 7 million creators. Skillshare also grants access to up to date styles and strategies every creator must have (Skillshare, 2019).

Furthermore, community development is seen as an academic discipline as well as a practice-based profession that promotes sustainable development, participative democracy, equality, rights, through the organization, social justice and economic opportunity, empowerment and education of people within their communities (NACDEP., 2014). Community development approaches are recognized internationally. Community development methods and approaches have been acknowledged as significant for local, social, economic, cultural, environmental and political development by such organizations as the UN, WHO, OECD, World Bank, Council of Europe and EU (Mathie and Cunningham, 2010).

Community development practitioners are hitherto engaged in a variety of activities including economic development, housing, job training and others (Brophy and Shabecoff, 2001). To a large extent, the field has been shaped by community practice rather than guided by theory. Many of the institutional innovations that have become basic tools such as community land trusts and community development financial institutions were developed through local experiments. Methods of community organizing and facilitation have evolved as well through practice and social learning. This is not to suggest that research has not made important contributions to community development. Several examples illustrate this link. There has been a plethora of recent research on the concept of social capital. This

concept focuses on the role of social networks and relationships in generating or inhibiting collective action. Although, the research has been widely debated, the empirical work on this topic has some immediate implications for community development. Strategies for establishing social ties across groups within the community and with outside organizations and institutions are essential to the development process. Another example is the research on workforce development which documents the role that community-based organizations can play in linking employers, workers and training institutions (Melendez, 2004). Workforce development networks can be structured, so as to provide employers with incentives to invest in training of low-wage workers (Green, 2007). Although, the context for community development varies widely, most practitioners would prefer to base their activities on research-based ideas and concepts. In their book, "Introduction to community development," Robinson and Green brought these pieces (theory and practice) together in an integrative fashion that summarizes the current state of the field. The goal is to more fully integrate the insights from research and practice to advance both (Robinson and Green, 2011).

New communication technology has made available new forms of social interaction, heading to the outcome of new social problems. This conversely has reformed the forms of human relationships and has improved, among other things, better teaching methods fostering interactive participation and collaborative learning (Arbaugh and Benbunan, 2007; Harasim, 2000; Lipponen *et al.*, 2003; Macdonald, 2003; Rovai, 2000; Weller *et al.*, 2005). In comparison to traditional communication between one and many, this avails students the chance to partly self-direct their own learning process, setting learning goals and choosing the content. Obtaining teaching materials, sharing texts, participating in forums and learning the main tools of participatory planning in a virtual community are among the tools presented by e-Learning platforms necessary for the study of community development. In a virtual community, all the interactive processes mediated by the technological environment are characterized by practices that, compared to face-to-face interaction are entirely novel. The community learns to communicate through a new type of language and members learn to co-construct work projects and knowledge, thereby developing and changing in accordance with community needs (Talamo *et al.*, 2001). Among the other aspects to be emphasized is the fact that online learning is characterized by forms of cooperation and collaboration between members. Computer Supported Collaborative Learning

(CSCL) based on cooperative learner-centred pedagogic models, encourages students of the master's degree program to work together on learning tasks (Benigno and Trentin, 2000; Slavin, 1996).

e-Learning platforms in education are engendered to facilitate the fight in eradicating mass illiteracy as well as promote easy access to materials required to fast track research in emerging fields of study. Unfortunately, many students and even teachers are yet not aware of these tools and the potentials it holds for them, if properly harnessed. To this end, many still fall victims of the same problems these tools are meant to solve such as the issue of proximity, time and resources. On one hand, Arcidiacono *et al.* (2009) contends that teachers must have knowledge of the tools that online learning offers. They must be computer literate and therefore, must know how to first, choose the learning tool best suited to their aims through download, shared forum, individual and shared training and lots more, etc. Secondly, pre-plan tasks, completion time and evaluation. Thirdly and finally, monitor the completion of work to understand the efficiency and efficacy of the e-Learning learning platforms (Arcidiacono *et al.*, 2009). On the other hand, students must understand the importance of these tools and make conscious efforts toward actualizing them, so as to be carried along with current trends and methods in this dynamic knowledge-driven era. Some of the benefits e-Learning platforms offer students offering community development will include:

Online learning accommodates learner's needs: The online method of learning is best suited for every learner. This digital revolution has led to remarkable changes in how the content is accessed, consumed, discussed and shared. Online educational courses through e-Learning platforms can be taken up by office goers and housewives too at the time that suits them. Depending on their availability and comfort, many people choose to learn at weekends or evenings.

Lectures can be taken any number of times: Unlike, classroom teaching with online learning, you can access the content an unlimited number of times. This is especially, required at the time of revision when preparing for an exam. In the traditional form of learning, if you cannot attend the lecture, then you have to prepare for that topic on your own. In e-Learning, you can attend the lectures whenever you want with ease.

Offers access to updated content: A prime benefit of learning online is that it makes sure that you are in synchronization with modern learners. This enables the learner to access updated content whenever they want it.

Quick delivery of lessons: e-Learning is a way to provide quick delivery of lessons. As compared to traditional classroom teaching method, this mode has relatively quick delivery cycles. This indicates that the time required to learn is reduced to 25-60% of what is required in traditional learning. There are some reasons why learning time is reduced by e-Learning. Lessons start quickly and also wrapped up in a single learning session. This enables training programs to easily roll out within a few weeks or sometimes even days. Learners can define their own speed of learning instead of following the speed of the whole group. Saves time as a student does not need to travel to the training venue. You can learn at the comfort of your own place. Students can choose to study specific and relevant areas of the learning material without focusing on each and every area. For example, they can skip certain areas they do not want to learn.

Scalability: e-Learning helps in creating and communicating new training, policies, concepts and ideas and e-Learning is a very quick way of learning.

Consistency: e-Learning enables educators to get a higher degree of coverage to communicate the message in a consistent way for their target audience. This ensures that all learners receive the same type of training with this learning mode.

Reduced costs: e-Learning is cost-effective as compared to traditional forms of learning. The reason for this price reduction is because learning through this mode happens quickly and easily. A lot of training time is reduced with respect to trainers, travel, course materials and accommodation. This cost-effectiveness also helps in enhancing the profitability of an organization. Also, when you are studying at your own place, you are relieved from paying for travel expenses (e.g., accommodation) when training happens in another city/state and/or external learning materials.

Effectiveness: e-Learning has a positive influence on an organization's profitability. It makes it easy to grasp the content and digest it. It results in improved scores on certifications, tests or other types of evaluation. It results in a higher number of students who achieve 'pass' or mastery level. Enhanced ability to learn and implement the new processes or knowledge at the workplace. It helps in retaining information for a longer time.

Less impact on environment: e-Learning platforms provide us with a less energy-intensive system of operation in teaching, learning g and research activities,

since, it deals less with papers. This means that e-Learning is an eco-friendly system as fewer trees are felled for paper and energy sack.

Despite the above stated benefits, several problems affect the standard and quality of e-Learning system in some developing nations. Some of these problems include limited classrooms and laboratories, lack of adequate training for faculty members and limited financial resources (Al-Mafriji *et al.*, 2018). According to Qwaider (2017) in order to overcome potential challenges in the use of e-Learning platforms, there is a need to provide a quick and easy means for communicating with site designers, training of teachers on how to use e-Learning and the provision of induction guide to staff members and the need to reduce administrative burdens are assigned to faculty members. Al-Mafriji *et al.* (2018), suggested that attention should be paid to the specific goals of the education system and the perspective of learners and teachers in ascertaining quality in an e-Learning system.

CONCLUSION

This study showed that community development is an academic discipline as well as a practice-based profession that can promote sustainable development, participative democracy, equality and rights. It further, showed that e-Learning platforms are media that allow the use of a computer-based educational tool or system in learning anywhere and at any time. The study focused on e-Learning platforms that can facilitate the study of community development as an academic discipline and practice-based profession. No meaningful progress can be made today in solving human problems without the internet and online platforms, hence, the importance of e-Learning platforms in community development cannot be overemphasized. Several e-Learning platforms for the study of community development include Teachable, WizIQ, Ruzuku, Educadium, Thinkific, Academy of Mine, CourseCraft and Skillshare. These online learning tools are relevant for both educators and prospective students interested in the community development specialty.

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