Revolutionizing Tertiary Education: Implementation of a Smart Departmental Website for Enhanced Learning and Management

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Abstract:
In response to the evolving landscape of education, this paper introduces a transformative initiative – the implementation of a Smart Departmental Website within tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This innovative platform integrates a Learning Management System (LMS) and administrative functionalities to streamline academic processes and enhance the educational experience for students, faculty, and administrative staff. Through a comprehensive review of the features and benefits of the Smart Departmental Website, this paper aims to elucidate its potential to revolutionize tertiary education in Nigeria and globally.

Keywords: Smart Departmental Website, Tertiary Education, Learning Management System, Administrative Efficiency, Educational Technology

Introduction:

The digital revolution has brought about profound changes in the way we learn and manage academic resources. In light of these advancements, there is a pressing need for tertiary institutions to embrace innovative solutions that cater to the diverse needs of stakeholders. This paper presents a pioneering initiative – the deployment of a Smart Departmental Website – designed to revolutionize the educational experience by integrating cutting-edge technology into academic and administrative processes.

Literature Review:

The digitalization of educational resources has become increasingly prevalent in tertiary education, with various initiatives aimed at enhancing access to learning materials and improving administrative processes (Garrison, 2017). In the context of Nigerian universities, challenges such as high printing costs and currency devaluation have exacerbated the difficulties faced by students in accessing affordable educational materials (Adegbite, 2018; Okoro & Ogunleye, 2020). Traditional methods of book sales through university bookshops have become less viable, prompting the exploration of alternative approaches to ebook distribution and management (Salami & Akinyemi, 2017). Digital textbooks have emerged as a potential solution to address the accessibility issues faced by students, offering benefits such as affordability, portability, and interactivity (Ibrahim & Abdullahi, 2019). By leveraging technology, digital textbooks can be accessed anytime, anywhere, providing students with greater flexibility in their learning (Yusuf, 2019). However, the adoption of digital textbooks in Nigerian universities has been hindered by factors such as lack of awareness and infrastructure (Ibrahim & Abdullahi, 2019).

The accreditation of programmes in tertiary institutions by regulatory bodies like the Nigerian University Commission (NUC), National Board for Technical Education and Council for the Regulation of Engineering in Nigeria (COREN), is usually a periodic process which is usually rigorous and complex due to fact that academic resources in these institutions are documented mostly using analogue methods. NBTE in its recent directive to polytechnics in Nigeria, recommended the digitalization of technical education in Nigeria. With a commitment to ensuring the country's technical education system remains globally competitive, NBTE is embracing digital

tools and platforms. This is to revolutionize various aspects of its operations and ensure seamless accreditation more transparently. The digitalization process encompasses a range of strategic objectives, including digitizing academic records, automating accreditation processes, and implementing e-learning platforms with a Learning Management System (LMS) that can be monitored. Prof. Bugaje emphasizes that these measures are essential for keeping pace with the rapidly evolving demands of the modern world, providing students with cutting-edge education, and equipping them with the skills necessary to thrive in a digital era. One of the key components of the digitalization initiative is the development of a user-friendly online portal that will serve as a centralized hub for students, educators, and administrative staff. This portal will facilitate seamless communication, access to academic resources, and the efficient management of educational records (Vanguard, 2024).

The implementation of a Smart Departmental Website offers a promising solution to enhance access to educational materials and streamline administrative processes in Nigerian universities (Salami & Akinyemi, 2017). By integrating a Learning Management System (LMS) and administrative functionalities, the Smart Departmental Website provides students, faculty, and administrative staff with a centralized platform for accessing learning materials, submitting assignments, and managing academic records (Garrison, 2017). Additionally, the website's built-in security features prevent unauthorized sharing and downloading of educational materials, safeguarding the intellectual property of authors and publishers (Adegbite, 2018).

While the Smart Departmental Website represents a significant step towards modernizing tertiary education in Nigeria, further research is needed to assess its long-term impact and scalability (Ibrahim & Abdullahi, 2019). Additionally, efforts to raise awareness and provide training on the use of digital learning platforms are crucial to ensuring successful adoption and integration within university settings (Yusuf, 2019).

Methodology

Development of the Departmental Smart Website

Under this section, we introduce the process behind the development of a sample departmental smart website, which serves multiple vital functions including practical report submission, uploading past thesis works, facilitating learning, and supporting departmental accreditation. This robust and user-friendly platform was developed using WordPress and is hosted on Bluehost. Other hosting companies include: Hostgator, Godaddy, Namecheap and DomainKing. Alternative website content management systems (CMS) include Joomla, Bing, and Wix.

Step-by-Step Development Process

Choosing the Hosting Platform

Bluehost was selected for its reliability, excellent customer service, and compatibility with WordPress. Bluehost offers seamless integration with WordPress, providing a straightforward setup process, which made it an ideal choice for hosting our website.

Setting Up WordPress

i. **Installation:** Using Bluehost's one-click WordPress installation, I quickly set up the content management system (CMS). This allowed the us to focus more on customizing the site rather than dealing with technicalities.

ii. **Configuration:** After installation, we configured basic settings, including site title, tagline, and permalink structure to enhance SEO and usability.

i. Design and Theme Selection

i.) Theme Selection: we chose a professional and responsive theme was selected that is customizable and aligns with our departmental branding. The theme ensures that the website is accessible on various devices, providing a seamless user experience.

ii.) Customization: Using the WordPress Customizer, we tailored the theme to meet our specific needs. This involved adjusting the color scheme, fonts, layout options, and incorporating the department's logo.

Adding Essential Plugins

i.) **Form Plugins:** To facilitate practical report submission, we installed a form plugin like WPForms. This plugin allows students to upload their reports directly on the site, ensuring a streamlined submission process.

ii.) **Document Management:** For uploading and organizing past thesis works, we used a document management plugin such as WP Document Revisions. This plugin provides a user-friendly interface for both uploading and accessing documents.

iii.) **Learning Management System (LMS):** To support learning, we integrated an LMS plugin like LearnDash. This allows for the creation and management of courses, quizzes, and educational content directly on the website.

iv.) **SEO and Security:** Ensuring the website's security and visibility, we installed plugins like Yoast SEO and Wordfence Security. These plugins help optimize content for search engines and protect the site from potential threats.

Content Creation and Organization:

Pages and Structure: we structured the website to include key sections such as Home, Report Submission, Past Thesis Works, Learning Resources, and Accreditation. Each page was designed to be intuitive and easy to navigate.

Uploading Content: we began by uploading existing departmental resources, past theses, and setting up the LMS with initial courses and materials. This provided a solid foundation for the website's educational offerings.

Testing and Launch:

Testing: Before going live, we conducted thorough testing to ensure all functionalities worked correctly. This included testing form submissions, document uploads, course accessibility, and overall site responsiveness.

Launch: After confirming everything was in place and functioning as expected, we launched the website. Bluehost's reliable hosting services ensured a smooth launch without any downtime.

Ongoing Maintenance and Updates:

Regular Updates: we established a routine for regular updates and maintenance, including updating WordPress core, themes, and plugins to keep the site secure and up-to-date.

User Feedback: we continuously gather feedback from users to make necessary improvements and enhancements to the website.

Results

Key Features of the Departmental Smart Website

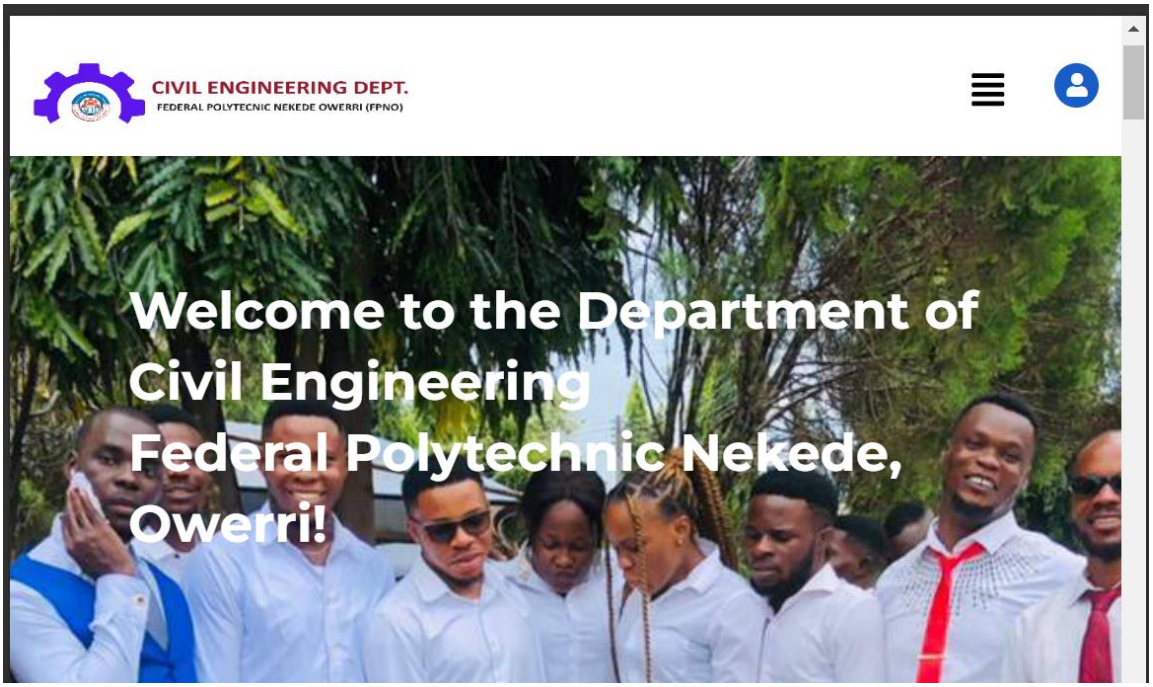


Figure 4.1: Screenshot of the Smart Departmental Website in a mobile view

i.) **Practical Report Submission:** Streamlined process for students to submit reports online.

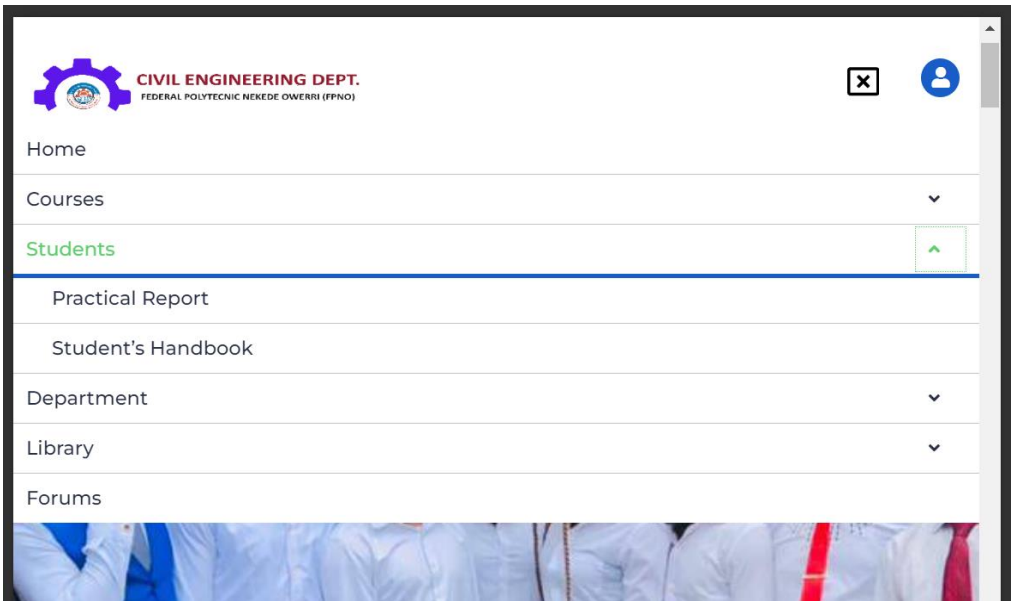


Figure 4.2: Students menu options for practical report submissions

ii.) **Past Thesis Archive:** Organized repository of past theses, accessible for reference and research.

iii.) **Learning Resources**: Comprehensive LMS with courses, quizzes, and learning materials.

iv.) **Accreditation Support:** Detailed information and resources to support departmental accreditation processes.

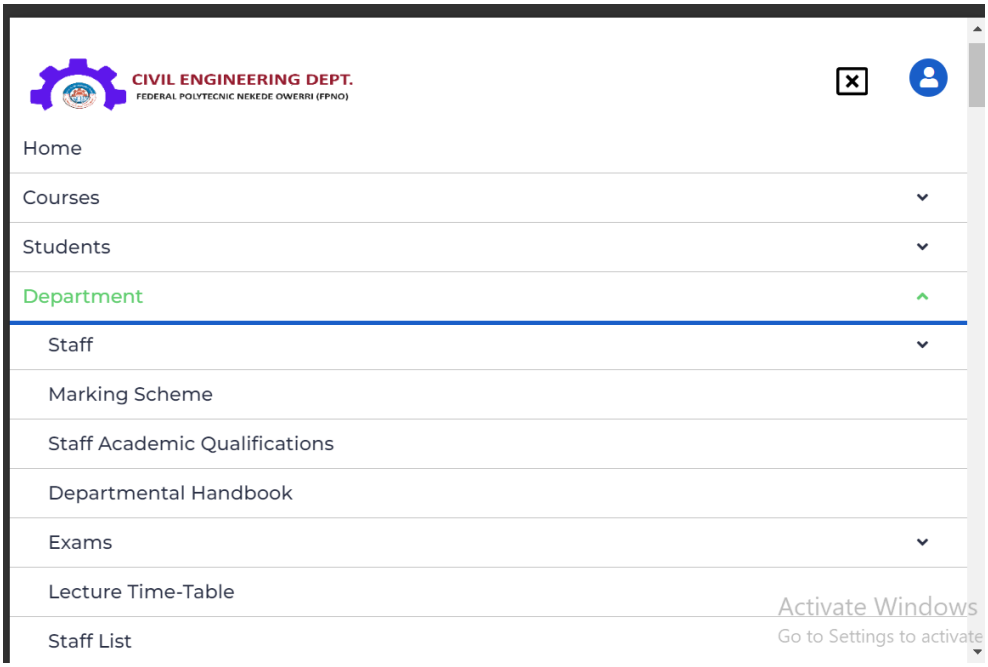


Figure 4.3: Menu showing how departmental channel through which academic resources can be accessed.

This website represents a significant step forward in enhancing our department's digital infrastructure, promoting efficient workflows, and providing valuable educational resources. I am confident that this platform will greatly benefit students, faculty, and staff, supporting our academic and administrative goals. The implementation of a Smart Departmental Website offers a myriad of benefits for students, faculty, and administrative staff. For students, the platform provides access to interactive learning materials, facilitates communication with lecturers, and simplifies the submission of practical reports and thesis documents. Faculty members benefit from streamlined administrative processes, real-time feedback mechanisms, and centralized data management. Moreover, the Smart Departmental Website serves as a valuable tool during accreditation processes, ensuring compliance with regulatory standards and promoting transparency. The deployment of a Smart Departmental Website represents a significant step towards modernizing tertiary education and improving administrative efficiency. By leveraging technology to streamline academic processes and enhance communication channels, the platform empowers stakeholders to thrive in an increasingly digitalized educational landscape.

Conclusion and Recommendation:

In conclusion, the implementation of a Smart Departmental Website holds immense potential to revolutionize tertiary education by fostering a collaborative learning environment and streamlining administrative tasks. As such, we recommend that tertiary institutions prioritize the adoption of such innovative solutions to enhance the educational experience and stay abreast of technological advancements. Additionally, further research is warranted to explore the long-term impact and scalability of Smart Departmental Websites in diverse educational settings.

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