



## **Report AAACE Scholarship 2012**

Visited Conference: SITE 2012, Austin, Texas, USA  
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1. **Introduction** (more information about the reasons why you applied for this scholarship and why you selected this conference)

I am currently an MSc student of Computer Engineering at the Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands. As part of my previous studies in my home country Nigeria, I carried out a research on the use of technology to enhance instructional delivery and student performance, and was looking for an opportunity to present my findings within the research community, preferably at the international level. The main goal for me was to share the results of our experience of integrating technology into the learning process at an institution of higher learning in Nigeria. Also, as a young academic, I knew that presenting my paper in an international conference would be an important milestone in my career. These provided motivation for me to submit my paper for presentation at the SITE 2012 conference, and I was glad that it was accepted. Although I knew that travelling to the US would be quite demanding financially for a student, I chose this particular conference because of the great relevance of its theme and topics to the research area we worked on. Moreover, I reasoned that attending such a conference would enable me learn from the experience of professional educators so as to improve my teaching methods with respect to effectively integrating technology into my teaching career, as well as enable me gain fresh ideas for further research in that area. However, since the research to be presented was not carried out as part of my current academic program, I knew I could not request sponsorship from my current university for the conference. I, therefore, decided to volunteer for student assistantship at the conference registration desk, and to enquire after further funding assistance to support my participation at the conference; and I was glad to be directed to make an application to the scholarship foundation.

2. **Research Questions and Expectation** (more detailed information about your research interest, the questions you expected to get an answer on and expectations you had before you visited the conference)

With a background in electronic engineering, my main interest has been in developing technological solutions for existing human problems, thus using technology as a tool to enhance the quality of life and of service delivery. While working as a graduate assistant in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, my duties included assisting in teaching an undergraduate course. While doing that, I observed a history of poor student performance and high failure rate in the course. This challenged me to explore Technology-Enabled Learning as a means of improving student performance by improving the quality of instruction delivery. The results of that study were presented in this conference. As an upcoming academic with substantial teaching responsibility ahead, I looked forward to the conference because I expected it to enable me see how other educators have employed technology-enabled learning in the classroom -to discuss ideas, and to share views/opinions on the use of technology in education. I also looked forward to learning new approaches or methodologies that have proved useful in other places so that I can take advantage of them upon my return to my home university in Nigeria. The conference met these expectations for me, especially the round table sessions where we discussed and in some cases had demonstrations of useful tools which could be used to actively engage students in the classroom. I look forward to exploring the new ideas I got from the conference and I hope to be able to offer a richer and more rewarding learning experience to my future students.

### 3. **Planning and visited sessions per day** (incl. pre-conference workshop)

Even though I left the Netherlands early on Sunday morning (March 4) to ensure that I would arrive at Austin on Sunday night, due to a long immigration queue at Chicago O'Hare airport, I missed a connecting flight and so could only arrive late on Monday morning. Thus I missed the keynote address for the day; however, I was able to attend those for Tuesday and Wednesday. Although my volunteer roles on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> made it impossible for me to attend a number of sessions I would have loved to attend, I was able to attend 1 round table presentation on personalized learning using gaming on Monday, and the Special Interest Group (SIG) meeting for research and evaluation plus 1 one concurrent session on the Tuesday. I also gave my own oral presentation that Tuesday morning, and attended the welcome event in the evening. On Wednesday, I attended the, 2 oral presentations and a round table discussion on mobile phone use in the classroom, as well as on how to engage students in critical discussions using twitter. I also attended the poster presentation session on Wednesday night. I could not attend any sessions on Thursday and Friday because I did not pre-register for the Friday workshops due to lack of funds, and also because I had to leave the conference on Thursday afternoon due to logistic issues with my hotel lodging. However, I spent most of my time on Thursday networking with other researchers.

### 4. **Scientific discussion** (elaborate on the keynote-sessions topics & the presented content and materials from all other attended activities from an academic point of view)

The keynote session on Tuesday morning on Technology Trends in Education provided a good basis for further discussions on the role and relevance of technology in education. It described the evolution of technology over the years and challenged researchers and educators to leverage the opportunities provided by such trends to actively engage the students in learning using current/emerging technologies. Thus, there is need for educational content to be presented in such a way that it can be easily accessed on a wide variety of mobile devices which is now available to almost all classes of students. This implies a change in the manner the content was previously presented using the traditional methods. The committee of Deans' meeting also focused on how to harness technology-enabled education to the benefit of the students as well as the cost implications for school administrators. This is because the introduction of technology-enabled learning has a number of implications for administration. Integrating technological devices in the schools require a reasonable amount of investment so the administrators are faced with the task of providing these improved services at a reasonable cost while persuading the parents/students to be willing to accept increased fees for them. The challenge is to find a reasonable middle ground for both parties. The round-table discussion on engaging students on critical discussions with Twitter was insightful for me and I hope to use that approach a lot to engage my future students. However, even though the success rate of using Twitter in the classroom is high, it comes with the challenge of deciding how best to evaluate the students performance based solely on their 'active' participation in the online discussions so I think that this method is best suited to courses that do not require classified grades. Also, some of the online tools that can be used for engaging students and enabling them work in teams require significant effort and time to be developed and mastered by both the teachers and students however, the presentations I attended showed that the benefits far outweigh the cost on the long run. Thus, I would conclude that there is a huge potential for information technology application in education. This agrees with most of the results presented in the sessions I attended which showed that students tend to be better motivated to learn when the learning material is presented using a technological approach that they are already familiar with.

5. **Assessment and reflective evaluation on the conference** (Did the conference reach your expectations? In your opinion, what was excellent and where is room for improvement?)

SITE 2012 was my first SITE conference, and I think it met most of my expectations about an international conference. The atmosphere was warm and friendly, and it was very easy for me to get any help or assistance that I required. A good number of researchers from different countries attended, and I got the opportunity to get to know what is happening in such countries. I liked the idea of a Special Interest Group (SIG) because it brought together only those who share a particular interest enabling well targeted discussions on issues which are peculiar to that area of specialization, and so I highly recommend it. I also had the opportunity of meeting with other African researchers and we discussed the challenges that are peculiar to the African continent. I also liked the general session with the deans very much, because it enabled me understand some of the challenges of using Technology in Education from an administrative/management point of view. I had the opportunity to meet with top professionals in the field in person, which might not have been possible outside the conference. I also got some ideas on how to improve the learning experience of my future students using available Technology in the classroom. I really enjoyed attending the round table discussions because; I had opportunity to experiment with some of the ideas that were presented and/or demonstrated. The poster session was also very nice. I got some ideas on how to improve my future design for a courseware. Overall, I think that the time allocations for the sessions were quite appropriate. On the down side however, I did not like the idea of having to buy my lunch at an additional cost during the conference, and I think that this is one area which needs to be improved. I suggest that the conference registration should be inclusive of lunch costs, so that attendees can enjoy a decent lunch at no additional cost. The accommodation cost for student attendees can also be reduced by providing a forum for interested attendees who are coming alone to pair up with others in a room while making hotel reservations.

## 6 **Concluding thoughts....**

Overall, it was a nice experience for me to be at the SITE 2012 Conference. I really enjoyed the round table sessions and I would recommend SITE conferences to anyone who is interested in using ICT in education and also to educators in Nigeria, as it is a very good forum for cross fertilization of ideas at an international level. It also provides a good platform for mentoring and international collaborations.