



INTEGRATION OF BLENDED LEARNING AS A MEASURE FOR FACILITATING INSTRUCTION IN THE TERTIARY BUSINESS EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN THE NEW NORMAL IN DELTA STATE

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Abstract

The study investigated the integration of blended learning as a measure for facilitating instruction in the tertiary business education programme in the new normal in Delta State. Two research questions guided the study and two hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised 109 business educators from five tertiary institutions in Anambra State. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire. The instrument was subject to a pilot test on 20 business educators in Anambra State. The application of the Cronbach Alpha reliability test on the returned data yielded coefficient values of 0.85 and 0.83 for clusters B1 and B2 respectively with an overall reliability coefficient value of 0.84. Data collected from the respondents were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test. Findings revealed that the benefits of integrating blended learning as a measure for facilitating instruction in the tertiary business education programme in the new normal in Delta State are that it offers a platform to facilitate greater interactivity between students, helps students achieve higher and more meaningful levels of learning, allows students practice the ability to project themselves socially, makes global networks of information available for learners and creates opportunity for collaboration. Findings revealed that the measures for facilitating instruction in the blended learning environment in the business education programme in the new normal in Delta State include creating a detailed syllabus with documented learning outcomes, creating the right blend of activities for deep and meaningful learning, offering students opportunity to learn together, allowing open communication between business educators and students and promoting inquiry based learning in the business education programme among others. The result of the hypotheses are the years of the experience of the respondents did not significantly influence their mean ratings. It was recommended that Government at all levels in conjunction with the administrators of the business education programme should organize a comprehensive review of the business education curriculum so as to allow for flexibility and the application of the blended learning approach so as to scale the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Integration, Blended Learning, Instruction, Business Education



Introduction

The advent of the Covid-19 virus has brought about disruptions in all sectors of the economy globally. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every aspect of human endeavour and none more so than education. According to the World Bank (2020) report, the Covid-19 pandemic has claimed millions of lives, disrupted schooling and training, and put economies around the world, most especially tertiary education. Naveed (2020) noted that as a result of the pandemic, over 1.725 billion learners were not receiving any education worldwide. As many countries attempt to come out of the lockdown imposed as a necessity by the pandemic, it is clear that "business as usual" will no longer be a tenable proposition (Naveed). This has resulted in many educational institutions advocating for a new system of education that would mitigate the disruptions resulting from the pandemic. Many versions of the "new normal" are being tried, experimented, and disseminated as the world slowly re-emerges, and education is leading the pack in defining the new normal. In the business education programme in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria, there has been lots of discussion surrounding the appropriate teaching and learning system that would best suit the programme.

Business education is the embodiment of vocational experience and skills needed for jobs and development in a wide variety of business professions. Business education programme is a tertiary education program that gives students the training and skills they need to start and run a business. Onokpaunu (2016) defined business education as an aspect of general education that prepares students' for employment and advancement in entrepreneurial venturing, teaching profession and other office occupations. Obiete, Nwazor and Vin-Mbah (2015) stated that business education programme is unique because of its ability to equip its recipients with skills to function independently as self-employed and employers of labour. The objectives of business education include among others, providing opportunity for practice job preparation or vocation studies for students in order to make them render effective and efficient services in office, distributive and service occupations and preparing students based on interests and aptitudes with the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to enter into a business occupation, advance and profit in it. However, it is a worry that the pandemic has impacted on the ability of the business education programme to provide quality instructions that will facilitate the development of office and entrepreneurial skills among students.

This has influenced the calls by business educators and other education experts to provide educational experiences for students through the application of technology (Naveed, 2020). Adeoye, Adanikin and Adanikin (2020) noted that the application of technology will not only help to facilitate instruction and distance learning, it will make room for individualized learning experiences that will promote skills acquisition among business education students. The use of the Internet has been suggested as the greatest tool for transporting learning contents while the actual delivery has been achieved using all various forms of learning management systems, custom developed platforms and standalone applications (Naveed, 2020). However, in Nigeria, issues related to access to technology and internet as well as the cost of internet have posed a measure challenge to the full integration of technology in the tertiary business education programme. In Delta state just like in other states in Nigeria, problems with electrical supply, online access, insufficient bandwidth, and a lack of network capacity to handle rising data traffic seem to pose a huge challenge to instructional delivery during the pandemic. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the United * Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), (2020) students and teachers bore the majority of the higher data use costs incurred for distance learning. These disruptions seem to have informed the calls for the adoption of blended learning as a tool for facilitating instruction in the business education programme.

Blended learning is one of the contemporary trends of education and one of the new trends of the teacher in the twenty first century. Blended learning is described as an educational method in which more than one means is used for transmitting knowledge and experience to learners to achieve the best of the learning outputs. Nisreen (2016) described blended learning as a way of learning aiming to



help the learner achieve the targeted learning outcomes through the blending between the forms of traditional education and e-learning with its patterns inside and outside the classroom. Al-Rimawi (2016) stated that blended learning combines the advantages of e-learning and the benefits of classroom education. It is based on the integration between the traditional learning and e-learning.

Ismail (2009) defined blended learning as the employment of technological innovations in blending the two methods of education face-to-face as well as distance education to bring about an interaction between the teacher or a mentor with learners face-to-face through these innovations, which are not required to have specific electronic tools or specific quality with the availability of learning sources linked with content and learning activities. Hannon and Macken (2014) opined that the benefits of blended learning include: making computers and local and global networks of information available for learners; developing teachers' roles as leaders and mentors to their students in terms of their expertise in computers and networks of local and international information, in addition to being producers rather than importers of knowledge; enabling learning groups to use multimedia, e-mail, virtual libraries, and all internet data collaborative software; having the ability to combine different possibilities for different schools and universities in productive ways and overcoming the problem of lasting change in the content of educational materials. Cleveland-Innes and Wilton (2018) suggested the following measures as ways for facilitating instruction in blended learning environments. These include among others, one-on-one interaction between teacher and student as well as communication to the whole group and between students; availing students the opportunity to reflect during the course; providing opportunity to learn together and even teach each other in a peer-teaching setting. In addition, personality variable relating to years of experience could affect business educators' ability to utilize blended learning. However, these views are hypothetical and have not been empirically proven to be the case among business educators in Delta State. It is against this backdrop that this study investigated the integration of blended learning as a measure for facilitating instruction in the tertiary business education programme in the new normal in Delta State.

Statement of the Problem

The rapid spread of the Covid-19 virus heightened by the huge number of deaths led to the hurried closure of educational institutions. The outbreak of the Covid-19 virus has presented a huge hurdle to the quality of instruction in business education programme in tertiary institutions. The use of technology for instruction has been suggested as a measure for ensuring quality learning whilst minimizing the spread of the virus. However, the use of technology seems to have been poorly implemented in the business education programme. This is because of issues related to lack of access to technology, poor electricity and high cost of technology. These challenges seem to impact on the ability of business education to provide quality instruction in the business education programme. The researcher is worried if the application of technology as a solution to improving instruction in the business education programme in the new normal?

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the benefits of adopting blended learning as a measure for facilitating instruction in the tertiary business education programme in the new normal in Delta State?
2. What are the measures for facilitating instruction in the blended learning environment in the business education programme in the new normal in Delta State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:



1. There is no significant difference in mean ratings of experienced and less experienced business educators on the benefits of integrating blended learning as a measure for facilitating instruction in the tertiary business education programme in the new normal in Delta State.
2. There is no significant difference in mean ratings of experienced and less experienced business educators on the measures for facilitating instruction in the blended learning environment in the business education programme in the new normal in Delta State.

Method

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The study was carried out in Delta State. The population of the study comprised 108 business educators in tertiary institutions in the State. The instrument was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher. The instrument was titled "Questionnaire on Blended Learning as A Measure for Facilitating Instruction in The Tertiary Business Education Programme in the New Normal (QBLMFITBEPNN)". The instrument was structured on a 4-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (DS). The instrument was validated by three experts in the School of Business Education, Federal College of Education (Technical), Asaba, Delta State. Further the instrument was subject to a pilot test on 10 business educators in Anambra State. The application of the Cronbach Alpha reliability test on the returned data yielded coefficient values of 0.85 and 0.83 for clusters B1 and B2 respectively with an overall reliability coefficient value of 0.84. Data collected from the respondents were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test. The mean value was used to answer the research questions while the standard deviation was used to ascertain the homogeneity or otherwise of the respondents' ratings. In analyzing the mean, any item with mean score above 2.50 agree below the mean score 2.50 disagree. For the hypotheses, t-test was used to test all the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Where the calculated t value was less than the critical value of t, it meant that the variable did not significantly affect respondents' mean ratings and the hypothesis was accepted. Conversely, where the calculated t value was equal to or greater than the critical t value, it meant that the variable had a significant effect on the respondents' mean ratings and the hypothesis was rejected.

Results

Research Question 1

What are the benefits of integrating blended learning as a measure for facilitating instruction in the tertiary business education programme in the new normal in Delta State?

Table 1: Respondents Mean Ratings on the Benefits of Integrating Blended Learning a Measure for Facilitating Instruction in the Tertiary Business Education Programme in the New Normal

S/No.	Benefits of adopting blended learning include:	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	Creates opportunity for collaboration	3.22	0.86	Agree
2.	Offers a platform to facilitate greater interactivity Between students	3.43	0.94	Agree
3.	Offers a platform to facilitate greater interactivity Between students and business educators	3.16	0.78	Agree
4.	Allows for learning anytime and anywhere	3.12	0.74	Agree
5.	Allows Students practice the ability to project themselves socially	3.33	0.85	Agree



6.	Makes global networks of information available for Learners	3.28	0.88	Agree
7.	Develops teachers' roles as leaders and mentors to their students in terms of their expertise in Computers	3.11	0.77	Agree
8.	Offers opportunity to combine different possibilities for business education in different tertiary institutions in productive ways	3.08	0.78	Agree
9.	Helps students achieve higher and more meaningful levels of learning.	3.36	0.89	Agree
10.	It promotes the ease of monitoring of teaching and learning activities	3.20	0.80	Agree
	Cluster Mean	3.22		Agree

Data in Table 1 reveal that all the items, achieved mean ratings ranging between 2.65 3.08 and 3.43 and standard deviations ranging between 0.74 to 0.94. This means that they are all benefits of integrating blended learning as a measure for facilitating instruction in the tertiary business education programme in the new normal. The cluster mean of 3.22 indicates that the benefits of integrating blended learning as a measure for facilitating instruction in the tertiary business education programme in the new normal in Delta State are that it offers a platform to facilitate greater interactivity between students, helps students achieve higher and more meaningful levels of learning, allows students practice the ability to project themselves socially, makes global networks of information available for learners and creates opportunity for collaboration.

Research Question 2

What are the measures for facilitating instruction in the blended learning environment in the business education programme in the new normal in Delta State?

Table 2: Respondents Mean Ratings on the Measures for Facilitating Instruction in the blended learning system in the Tertiary Business Education Programme in the New Normal

S/No	Measures for facilitating instruction in the blended learning include	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	Focus on technology that will promote engagement among students	3.31	0.75	Agree
2.	Carefully selecting the technology to match with learning activities that best suit students needs	3.11	0.88	Agree
3.	Ensure activity monitoring by the business educator through electronic assignment submission	3.08	0.73	Agree
4.	Ensure well-feedback balanced with supported learner independence	3.30	0.79	Agree
5.	Provide opportunities for students adjust to the online learning environment	3.23	0.78	Agree to



6.	Create the rightblend of activities for deep, meaningful learning	3.45	0.81	Agree
7.	Create a detailed syllabus with documented learning outcomes	3.50	0.79	Agree
8.	Allow for open communication between business educators and students	3.38	0.74	Agree
9.	Provide students opportunity to reflect during the course	3.25	0.81	Agree
10.	Offer students opportunity to learn together	3.43	0.72	Agree
11.	Create a community of business educators where peer teaching is promoted	3.28	0.83	Agree
12.	Promoting inquiry based learning in the business education programme	3.34	0.86	Agree
13.	Ensure that inquiry leads to resolution	3.20	0.82	Agree
14.	Ensure assessment is congruent with intended learning outcomes	3.26	0.84	Agree

Cluster Mean3.28Agree

Data in Table 2 reveal that all the items, achieved mean ratings ranging between 2.65 3.08 and 3.45 and standard deviations ranging between 0.72 to 0.88.This means that they are all measures for facilitating instruction in the blended learning environment in the business education programme in the new normal. The cluster mean of 3.28 indicates that the measures for facilitating instruction in the blended learning environment in the business education programme in the new normal in Delta State include creating a detailed syllabus with documented learning outcomes,creating the rightblend of activities for deep and meaningfullearning,offeringstudentsOpportunity to learn together, allowing open communication between business educators and students and promoting inquiry based learning in the business education programme among others.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in mean ratings of experienced and less experienced business educators on the benefits of integrating blended learning as a measure for facilitating instruction in the tertiary business education programme in the new normal in Delta State.

Table 3: Summary of t-test Analysis of Experienced and Less Experienced Business Educators on the Benefits of Integrating Blended Learning as a Measure for Facilitating Instruction in the Tertiary Business Education Programme in the New Normal

Status	N	X	SD	df	cal. t	t-crit. *	Decision
Experienced Bus. Edu.	58	3.18	0.84	980.74	1.96NS		
Less Experienced Bus. Ed.	32	3.240.78					
Total	90						



Result in Table 3 show that experienced business educators had a mean rating of 3.18 and standard deviation of 0.84, while the less experienced business educators had a mean rating of 3.24 and standard deviation of 0.78. These yielded a calculated t-value of 0.74 at 98 degrees of freedom. Since the calculated t-value of 0.74 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96, the null hypothesis is accepted. This means that there is no significant difference in mean ratings of experienced and less experienced business educators on the benefits of integrating blended learning as a measure for facilitating instruction in the tertiary business education programme in the new normal in Delta State.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in mean ratings of experienced and less experienced business educators on the measures for facilitating instruction in the blended learning environment in the business education programme in the new normal in Delta State.

Table 4: Summary of t-test Analysis of Experienced and Less Experienced Business Educators on the Measures for Facilitating Instruction in the Blended Learning Environment in the Tertiary Business Education Programme in the New Normal

Status	N	XSD	df	cal. t	t-crit.	Decision
Experienced Bus. Edu.	58	3.21	0.76			
Less Experienced Bus. Ed.	32	3.18	0.74			
Total	90	980.36	1.96NS			

Result in Table 34 show that experienced business educators had a mean rating of 3.21 and standard deviation of 0.76, while the less experienced business educators had a mean rating of 3.18 and standard deviation of 0.74. These yielded a calculated t-value of 0.36 at 98 degrees of freedom. Since the calculated t-value of 0.36 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96, the null hypothesis is accepted. This means that there is no significant difference in mean ratings of experienced and less experienced business educators on the measures for facilitating instruction in the blended learning environment in the business education programme in the new normal in Delta State.

Discussion of Findings

Findings of the study revealed that the benefits of integrating blended learning as a measure for facilitating instruction in the tertiary business education programme in the new normal in Delta State are that it offers a platform to facilitate greater interactivity between students, helps students achieve higher and more meaningful levels of learning, allows students practice the ability to project Themselves socially, makes global networks of information available for learners and creates opportunity for collaboration. This is in agreement with traditional education and e-learning with its patterns inside and outside the classroom. Al-Rimawi (2016) who stated that blended learning combines the advantages of e-learning and the benefits of classroom education. It is based on the integration between the traditional learning and e-learning. According to Hannon and Macken(2014), blended learning has enormous advantage in that it makes information readily available to students through the internet. Hannon and Macken further averred that blended offer teachers opportunity for mentorship of students as well as provides opportunities for flexibility in learning. Pappas (2015) suggested that distracted or unmotivated Learners benefit from the active collaborative synchronous experience in a blended



learning system. Also, Pappas opined that self-guided learners may be in less need of remediation but canals benefit from the higher level of immediate support and direction offered in synchronous learning experiences. Further findings revealed that no significant difference in mean ratings of experienced and less experienced business educators on the measures for facilitating instruction in the blended learning environment in the business education programme in the new normal in Delta State. This shows that experienced and less experienced business educators agree that the integration of blended learning would facilitate instruction in the tertiary business education programme in the new normal in Delta State. This is in agreement with Nisreen (2016) who held that blended learning would help tertiary education programme to deal with the disruption posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Findings of the study revealed that the measures for facilitating instruction in the blended learning environment in the business education programme in the new normal in Delta State include creating a detailed syllabus with documented learning outcomes, creating the right blend of activities for deep and meaningful learning, offering students opportunity to learn together, allowing open communication between business educators and students and promoting inquiry based learning in the business education programme among others. This finding is in agreement with Beatly (2016) who posited that most effective blended learning design offers a learner-centered approach that is personalizable and accessible, with the best designs integrating a range of learning opportunities that allow learners more control over their form a land informal learning actions. According to Cleveland-Innes and Wilton (2018), for educators to successfully integrate blended learning, they need to ensure open communication is allowed, avail students the opportunity to reflect during the course, provide opportunity to learn together and even teach each other in a peer-teaching setting. Furthermore, findings revealed no significant difference in the mean ratings of experienced and less experienced business educators on the measures for facilitating instruction in the blended learning environment in the business education programme in the new normal in Delta State. This shows that experienced and less experienced business educators agree that the measures espoused above would facilitate instruction in the blended learning environment in the business education programme in the new normal. This is in line with Cleveland-Innes and Wilton (2018) who suggested that successful integration of blended learning require the application of certain principles like open communication, promoting enquiry based learning and carefully planning syllabus in the business education programme.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concludes that blended learning is a veritable tool for facilitating instruction in the tertiary business education programme in the new normal in Delta State. The researcher is of the view that providing more effective learning experiences increases access and flexibility as well as preventing the surge in the rate of transmission of Covid-19. It is likely that the business education programme should provide a blend of face-to-face and computer mediated experiences.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

1. Government in conjunction with the administrators of the business education programme should organize a comprehensive review of the business education curriculum so as to allow for flexibility and the application of the blended learning approach so as to scale the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.
2. The administrators should organize in-service training programmes like conferences, seminars and workshops that are targeted at improving business educators' skills and competencies in blending their teaching approach.



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