

INTEREST OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN VIRTUAL LEARNING MODES OCCASIONED BY THE NEW NORMAL

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Abstract

This study investigates the interest of undergraduate students in virtual learning modes occasioned by the new normal. Three research questions were generated for the study. A structured inventory was used for data collection. Data collected were analysed using frequency counts, mean scores and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) analyses. The findings of the study deduced that students found it difficult to learn virtually, it is difficult for them to learn virtually on regular basis, virtual learning is effective for coping up with missed lectures, proficiency in the use of computers makes virtual learning easy, productivity of students can be enhanced through virtual learning, virtual learning is economical in terms of time for students and lecturers while many believed that a number of problems were created by virtual learning rather than its solution while there was difference in the interest of undergraduate students in virtual learning and their level of its acceptability. Based on the findings, the necessary conclusions and recommendations were made. Three universities in Osun state were selected, 120 students from each institution were picked to make a total of 360 respondents used.

Keywords: Interest, Undergraduate students, Virtual Learning Modes, New Normal.

Introduction

Education is the process of facilitating learning or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, beliefs, habits and values. Educational methods include teaching, direct research, storytelling, discussion, and training. Training activities often take place under the guidance of educators, but students can also educate themselves. Education can take place in a formal or informal context, and any experience that has educational efficacy in the way one thinks, acts or feels can be considered educational. The teaching methodology is called pedagogy. Generally, education is formally divided into phases, such as kindergarten, primary school, middle school, basic school, high school and then tertiary education in the form of polytechnic, college of education or university. Apprenticeship is another. The right to education has been recognized by some governments and the United Nations. In most regions, education is mandatory until a certain age.

In contemporary world, education and knowledge acquisition goes beyond the four walls of educational institutions. Learning now takes place in many diversified forms, which make it easy to facilitate the education of the general public. Without doubt, the most welcome among this myriad of facilitated forms embraced by teachers, instructors and educational facilitators the world over is online learning. Obviously, many faculty members and students do not see the value of fully online learning, despite the fact that online learning has been around for many decades. During the current health crisis, many instructors have had to improvise quick online learning solutions (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust & Bond, 2020).

The process of learning nowadays is therefore not limited to the traditional classrooms, and virtual learning environments today play a major role in our educational system. Online learning was once considered by the average person, scholar, or instructor as a passing fad because it was believed that social interaction was the pinnacle of the educational experience from kindergarten to university. However, people who manage family, work, as well as people with monetary constraints consider online programs as a boon that has fulfilled their educational needs. Online classrooms have gained a lot of acceptance within our educational system based on their ideological, pedagogical, financial, and social aspects in comparison to the traditional, physical classroom environments (Wu & Hwang, 2010).

Online learning (often used interchangeably with e-learning) is a form of distance education that involves using technology as the mediator of the learning process, and that teaching is entirely delivered through the internet (Siemens et al., 2015). Asabere (2012), online learning aims to seek changes in the pattern of the whole academic process. Online learning is known with many names and terms like learning through web, online learning, and instruction through computer assistance. Online learning has many definitions in the contexts and milieu of its operationalization. According to Berteau (2014), some specialists were of the notion that online learning is a way of teaching in which multiple integration of technology are sought while some were of the notions that it is a substitute of distance education, which is facilitated by the application of internet considered as an effective way of rapid communications. Nichols (2013) stated that online learning is a set of integration of various types of technologies solely for the purpose of promoting education. Online learning is a broad term, which provides complete description of various types of online learning adopting the modern Information and Communication Technologies.

Efforts at strengthening the effectiveness of online learning needs to understand the perception of the users. Studies have documented both favourable and unfavourable perceptions by students on online learning. Several studies indicate that the instructor's interaction with students has considerable impact on the student's perceptions of online learning. Consistency in course design Swan, Shea, Fredericksen, Pickett, Pelz & Maher (2000), the capability of the interaction with course instructors to promote critical thinking ability and information processing (Duffy, Dueber & Hawley, 1998, pp. 51–78); Picciano (2002); Hay, Hodgkinson, Peltier & Drago (2004), rate of interactivity in the online setting (Arbaugh (2000); Hay et al. (2004)), the extent of instructional emphasis on learning through interaction, the flexibility of online learning (Chizmar and Walbert (1999); McCall (2002) were among the perceived strengths of online learning.

The merger of technology, education and virtual social interaction has created a platform for advancement in education and increase the reach of education across numerous demographic and life situations who may not previously have been able to attend or even consider taking classes at a university or college. People coming from different backgrounds like different work schedules, raising children, driving distances and even physical disabilities and health conditions limit people from attending colleges, and thus, their pursuit of a degree and to develop as scholars is nullified. With online options, there are a variety of degree programs available, the time taken to attend each class is more convenient and this makes further their education, less complicated than heading to campus.

The internet serves as a platform that motivates top learning institutions to heavily invest in online educational programs. The rising investments in online technology by more and more learning institutions are due to the fact that online classes from accredited institutions are preferred over other similar institutions. The online classes provided by accredited learning institutions provide availability and flexible options for many who otherwise would remain a part of populations marginalized due to a different set of conditions and needs (Jethro, Grace, & Thomas, 2012; Wu & Hwang, 2010). Similar to any corporation, increased enrollment and retention are vital for success and expansion. Therefore, top educational institutions adopt corporate models to be used in marketing to individuals who sought to expand their knowledge, challenge their cognition, and expand the opportunities in their career. The implementation of online learning increases recruiting efforts and the focal point is shifted on student retention in online programs until graduation. In 2012, fifty-percent of students in higher education programs dropped out before completing campus-based programs; however, with the online option as a solution to the retention issue, the number of students that have left educational programs in higher learning has presumably decreased (Seidman, 2012).

Jethro, Grace, and Thomas (2012) defined online learning and described it as a learning process that is created through the interaction with network-based content delivered through digital platforms. According to Tubaishat and Lansari (2011), effective online learning may be best achieved by thorough understanding of the educational needs of students and specifically of those who want to take advantage of the Internet and the number of applications and technological devices which can be used to enhance their learning experiences. Jaggars (2011) emphasize that online learning can be extremely beneficial because it promotes wider access to college education with reduced time and cost in commuting. The internet gives students the liberty to choose the learning facility and the schedule most convenient for them as far as time, distance, flexibility, and money are concerned. Overall, the major questions in the debate on the validity of online learning has been answered; with the help of the technologically advanced forms of learning through computers, related devices, and internet. Also, the effectiveness of online programs to educate and retain students is similar to the traditional classroom learning format (Mahanta & Ahmed, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

The world is technologically getting advanced. It is sometimes referred to as a global village. The reason for this assertion is attributed to the attitudes of undergraduates towards online learning. Online learning as a matter of fact is fast becoming popular in business education instructional delivery method, most especially in tertiary institutions in Europe, America, and other developed and technologically advanced countries. In Nigeria, its usage as a method of teaching and learning in tertiary institutions needs to be emphasized in line with what obtains in other part of the world.

Considering the fact that reading is the prime means to interact and learn content in online other than webcams, webcasts, and podcasts, online educational institutions need to provide learning development courses for students who may display difficulty in reading literacy. Many online schools only have an entrance exam that may not fully assess individuals' aptitudes in various areas that may play a role in a student's success in online learning specifically. This identifies that there is a need to mitigate issues such as reading comprehension and other areas that may be vital to their online success, by providing learning development courses to prepare for the successful completion of their online studies. The present study is therefore interested in investigating the impact of online learning modes on undergraduate students' interest in learning in the new normal.

Purpose of the Study

1. To examine the interest of students in universities in Osun state in virtual learning modes.
2. To determine the level of availability of virtual learning modes by undergraduate students in universities in Osun state.
3. To find out the ease with which students in universities in Osun state study virtually in the new normal.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of acceptability of virtual learning modes by undergraduate students in universities in Osun state?
2. What is the ease with which students in universities in Osun state study virtually in the new normal?

Hypothesis

1. There is no significant difference in the interest of students in universities in Osun state in virtual learning and their level of its acceptability.

Scope of the Study

This research was conducted in Osun State, Nigeria. It covers the undergraduate students in Osun state universities (public and private). Geographically, the study covers three 3 universities, Osun State. (1 Federal university, 1 State university and 1 Private university).

Methodology

Descriptive survey research was adopted for this study because it involves collecting and analyzing data gathered from a sample considered to be representative of the population, and generalizing the findings. The researcher employed simple random sampling technique to select three universities in Osun state, (1 federal university, 1 state university and 1 private university). These represent the 3 categories of universities in Nigeria. Simple sample ensures the adequacy probability that every subject has the equal chances of being selected in all. One hundred and twenty 120 undergraduate students were purposively selected from each of the universities making a total of three hundred and sixty 360 respondents.

A validated inventory was used for the study titled "Impact of Online Learning Modes on Undergraduate Students' Attitude to Learning in the New Normal (IOLMUSALNN)". The inventory will consisted of two sections (A and B), section A will elicits responses on the demographic data of the respondents while section B is sub- divided into four with relevant items that could be used to elicit relevant responses from the respondents in line with the research questions and hypotheses. The inventory was

validated by two educational technologists and an expert in test construction. This is to determine the effectiveness and the appropriateness of the instrument, to reduce ambiguity in the contents and structures of the sentences used, and in order to establish construct validity. The validator's corrections and modifications were used to improve the quality of the instrument.

The instrument was subjected to test-retest method for a period of three weeks to ascertain the internal consistency of the instrument. It was administered on twenty (20) respondents who are not part of the study sample after which the instrument was subjected to Person Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) analysis to establish the reality of the instrument. The researcher distributed the inventory to the selected number of students. The completed inventory will be collected for analysis. Data collected was subjected to descriptive statistics specifically mean, standard deviation and frequency counts.

Results

This section presents the analysis of data and interpretation of result. The first part presents the demographic distribution of respondents using descriptive statistics (frequency count and simple percentages) while the second part gives the analysis of research question using frequency and percentage.

Table 1: Respondent Distribution by Gender
(N = 60)

	F	%
Male	193	53.6
Female	167	46.4
Total	360	100.0

Table 1 presents the gender distribution of respondent. It shows that 53.6% are male while 46.4% are female.

Table 2: Respondent Distribution by Class
N = 360

	F	%
100	113	31.4
200	144	40.0
300	63	17.5
400	40	11.1
Total	360	100.0

Table 2 presents the Class distribution of respondent. It shows that 31.4% are 100level, 40.0% are in 200level, 17.5% are in 300level while 11.1% are in 400level.

Analyses of Research Questions

Research Question 1: What is the level of acceptability of virtual learning modes by undergraduate students in universities in Osun state.

Table 3: Analysis of level of Acceptability of virtual learning modes by undergraduate Students in universities in Osun State (N = 360)

S/ N	ITEMS	RESPONSE				
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		F %	F %	f %	f %	f %
1	It is difficult to learn virtually with appropriate guidance	204 56.7%	107 29.7%	26 7.2%	9 2.5%	14 3.9%
2	It is difficult to learn virtually on regular basis due to least face to face interaction between students and lecturers	148 41.1%	124 34.4%	64 17.8%	14 3.9%	10 2.8%
3	Slow technology and poor internet connections discouraged me from virtual learning.	124 34.4%	173 48.1%	49 13.6%	9 2.5%	5 1.4%
4	Virtual learning is often avoided as it promotes social isolation.	157 43.6%	144 40.0%	51 14.2%	6 1.7%	2 0.6%
5	Virtual learning highly motivates students for taking advance courses	138 38.3%	134 37.2%	75 20.8%	12 3.3%	1 0.3%

Table 3 present the level of acceptability of virtual learning modes by undergraduate students in universities in Osun state. The items the respondent agreed with were; It is difficult to learn virtually with appropriate guidance (85.4%), It is difficult to learn virtually on regular basis due to least face to face interaction between students and lecturers (84.5%), Slow technology and poor internet connections discouraged me from virtual learning (82.5%), virtual learning is often avoided as it promotes social isolation (83.6%), virtual learning highly motivates students for taking advance courses (75.5%).

Research Question 2: What is the ease with which students in universities in Osun state study virtually in the new normal?

What is the ease with which students in universities in Osun state study virtually in the new normal?

Table 4: Analysis of the ease with which students in universities in Osun state study virtually in the new normal (N = 360)

S/ N	ITEMS	RESPONSE									
		Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	f	%	f	%
1	Virtual learning is effective for coping up with missed lectures	241	66.9%	85	23.6%	21	5.8%	9	2.5%	4	1.1%
2	Proficiency in the use of computers makes virtual learning easy.	76	21.1%	192	53.3%	76	21.1%	11	3.1%	5	1.4%
3	Productivity of students can be enhanced through virtual learning.	151	41.9%	97	26.9%	92	25.6%	12	3.3%	8	2.2%
4	Virtual learning is economical in terms of time for students and lecturers	107	29.7%	146	40.6%	83	23.1%	20	5.6%	4	1.1%
5	Students and lecturer's interaction is weak in virtual learning	122	33.9%	108	30.0%	90	25.0%	25	6.9%	15	4.2%
6	Virtual learning ensures the effectiveness of class presentation.	135	37.5%	103	28.6%	78	21.7%	32	8.9%	12	3.3%
7	A number of problems were created by virtual learning rather than its solution	164	45.6%	124	34.4%	44	12.2%	13	3.6%	15	4.2%
8	Access to education increases through virtual learning	182	50.6%	94	26.1%	57	15.8%	21	5.8%	6	1.7%
9	Maximum amount of time is consumed while learning virtually.	233	64.7%	81	22.5%	31	8.6%	8	2.2%	5	1.4%

Table 4 presents the analysis of the ease with which students in universities in Osun state study virtually in the new normal. The items the respondent agreed with were; virtual learning is effective for coping up with missed lectures (90.5%), Proficiency in the use of computers makes virtual learning easy (74.4%), Productivity of students can be enhanced through virtual learning (68.8%), virtual learning is economical in terms of time for students and lecturers (70.3%), Students and lecturers interaction is weak in virtual learning (63.9%), virtual learning ensures the effectiveness

of class presentation (66.3%), A number of problems were created by virtual learning rather than its solution (80.0%), Access to education increases through virtual learning (76.7%), Maximum amount of time is consumed while learning virtually (87.2%).

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the interest of students in universities in Osun state in virtual learning and their level of its acceptability.

Table 6: Summary of t-test Analysis on the difference in the interest of students in universities in Osun state in virtual learning and their level of its acceptability

	N	Mean	S. D	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Remark
Virtual learning	360	13.78	3.06	85.42	359	0.000	Significant
level of its acceptability	360	9.13	2.07				

Table 6 shows the differences in the interest of students in universities in Osun state in virtual learning and their level of its acceptability. The result reveals that there is difference in the interest of students in universities in Osun state in virtual learning and their level of its acceptability ($t = 85.42$, $df = 359$, $p > 0.00$). This implies that virtual learning and their level of its acceptability by students in universities in Osun state is different.

Discussion of Results or Findings

Study revealed the interest of undergraduate students in virtual learning modes occasioned by the new normal and it was revealed that it is difficult to learn virtually with appropriate guidance, It is difficult to learn virtually on regular basis due to least face to face interaction between students and lecturers, Slow technology and poor internet connections discouraged students from virtual learning, virtual learning is often avoided as it promotes social isolation, vlearning highly motivates students for taking advance courses as supported by Olatokun (2018) indicated that most students believed the physical learning to be far better and convenient than virtual learning. Though, many students have no benefit in using virtual for learning, maybe as a resulting of using for only pleasure shake as revealed by Kurtus (2012) who believed that some students use the internet for non-academic purposes such as gaming and social networking, thus culminating in loss of study schedules.

Another finding of this study revealed that virtual learning is effective for coping up with missed lectures, proficiency in the use of computers makes virtual learning easy, productivity of students can be enhanced through virtual learning, virtual learning is economical in terms of time for students and lecturers, students and lecturers interaction is weak in virtual learning, virtual learning ensures the effectiveness of class presentation, while many believed that a number of problems were created by virtual learning rather than its solution, maximum amount of time is consumed while learning virtually. The findings are in line with Hermanset (2011) who have identified three main stages for virtual learning to be highly valued and regarded by the lecturers and students; integration, enhancement and complementary. More so, there was difference in the interest of students in universities in Osun state in virtual learning and their level of its acceptability.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research, study aimed at finding out the interest of undergraduate students in virtual learning modes occasioned by the new normal. From the findings, it was deduced that it is difficult for students to learn virtually on regular basis; virtual learning highly motivates students to take advance courses; and virtual learning is effective in coping up with missed lectures. Proficiency in the use of computers makes virtual learning easy, productivity of students can be enhanced through virtual learning, virtual learning is economical in terms of time for students and lecturers while many believed that rather than being a solution, a number of problems have been created by virtual learning. Hence, the study also revealed that there was a difference in the interest of students in universities in Osun State in virtual learning and their level of its acceptability.

Based on the results of data study and tested hypotheses, it is hereby **recommended** that:

1. Orientation programs must be put in place to prepare student by training them with both theoretical, pedagogical coupled with the specific technological knowledge in their subject area.
2. Putting in place a user-friendly technology for easy adaptation for the students for lecturers to quickly design student-centered pedagogical activities hence creating a scenario where teachers easily integrate virtual learning into their typical traditional classroom practices.
3. Creating collaborative design teams where student can work with peers to formulate virtual learning and solve virtual related problems they are faced with on a daily basis.
4. Creating exemplary virtual learning curriculum materials for students, to inspire them to learn.

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