

PERCEPTION ON THE USE OF BLENDED LEARNING METHOD AMONG DISTANCE EDUCATION STUDENTS IN NORTH-CENTRAL, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated the perception on the use of blended learning method among Distance Education Students in the North-Central, Nigeria. This study was a descriptive research of the survey type. three research questions were raised to guide the study. The sample for the study consisted of two hundred and twenty-three (223) students from six Distance Education study centres in North Central selected by random sampling technique. The selection cut across Kogi, Kwara and Niger State. The research instrument used for the study was a researcher-designed questionnaire, entitled Students' Perception on the Use of Blended Learning Questionnaire (SPUBLQ) which had a reliability coefficient of 0.92. Data were collected by direct administration and was analyzed using Mean rating and 3.0 as the benchmark. The finding of the study revealed that the Distance Education students benefited from the blended learning method, also indicated that, Inadequate power supply, Internet connection problem, lack of computer operating skill/competence are barriers to effective use of blended learning in distance education in Nigeria. It was recommended that the Federal Government should ensure good internet connectivity in Nigeria to boost the use of Blended Learning method and other ICT's tools among others.

Keywords: Perception, Blended learning, Distance Education

Introduction

In the field of education, computer served as useful tool in administration and instructional process and as a tool for effective teaching and learning, the use of computer in education has provided some of the solutions to the problems of teaching and made learning permanent and interesting for students (Yusuf, 2007). Drent and Meelissen (2007) stated that the objectives of using computer in education are three; the use of computer as objective of study, the use of computer as aspect of discipline or profession and the use of computer as medium for teaching and learning. Therefore, the widespread adoption and availability of digital learning technologies has led to increased levels of integration of computer-mediated instructional elements into the traditional face-to-face learning experience. The integration of Information Communication Technology (ICT) to the traditional method of teaching led to adoption of blended learning method.

The constant use of Traditional method in teaching and learning is not encouraging in higher institutions because students of nowadays have witness shift in education from teacher center approach to learner center approach through the use of information and communication technology in education, where learning are not restricted to the four wall of the classrooms (Jones & Young, 2006). With the help of technical experts, imaginative educators have got and

developed various ways to exploit and combine methods to achieve learning objectives, such as Mobile Learning, Blended Learning, Flipped Classroom among others.

Garrison and Kanuka (2004) defined blended learning as the thoughtful integration of traditional face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experience. Singh and Reed (2011) described blended learning as a learning programme where more than one delivery mode, teaching models, styles of learning is systematically combined through the use of appropriate technology.

Levy (2009) contended that blended learning is not a question of combining different education systems to create a new educational method, it was believed that the two approaches should be combined in harmony and balance so as to raise the level of education quality.

Blended learning is a teaching method which involves instructional delivery through online (internet) and face to face interaction. For example, the invention of the printing press in the 15th century enable the blending of face to face, teacher-lead instruction with reading home work. Likewise, audio recordings, television transmissions, online text-based, data bases and discussion boards, just to mention but view, were developed in the 20th century and then used for pedagogical purposes, such development enhances their uses in teaching and learning process.

According to Osguthorpe and Graham (2003), blended learning can generally be classified into six models: (i) Face-to-face driver - where the teacher drives the instruction and augments with digital tools. (ii) Rotation - students cycle through a schedule of independent online study and face-to-face classroom time (iii) Flex - Most of the curriculum is delivered via a digital platform and teachers are available for face-to-face consultation and support. (iv) Labs –All of the curriculum is delivered via a digital platform but in a consistent physical location. Students usually take traditional classes in this model as well. (v) Self-Blend - Students choose to augment the traditional learning with online course work (vi) Online Driver - All curriculum and teaching is delivered via a digital platform and face-to-face meetings are scheduled or made available if necessary.

Shea (2007) pointed out by asking what instructional problem blended learning solves? Shea claimed that a frequent answer to this question is that, students' increased access in two different ways that is in terms of time, physical location and increased capacity for institutions because there are fewer classroom space constraints and hence greater ability to serve more students. However, Shea pointed out that the quality of education must remain the same or improve after the transition to a blended learning method. Blended learning method is being used in distance Education in Nigeria.

Distance Education has been defined as all learning that take place where there is no face-to-face interaction between students and teachers (Maurice, Charles & Ofori-Darko, 2012). Distance education is the learning occurring in different place from teaching in which the instructor and the students are separated which also requires special techniques in course design, instructional techniques and different types of technology (such as printed materials, video materials and online material to provide contact between instructor and student, to enhance 2-way communication (Mboroki, 2011).

Ezekoka (2015) investigated the prospects and constraints of blended learning among National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) students in Owerri study center. The study adopted descriptive survey design using researcher-made questionnaire to collect data. Four research questions guided this study with mean scores as the statistical tool. Fifty (50) students were randomly selected from across the disciplines as respondents. The findings of the study revealed that blended learning benefits the NOUN students because it enables them to study anywhere and at their own pace; it facilitates independent learning; it helps to reduce the withdrawal rate of students among others. The present study differs from that of Ezekoka (2015) in the sense that, the present study conducted in North central, Nigeria and on Distance Education Students while Ezekoka (2015) conducted in Owerri and among National Open University (NOUN) students. Both studies adopted descriptive survey research. However, this study investigated the perception on the use of blended learning method among Distance Education Students in the North-Central, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the influence of technology in education globally, some question still arises in the mind of every teachers as to the demands in coping with changes. Some of the questions are; what are the right types of technology for pedagogy? How does ICT integrate to pedagogical content? To mention but few. These questions need to be address in order to have clear vision in today's education. Therefore, this calls for an urgent concern to educators and policy maker to let teachers know how far the integration of ICT influence the pedagogy in teaching and learning process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find out students' perspective on use of Blended learning method in Distance learning, Nigeria. Specifically, the study determined:

- (i) the benefit that blended learning method provides to students in Distance Education
- (ii) the challenges faced by the students in Distance Education in using Blended Learning methods
- (iii) the blended learning models that applied to Distance Education Courses

Research Questions

To put this study in focus, the following research questions were answered:

- (i) What is the benefit of Blended Learning method to the Distance Education students in North Central?
- (ii) What are the challenges facing Distance Education Students in using Blended Learning method in North Central Nigeria?
- (iii) What are the models of Blended Learning method that applied to Distance Education courses?

Methodology

The study is a descriptive survey research and Fajemidagba (2009), stated that, a descriptive research involved the explanation of an observed phenomenon. The population for this study consists of all Distance Education students in Nigeria. The target population for this study comprised of National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) and National Teacher Institute (NTI) study centers in North Central Nigeria. These two institute were particularly chosen because they have adopted the use of blended learning method in teaching and learning processes.

The sample for the study consisted of two hundred and twenty-three students from six study centers in North Central selected by random sampling technique. The selection cut across Kogi, Kwara and Niger States study centers. Students' Perception on the Use of Blended Learning Questionnaire (SPUBLQ) was the instrument used for this study. It was divided into four sections (Section A, B, C, and D). Section A was designed to collect demographic data of the respondents, Section B, C and D consist of statements which were designed using 5- point likert scale (namely, 1 as Strongly Disagree, 2 as Disagree, 3 as undecided, 4 as Agree and 5 as Strongly Agree). Students used (SPUBLQ) to express the benefit, challenges and model of blended learning method respectively.

The instrument used was validated by two Distance Education Senior Lecturers in the field of science education to ascertain if the items had face and content validity, some items were rephrased by the experts. It was trial- tested in a similar sample within the research area but outside of the main study and reliability coefficient of 0.88 was obtained respectively, using Cronbach's Alpha formula.

The data obtained in respect of each research questions were analyzed using Mean and Rank. A Mean response below 3.0 was considered Disagree while a mean response of 3.0 and above was considered as Agree. This implies that, the researchers used 3.0 as bench mark.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the benefit of Blended Learning method to the Distance Education students in North Central?

Table 1: Presents rank order of students' mean response on the benefit for the use of blended learning method in distance learning (N = 223)

S/N	Statements on the Benefit of Blended Learning	Mean	Rank	Decision
1.	Blended learning facilitate independent learning	3.96	1 st	Agree
2.	I can access the learning activities at the time convenient to me.	3.58	6 th	Agree
3.	Blended learning enable students to study anywhere at their own pace	3.88	2 nd	Agree
4.	Blended learning enhance students learning outcome	3.65	4 th	Agree
5.	I decide how much I want to learn in a given time in Blended learning method	3.52	7 th	Agree
6.	Blended learning helps to reduce the withdrawal rate	3.81	3 rd	Agree
7.	Blended learning helps in balance work and school	3.61	5 th	Agree
	Blended learning Method allow me to learn by myself.	3.51	8 th	Agree
8.	Grand Mean	3.71		

From the table 1 above, the respondents agree to all the eight statements with mean score greater than 3.0. However, blended learning facilitate independent learning (3.96), blended learning enable students to study at their own pace (3.88) and blended learning help to reduce the withdrawal rate of students (3.81) were ranked highest as the major benefit of the blended learning, statement 2,4,5,7 and 8 were ranked low accordingly. The Grand Mean was 3.71, this shows that, the use of blended learning method benefits students in distance learning.

Research Question 2: What are the challenges facing Distance Education Students in using Blended Learning method in North Central Nigeria?

Table 2: Presents rank order of students' mean response on the challenges facing distance education students for the use of blended learning method (N = 223)

S/N	Statement on the challenges faced the use of blended learning method	Mean	Rank	Decision
1.	Blended Learning Method is only meant for computer expert.	3.06	9 th	Agree
2.	Blended Learning Method is not giving an equal opportunity to brilliant and slow learners.	2.84	10 th	Disagree
3.	Reading on screen only does not give me better understanding of the content.	3.23	5 th	Agree
4.	Blended Learning Method is better for only hardworking students.	3.70	4 th	Agree
5.	Blended Learning method more costly than traditional method	3.72	3 rd	Agree
6.	Internet connection problem make Blended Learning Method ineffective.	3.79	2 nd	Agree
7.	Inadequate power supply	3.86	1 st	Agree
8.	Course materials online are very cumbersome. Blended Learning method make me feel Isolated at time.	3.08	7 th	Disagree
9.	Course materials online is not easy to understand	3.07	8 th	Agree
	Grand Mean	3.12	6th	Agree
		3.35		

From the table 2 above, the respondents agree to nine statements with mean score greater than 3.0. However, Inadequate power supply (3.86), internet connection problem (3.79) and were ranked highest as the major challenges of the use of blended learning, statement 5,4,3,10,8,9,1 and 2 were ranked low accordingly, and the respondents Disagree with the statement 2 and 8, shows that, course materials are well presented on the internet. The Grand Mean was 3.35, this implies that, the use of blended learning method in Distance Education has some challenges faced by the students.

Research Question 3: How Blended Learning method is being apply to Distance Education courses?

Table 3: Presents rank order of students' mean response on the ways blended learning is being applied to distance learning courses (N = 223)

S/N	Statement on ways Blended Learning is being applied	Mean	Rank	Decision
1.	The face to face drive model	3.71	1 st	Agree
2.	Rotational model	3.58	3 rd	Agree
3.	Flex model	2.88	4 th	Disagree
4.	Online laboratory approach	2.73	5 th	Disagree
5.	Self- blend model	3.65	2 nd	Agree
6.	The online driver model	2.61	6 th	Disagree
	Grand Mean	3.19		

From the table 3 above, the respondents agree to the statements 1, 2, 5 with mean score greater than 3.0. However, the face to face drive model (3.71), self- blend model (3.65) and rotational model (3.58) were ranked highest as the major Blended Learning Model used in Distance Education while the respondents Disagree with the statement 3,4 and 6 were ranked low. The Grand Mean was 3.19 which indicated that there some Blended Learning models used in Distance Education.

Discussion

Based on the result analyzed on the benefit of Blended learning to distance education students reveal that, Blended Learning facilitate independent learning, it enables students to study anywhere at their own pace, it helps to reduce the withdrawal rate, enhance student learning outcome, it helps in balance work and school, it helps in access the learning activity at the time convenient to me and it helps in deciding how much the student want to learn respectively. This finding is in line with Sharpe, Benfied, Robert and Francis (2006) cited by Ezekola (2015) who agree that, benefits of Blended Learning are; enable students to study anywhere at their own pace, facilitate independent learning, cost effective and enhances students learning outcomes. The finding is also in agreement with that of Osguthorpe and Graham (2003) who stated that, blended learning increase pedagogical richness, access to knowledge, social interaction, easy revision and cost effectiveness.

The findings from the study also indicate that inadequate power supply, internet connection problem, lack of computer operating skill/competence, make the students feel isolated at time and computer lab not well equipped with technology devices (ICT gadget) respectively are barriers to effective use of blended learning in distance education in Nigeria. This is in agreement with earlier finding of Ezekoka (2015) who stated that technophobia, lack of computer operating skill by students, poor internet connectivity and feel lonely and isolate when using blended learning are challenges facing the use of blended learning in Distance Education. The findings of the study also show that, three models out of six models propounded by Osguthorpe and Graham (2003) are practiced in Distance Education in North-Central Nigeria which are; face to face drive model, self-bland model and Rotational Model.

Conclusion

Blended learning is a teaching method which involves instructional delivery through online and face to face interaction. The invention of television transmission, online database and discussion board which were invented in 20th century enable the teacher to blend face to face instruction with reading home work. The use of blended method will enhance teaching and learning because Distance education students benefited the use of blended learning method. Despite the challenges faced the use of blended learning in Distance Education, blended learning method should be encouraged.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study;

- (i) The Federal Government should try to equip the laboratory of higher institutions with technological tools even given out laptops to students so as to make the use Blended Learning Method easier.
- (ii) The Federal Government should ensure good internet connectivity and electric power supply in Nigeria to boost the use of Blended Learning Method and other ICT's tools.

- (iii) The curriculum planners and policy makers should ensure that models of Blended Learning Method are used in Nigerian classroom.

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