
Business Education Students' Opinions on the Relevance and Challenges of Blended Learning in Teaching and Learning of Business Education in Edo State

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ABSTRACT

The study examined business education students' opinions on the relevance and challenges of blended learning in teaching and learning in Edo State. Four research questions were raised to guide the study with two corresponding hypotheses formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The descriptive survey research design was adopted in the study. The population was 291 final year business education students from the two public universities offering Business education in Edo State. The structured questionnaire titled: Blended Learning Questionnaire (BLEQ) was developed by the researcher and was structured in a 4-point likert scale, showing Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). The instrument was validated by experts in the field and the Cronbach Alpha was used in obtaining a reliability coefficient of 0.84. The researcher was able to retrieve 209 questionnaires from the respondents and they were subjected to further statistical analysis using Mean, Standard Deviation and the Independent Sample t-test. The Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 was used for this purpose. The findings revealed that blended learning strategy is utilized to a high extent. The analyses of the hypotheses revealed that there was a significant difference in the views of male and female Business education; Federal and State Business education students; Office Technology and Management (OTM) and Accounting Education students as regards blended learning strategy utilization. Based on the findings, a major recommendation advanced was that projectors should be used in delivering lectures.

Keywords: Blended learning, Computer skills and Business education

INTRODUCTION

Business Education is a fundamental aspect of Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) which has emphasis on equipping the learners with the necessary competencies needed to function effectively in the work place. According to Imeokparia and Edigbonya (2013), business education is an aspect of education that is geared at equipping the learners (students) with business and education competencies skills, knowledge and attitude) needed to effectively function in the world of work either as an employee or an employer (job/wealth creator). For the graduates of this programme to be able to perform well in the work place, they have to be properly taught. This has made stakeholders in Business Education to continue to strategize on the most suitable instructional methods to be adopted in teaching Business Education. This development has further made the concept of blended learning more prominence.

The body of literature on blended learning proves that there is no unity on the definition of blended learning. According to Driscoll (2002), blended learning is a combination of instructional methods. In a similar vein, Rovai and Jordan (2004) claimed that blended learning is a mixture of online learning and classroom that contain some of the facilities of online courses with the presence of face-to-face communication. Other researchers believed that the systems called blended learning integrates face-to-face instruction with computer mediated one (Graham, 2006; Stubbs, Martin & 2006). Colin and Moonen as cited in Rovai and Jordan (2004) describes blended learning as a hybrid of traditional face-to-face and online learning so that instruction occurs both in the classroom and online, and where the online component becomes a natural extension of traditional classroom learning. Oliver (2005) and Macdonald (2006) agree that blended learning is a method by which technology and live instruction are utilised to deliver a course. It has equally been stressed that the basic principle of blended learning is the strength of communication and interaction.

Allan (2007) developed three models of blended learning and they include: supplementary, transformative and learner-led approaches. In the supplementary model, the educational resources and communication systems can be provided through a virtual learning environment to support the physical content of the course traditional person-to-person environment. In the transformative model, an existing course is radically modified to achieve the same or enriched outcomes using the most appropriate means for each module or dimension. Such redesign of courses could produce new curricula (Graham, 2006). In the learner-led model, a wide range of methods and ICT applications are used to engage students in learning (Almalki, 2011).

Blended learning has been described as a vital instructional strategy that offers active learning environment. The learning environment is an important predictor of business education students' academic performance. With blended learning in place, all the senses of business education students are stimulated. In a similar vein, Davis and Fill (2007) have emphasized that blended learning changes students' experiences and outcomes due to its flexibility (Hameed, Badii & Cullen, 2008). The flexible nature of blended learning therefore offers many sources of learning for business education students and this in turn leads to deep understanding of topics and concept in business education (Chen & Jones, 2007). Since business education is a skill-based programme, blended learning becomes an instructional strategy of choice because of its potential in utilizing both the traditional teaching mode and the online teaching mode. In support of this assertion, Yuen (2010) concluded that online learning engagement provides an interactive setting for communication among teachers and students in the classroom and many facilitate co-operative activities even beyond the classrooms.

Despite the above relevance of blended learning, there are still some identifiable challenges which scholars have stressed to be hindering the smooth implementation of blended learning strategy. The poor funding of education in Nigeria is identified as a major challenge to the implementation of education policies of which blended learning is inclusive. Fund (money) is one of the most vital resources that is used to acquire other resources like facilities, manpower and others. The current budgetary allocation to education in Nigeria is worrisome compared to her counterparts in developed countries of the world. The inadequacy of instructional facilities has continued to receive attention from researchers and this is an impediment to the implementation of blended learning. Most countries where blended learning has been working are having

reasonable quantity and quality facilities in place for teaching and learning. Even when the facilities are available, there is problem of electricity supply. The poor supply of electricity by electricity providers has been the bane of technology related implementation. The absence of steady power supply will result to using alternative sources of power which will in turn become additional cost on the management. Some other factors that may pose challenge to the implementation of blended learning include poor internet connectivity/network, high maintenance cost and inadequate infrastructure.

Researchers over the years have continued to investigate blended learning strategy as an instructional strategy in teaching and learning. In a study carried out by Torrisi (2012), the author found out that the factors predicting academics' blended strategy use differ between male and female academics. Mohammed (2015) in a study concluded that blended learning is as effective as face to face learning in developing and improving knowledge and skills. The study by Alebaikan (2010) concludes that blended learning has the potential to offer a successful learning experience. This also corroborates the study by Almalki (2011) where the author found out that blended learning has the potential to improve the universities' performances in terms of quality and efficiency. Blended learning is useful to increase communication and interaction between students and instructors, which in turn would result in better learning experiences. The study also concludes that the implementation of blended learning requires a radical shift in the educational system including changes to policy, curriculum, and infrastructure and university culture. Ajide and Tik (2009) in their study found out that blended learning is very effective in making students active learners in the study of business study. It also revealed that students had attitudes towards blended learning is positive.

Blended learning is indeed a contemporary field of research in this part of the world. The growing technological awareness and utilization has further made this instructional strategy relevant. Literatures over the years have documented several benefits inherent in the implementation of blended learning. Some of the relevance of blended learning as reported by Oh and Park (2009); Davis & Fill (2007) and Hameed, Badii and Cullen (2008) includes active learning environment, changes in students' experiences and outcomes and flexibility of operations. Despite the relevance of blended learning as an effective instructional strategy, observations still reveal poor application and implementation of this strategy. Could the poor application and implementation of blended learning be due to poor funding? Could it be due to inadequacy of facilities and infrastructures? Could it be due to poor power supply or poor internet connectivity? Based on the above premise, the researchers intend to empirically investigate business education students' opinions the relevance and challenges of blended learning in teaching and learning of business education in Edo State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to investigate business education students' opinions the relevance and challenges of blended learning in teaching and learning of business education in Edo State; while the specific purposes were to determine:

- i. The opinions of business education students on the relevance of blended learning in the teaching and learning business education students in Edo State;

- ii. The opinion of business education students on the challenges of blended learning in the teaching and learning business education students in Edo State;
- iii. If male and female business education students differ in their opinions on the use of blended learning the teaching and learning of business education in Edo State; and
- iv. If there is a difference in the opinions of business education students in University of Benin and Ambrose Alli University, Edo State.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following questions and analysed using appropriate statistics:

- i. What are the opinions of business education students on the relevance of blended learning in the teaching and learning business education students in Edo State?
- ii. What are the opinion of business education students on the challenges of blended learning in the teaching and learning business education students in Edo State?
- iii. Do male and female business education students differ in their opinions on the use of blended learning in the teaching and learning of business education in Edo State?
- iv. Is there a significant difference in the opinions of business education students on the use of blended learning in University of Benin and Ambrose Alli University, Edo State?

Hypotheses

Research questions (iii) and (iv) were hypothesized and the null hypotheses formulated were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. Male and female business education students do not significantly differ in their opinions on the use of blended learning the teaching and learning of business education in Edo State; and
2. There is no significant difference in the opinions of business education students on the use of blended learning in University of Benin and Ambrose Alli University, Edo State.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized the descriptive survey design since it was basically an enquiry into the relevance and challenges of blended learning in the teaching and learning of Business education in Edo State. This is in agreement with Nworgu as cited in Omorogiuwa (2006) that a research survey is one in which a group of people or items is studied by collection and analyzing data from only a few people or items considered to be representative of the entire population. The population of this study consists of all Business education students in the two public universities offering Business education in Edo State. The total population was 291 Business education students. The entire population was used for the study. The instrument used for this study was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was used in eliciting information from the respondent and it was titled: Blended Learning Relevance and Challenges' Questionnaire (BLRACQ). It was divided into two parts – A and B. Part A was made up of the demographic information of the respondents such as sex and institution; while Part B was made up of 10 opinion statements designed in a 4-Point Rating Scale showing Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A) Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) weighted 4, 3, 2, 1 respectively.

The instrument was subjected to content and face validity. It was given to experts in Business Education in the Faculty of Education, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma and their inputs to the draft instrument were incorporated into the final questionnaire. The Cronbach's Alpha was used in ascertaining the reliability of the instrument. The instrument was administered to 20 students in Business education in Delta State University, Abraka, who were not part of the population. The reliability yielded a coefficient of .88. The researcher utilized the face to face method of data collection. The researcher was only able to retrieve 209 questionnaires from the respondents which is equivalent to 72 per cent retrieval rate. Mean and standard deviation was used in answering the two research questions and the independent sample t-test was used to analyze the two hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. When the P-value was greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis was retained and vice versa. Any mean value of 2.50 and above was considered as agree while below 2.50 was considered as disagree.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section was designed to present the results arising from the analysis and subsequently discussing them based on previous empirical studies. The data analysis for the research questions were carried out using mean and standard deviation and the results were presented in tables 1-2.

Research Question One: What are the opinions of business education students on the relevance of blended learning in the teaching and learning business education in Edo State?

To answer the research question, the frequency of the responses from the subjects was calculated. The result of the computation is:
Questionnaire items 1 – 5 were designed to address the research question. The summary of responses is as given in table

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on relevance of Blended Learning

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	With Blended learning, I can access the learning activities at times convenient to me.	3.68	.57	Agree
2.	The online material is available at locations suitable for me.	3.64	.63	Agree
3.	I am allowed to work at my own speed to achieve learning objectives.	3.09	.49	Agree
4.	I decide how much I want to learn in a given period.	3.57	.76	Agree
5.	I decide when I want to learn with blended learning.	3.04	.52	Agree
	Cluster	3.40	.59	Agree

Source: Field Survey, 2017

The Table 1 reveals that the mean responses ranged from 3.04 to 3.68 while the standard deviation ranged from .49 to .76. The Table reveals that the respondents rated all the items above 2.5, which was the mean score for decision making. Since the cluster mean was 3.40 and it was above the criterion mean value of 2.5, it reveals that blended learning is relevant in the teaching and learning business education in Edo State.

Research Question Two: What are the opinions of business education students on the challenges of blended learning in the teaching and learning business education in Edo State?

To answer the research question, the frequency of the responses from the subjects was calculated. Questionnaire items 6 – 10 were designed to address the research question. The summary of responses is as given in table 2.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on Challenges of Blended Learning

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
6.	Blended learning implementation involves high initial fund for start-up.	3.61	.69	Agree
7.	Business educators with low computer skills will not be able to explore the potentials of blended learning.	3.08	.61	Agree
8.	The inadequacy of technical and support staff is a challenge in the implementation of blended learning.	3.14	.58	Agree
9.	The inadequacy of competent Business educators is a challenge in the implementation of blended learning.	3.74	.54	Agree
10.	The poor internet connectivity in most campuses is a challenge in the implementation of blended learning.	3.83	.42	Agree
Cluster		3.48	.57	Agree

Source: Field Survey, 2017

The Table 2 reveals that the mean responses ranged from 3.08 to 3.83 while the standard deviation ranged from .42 to .69. The Table reveals that the respondents rated all the items above 2.5, which was the mean score for decision making. Since the cluster mean was 3.48 and it was above the criterion mean value of 2.5, it reveals that blended learning is faced with some challenges in the course of teaching and learning business education in Edo State.

HO₁: Male and female business education students do not significantly differ in their opinions on the use of blended learning the teaching and learning of business education in Edo State.

Table 3: t-test analysis on male and female business education students' opinions on benefits and challenges of blended learning

Sex	N	Mean	df	T	P	Remark
Male	144	35.13	207	5.10	0.000	Significant
Female	65	32.85				

Source: Field Survey, 2017

The result of table 3 shows that the degree of freedom of 207 has a t-value of 5.10 and a p-value of .000. Since the p-value of .000 is less than the alpha value of .05. This means that male and female business education students significantly differ in their opinions on the use of blended learning the teaching and learning of business education in Edo State. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

HO₂: There is no significant difference in the opinions of business education students on the use of blended learning in University of Benin and Ambrose Alli University, Edo State.

Table 4: t-test analysis on UNIBEN and AAU business education students' opinions on benefits and challenges of blended learning

Sex	N	Mean	Df	T	P	Remark
UNIBEN	67	32.43	207	-6.88	0.000	Significant
AAU	142	35.36				

Source: Field Survey, 2017

The result of table 3 shows that the degree of freedom of 207 has a t-value of -6.88 and a p-value of .000. Since the p-value of .000 is less than the alpha value of .05, the null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This means that there is no significant difference in the opinions of business education students on the use of blended learning in University of Benin and Ambrose Alli University, Edo State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings from research question one revealed that Business Education students agreed to all the five items that blended learning is relevant in the teaching and learning of Business Education in Edo State. The findings of this study also corroborate the findings of Davis and Fill (2007) and Hameed, Badii and Cullen (2008) who emphasized that blended learning changes students' experiences and outcomes due to its flexibility. The findings is also in support of Chen and Jones (2007) who concluded that the flexible nature of blended learning offers many sources of learning for students and this in turn leads to deep understanding of topics and concept

The findings arising from the analysis of research question two revealed that blended learning is faced with some challenges in the course of teaching and learning of Business Education students in Edo State. The findings revealed that poor funding, poor computer skills, inadequate technical and support staff, inadequate business educators and poor internet connectivity pose

challenges to the effective utilization of blended learning in the teaching and learning of business education in Edo State. This finding equally corroborates the findings of Ediagbonya (2016) and Franklin, Myers, and Yaron, (2007).

The analysis of hypothesis 1 clearly shows that male and female business education students significantly differ in their opinions on the use of blended learning in the teaching and learning of business education in Edo State. The analysis of hypothesis 2 shows that there is no significant difference in the opinions of business education students on the use of blended learning in University of Benin and Ambrose Alli University, Edo State. The variation in their responses may be due to the environment where both institutions are. That is, the society may have greatly influenced the usage of the blended learning strategy.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can therefore be concluded that despite the challenges being faced in the utilization of blended learning in universities in Edo State, its use is still relevant in the acquisition of Business Education skills. The findings further revealed that the potentials of blended learning cannot be over-emphasized, and as such, stakeholders should continue to encourage all desirous of teaching and learning to utilize the blended learning strategy. It can also be concluded that male and female business education students significantly differ in their opinions on the use of blended learning in the teaching and learning of business education in Edo State; and that, there is no significant difference in the opinions of business education students on the use of blended learning in University of Benin and Ambrose Alli University, Edo State..

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings arising from the study, the following recommendations are considered important:

1. Business Educators should be re-trained on properly utilizing blended learning strategy;
2. More funding should be provided by relevant stakeholders;
3. Government and private individuals should invest more in providing accessible internet services;
4. More competent business educators should be employed; and
5. More technical and support staff should be employed in institutions of learning.

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