LECTURERS' PERCEPTION ON THE UTILIZATION OF BLENDED LEARNING FOR INSTRUCTION IN SELECTED COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN NORTH-EAST, NIGERIA

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Abstract
Blended learning is an instructional strategy that requires the use of online and traditional face to face pedagogies in teaching-learning activity. Thus, this study examines lecturers' perception on the utilization of blended learning for instruction in selected Colleges of Education in North-east, Nigeria. The population for this study comprised all lecturers in Colleges of Education in North-east, Nigeria, while 170 lecturers were randomly sampled from two selected Colleges of Education in North-east, Nigeria. Descriptive survey research type was adopted and a 4-point Likert-type scale questionnaire was used. Four research questions and two hypotheses were answered and tested using mean and t-test statistics respectively. The sampled lecturers were further stratified along gender. The instrument of the study was the researchers' designed questionnaire tagged "Questionnaire on Lecturers' Perception on Blended Learning Utilization for Instruction". The findings revealed amongst others that; blended learning has tremendous use for instruction with the mean rating of 2.73, using 2.5 as the decision rule and no significant difference existed between the perception of male and female lecturers in the usefulness of blended learning for instruction. Thus, the study revealed that blended learning is very important in order to achieve meaningful, productive, interactive and individualized learning approach. It was recommended amongst others that blended learning strategy should be integrated into the teaching and learning for Colleges of Education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Perception; Information and Communication Technology; Blended learning, ICT Utilization; Gender.

Introduction
Perception refers to the process of explaining sensory impression into an integrated study of the world with the existing situations. Perception of lecturers towards the utilization of blended learning for instruction can give some evidences about its relevance in instruction. Therefore, perceived usefulness of blended learning for instruction is the lecturers and other users believe in its importance in instruction while its ease of use implies the level of its stress free during utilization. So, blended learning is the involvement of both the ICT and conventional learning strategies.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is defined as electronic based tools, which when it is properly utilized, can encourage the transformation of instruction from teacher-centered to learner-cantered (Amosa, Ogunlade, Ogunlade & Obielodan, 2016). Elmaifi (2014) remarked that applications of ICT in teaching and learning have presented a laudable

achievement in innovative strategies such as blended learning. In the same vein, Olorundare and Upahi (2013) posited that ICT is a major tool for advancing educational activities and research in developing countries. Therefore, where ICT facilities are available, teachers should thrive and be encouraged to integrate and make appropriate utilization of the resources for effective teaching and learning activities. Thus, in this age of technological advancements, digital facilities such as computers, audio-visual and online resources are increasingly replacing traditional teaching methods.

Traditionally, classroom environment is a teacher-centered approach where teacher dominates the affairs of the class through the use of chalk and talk approach with little or no intervention of students (Funso, 2004). Consequently, traditional approach is counter-productive to producing healthy, well-educated and well-rounded adult learner (Gupta, 2012). Teachers in this situation are unequipped to manage and deal appropriately with students' weaknesses in the learning process. Students usually become passive learners because they only receive information from the teachers. Arzel (2012) deduced that traditional approach follows a normal routine of conventional chalk and talk method in collaboration with simple instructional materials that are available for the teacher. Moreover, online learning on the other hand is the integration of technological devices and other specially designed online learning resources to enhance the teaching and learning process. Therefore, integration of these two strategies refers to blended learning strategy.

Blended learning is a means of solving educational problems through the integration of online learning and traditional learning strategies with the involvement and full participation of learners in teacher-students' learning experiences. Mersal and Mersal (2014) described blended learning as a technique of teaching that requires the use of two or more complementary approaches to teach the same material or content. This could be done by combining traditional method, discussion, activities and web based modules.

Kanuka, Brooks and Saranchuck (2009) described blended learning as a strategy of instructional delivery that eliminates time, location and situational barriers. Blended learning echoes the practice of distance education that warrants the flexibility of time, place and pace of students' learning (Jeffrey, Milne, Suddaby & Higgins, 2014). Thus, blended learning approach provides high quality interaction between teachers and students, since it is not limited to single pedagogical practice. Therefore, teaching and learning could be enhanced when instructor exposes learners through innovations in addition to conventional approaches (Abimbola, 2015). Therefore, blended learning helps teachers to make use of online learning experiences in addition to conventional teaching method to enhance learning.

The popularity of blended learning as a new approach to teaching and learning process is rapidly increasing. Blended learning scintillated to emerge as one of the most popular instructional strategy in the 21st century (Cuzer & Caner, 2014). This is because in the contemporary society, with the explosion of knowledge and innovations in technology, students used to access information digitally. Thus, blended learning approach provides significant instructional opportunities that the school shouldn't miss (Ferriman, 2015). Integration of online and conventional learning strategies might be considerably useful for solving and meeting the educational problems and needs (Murphy, 2003).

A good number of researches have been carried out in the field of education to find out the impact of blended learning strategy on education. For instance, Yushau (2006) observed the blended e-learning on Mathematics and computer attitudes in pre-calculus algebra. Mofeed and Al-Sous (2010) examined the effect of utilizing blended learning strategy on the ability of teachers in designing and producing educational media using descriptive method. The results revealed that teachers were able to design and produce educational media, which makes them more confident in dealing with e-learning and create their own different model of blended learning.

Similarly, the effect of blended learning strategy was investigated by Almasaeid (2014) and found out that using blended learning strategy to teach science subject has a positive impact in achievement skill and attitudes. In contrast, Cracraft (2014) found no statistically significant difference in students' achievement when taught using blended learning strategy and traditional teaching method. In another study, Kazu and Demirkol (2014) investigated the effect of blended learning environment on high school students' academic achievement and found that students exposed to blended learning outperformed their counterparts in conventional method. The students also revealed that female performed than male students.

Meyer (2014) reported that differences existed in gender similarly in both online learning and conventional learning strategies. Hence, males are inquisitive, fully involved in questions, discussions, optimistic, and remain active participants, whereas females were more submissive. Despite the contributions of blended learning strategy to the meaningful and productive learning, there are challenges to its integration to the teaching-learning process. However, the major barrier to its implementation is the users' attitude and commitment towards the integration of technology into the teaching-learning setting, thus this task could discourage the utilization among the users (Hofmann, 2014).

Research Questions

Answers were sought to the following research questions:

1. What is the lecturers' perception on the usefulness of blended learning for instruction?
2. What is the lecturers' perception on the ease of utilization of blended learning for instruction?
3. What is the lecturers' perception on the usefulness of blended learning for instruction based on gender?
4. What is the lecturers' perception on the ease of utilization of blended learning for instruction based on gender?

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

Ho_1: There is no significant difference between male and female lecturers' perception on the usefulness of blended learning for instruction

Ho_2: There is no significant difference between male and female lecturers' perception on the ease of use of blended learning for instruction

Methodology

The population for this study consisted of all lecturers in all Colleges of Education in North-east, Nigeria. The target population is all the lecturers in all the Colleges of Education in Bauchi and Yobe States of Nigeria. Thus, 170 lecturers were randomly sampled from the two sampled

Colleges of Education. The instrument for this study was researchers–designed questionnaire entitled 'lecturers' perception on the utilization of blended learning for instruction in selected colleges of education in north-east, Nigeria' Descriptive survey research type was adopted, using the 4-point Likert Scale response modes: Strongly Agree (SA = 4), Agree (A = 3), Disagree (D = 2) and Strongly Disagree (SD = 1). Hence, four research questions and two research hypotheses were answered and tested using mean rating and t-test statistical tools respectively. The total calculated mean score is four on each variable responded to, thus 2.5 was used for decision rule. Frequencies were converted to mean in the research questions one and two while research questions three and four were answered through the corresponding hypotheses one and two. Thus, hypotheses one and two were tested using *t*-test at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

This section focuses on the analysis of collected data. Data obtained in respect of research questions were analyzed using mean and t-test for the research hypotheses.

Demographic Information of Respondents

The distribution of lecturers participated in the study based on gender is shown on Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents based on Gender

Lecturers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	116	68.2
Female	54	31.8

Table 1 reveals that (116) 68.2% were male lecturers in all the sampled respondents while (54) 31.8% of them were female lecturers.

Research Question 1: What is the lecturers' perception on the usefulness of blended learning for instruction?

Table 2: Analysis of lecturers' responses onthe usefulness of blended learning for instruction

S/N	Statements	Mean
1.	I normally get detailed explanation from the textbook than searching anywhere else from the web.	2.46
2.	The use of blended learning strategy for instruction would motivate learners and facilitate better understanding.	3.12
3.	The quality of my instruction would be improved when blended learning strategy is fully integrated.	3.19
4.	Student-teacher relationship improves when blended learning strategy is fully integrated in teaching them.	2.95
5.	Blended learning strategy is tiresome, therefore traditional pedagogy is preferred.	2.42
6.	I use blended learning strategy for instruction because it enables me interacts with my students and technology at the same time	2.77

7.	The use of blended learning strategy for instruction would enable me cover the course contents within the time frame of the college	2.85
8.	Blended learning strategy supports learning experience that is collaborative and improves technological awareness.	2.86
9.	I think blackboard is sufficient enough for instruction, no need of blending with Online resources and other technology related tools.	2.30
10.	Blended learning strategy is a supplement to traditional method, but not a substitute.	2.69
11.	I prefer textbook than blending with other digital technologies.	2.47
	Grand Mean	2.73

Based on the results in Table 2, the findings reveal that lecturers in the two Colleges of Education agreed that the blended learning has tremendous use for instruction with the mean rating of 2.73, using 2.5 as the bench mark. There is an indication from the responses in items 1–11 that the blended learning is useful for instruction.

Research Question2: What is the lecturers' perception on the ease of utilization of blended learning for instruction?

Table 3: Analysis of lecturers' responses on the ease of utilization of blended learning for instruction

S/N	Statements	Mean
1.	I would find it easier to teach my students with blended learning strategy	3.27
2.	Blended learning strategy is easy to utilize for instruction.	3.08
3.	Blended learning strategy makes my teaching job better and faster.	2.95
4.	Blended learning strategy is user friendly.	2.90
5.	The flexibility of blended learning strategy would ensure speedy dissemination of information to students.	2.98
6.	With all the associated factors of internet facilities and poor network coverage, I would do all my best to integrate blended learning strategy for instruction.	2.80
7.	I will advocate for the use of blended learning strategy in education due to their relevance and convenience.	2.83
8.	Blended learning strategy is quite understandable for teaching-learning activities.	2.78
9.	It is easy to become skillful, if blended learning is fully integrated.	2.76
	Grand Mean	2.93

Based on the results in Table 3, the findings reveal that lecturers in the two Colleges of Education agreed that the use of blended learning for instruction is user friendly and stress free with the mean rating of 2.93, using 2.5 as the decision rule. Results from the responses in items 1–9 reveal that the respondents agree that blended learning is easy to use.

Ho_1: There is no significant difference between male and female lecturers' perception on the usefulness of blended learning for instruction.

Table 4: Significant difference in the perception of male and female lecturers on the usefulness of blended learning for instruction

Variable	No	Mean	Std. deviation	df	*t*-value	p-value	Remark
Male	116	2.837	.371	168	2.718	0.117	Not rejected
Female	54	2.922	.306				

NS - Not Significance at $p > 0.05$

From Table 4, analysis established that the *t*-value = 2.718, with *p*-value of 0.117 > 0.05 alpha level. This implies that the null hypothesis one, which states that there is no significant difference between male and female lecturers' perception on the usefulness of blended learning for instruction established no significant difference. Hence, the hypothesis two was not rejected.

Ho_2: There is no significant difference between male and female lecturers' perception on the ease of use of blended learning for instruction.

Table 5: Significant difference in the perception of male and female lecturers on the ease of use of blended learning for instruction

Variable	No	Mean	Std. deviation	df	*t*-value	p-value	Remark
Male	116	3.54	.23	168	14.62	0.00	Rejected
Female	54	3.34	.18				

NS - Significance at $p < 0.05$

From Table 5, analysis established that the *t*-value = 14.62, with *p*-value of 0.00< 0.05 alpha level. This implies that the null hypothesis two, which states that there is no significant difference between male and female lecturers' perception on the ease of use of blended learning for instruction established the significant difference on their perception regarding the ease of use. Hence, hypothesis two was rejected.

Discussion

The perception of male and female lecturers on the usefulness of blended learning for instruction was examined in research question one. Thus, the results of the mean value revealed that male and female lecturers agreed that blended learning has significant roles on the meaningful and productive teaching and process. Therefore, finding in this study is in line with the submission of Ferriman (2015), who asserted that blended learning strategy has noteworthy instructional opportunities, which should be encouraged by the schools. Moreover, research question two studied the ease of use of blended learning for instruction among male and female lecturers. It was affirmed through the mean rating, though the acceptance of its users' friendly was majorly among the male lecturers.

From the corresponding hypotheses, hypothesis 1 revealed that significant difference existed between male and female lecturers on their perception towards the usefulness of blended learning for instruction. This is supported with the submission of Shantakumari and Sajith (2014), who reported that no difference was observed in the perception of blended learning on the bases of gender. Also, research hypothesis two, established that significant difference existed between male and female lecturers' perception on the ease of use of blended learning for instruction. This finding corroborates with the submission of Meyer (2014), who submitted that males are inquisitive, fully involved in questions, discussions, optimistic, and remain active participants in the utilization of blended learning.

Conclusion

In order to be technologically developed, lecturers in Nigerian tertiary institutions have to be technologically inclined, due to its contributions to the development of education. Therefore, the teaching-learning process should embrace various innovative technologies such as blended learning strategy. Moreover, the relevance of blended learning as an instructional delivery method cannot be overemphasized. Thus, it was established from this study that blended leaning is useful for teaching-learning process. Specifically, the study concluded on the followings; the respondents agreed that the blended learning has tremendous use for instruction, the respondents agree that blended learning is easy to use, and no significant difference existed between male and female respondents' perception on the usefulness of blended learning for instruction established. Finally, no significant difference between male and female respondents' perception on the ease of use of blended learning for instruction established the significant difference on their perception regarding the ease of use.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made in this study:

(i) Blended learning strategy should be fully integrated, since it has tremendous roles on the teaching-learning process.

(ii) Both male and female lecturers should be encouraged to study the nitty-gritty of blended learning and encourage students on its utilization.

(iii) Lecturers should be adequately updated in the utilization of computer, so that blended learning as a learning strategy will be easy to use. To achieve this, in-service training and workshop on the blended learning should be constantly organized for lecturers in colleges of education.

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