ATTITUDE AND PERCEPTION OF BABCOCK UNDERGRADUATES TOWARDS ONLINE LEARNING DURING COVID-19

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Abstract

Due to Covid-19 crisis, education was shifted into emergency remote learning, and virtual classes were given through different online learning platforms such as Zoom, Google classroom, Google Meet and Microsoft Team. This study examined the attitude and perception of Babcock undergraduates of online learning during Covid-19 induced lockdown. The study adopted the survey research method. It was found that 100% of Babcock undergraduates participated in online classes during Covid-19 lockdown. Despite the high participation, level of comprehension and interpretation was low due to several challenges experience by students. This led to a passive attitude among many students towards online classes. It was therefore recommended that schools who desire to continue with online learning should improve on needed infrastructure that can bring about improved learning experiences for students.

Keywords: Covid-19, online learning, Covid-19 lockdown, participation, attitude

Introduction

The impact of COVID-19 pandemic has been felt in nearly every dimension of human life, and in all spheres of the world's economy. Businesses were shut, movement restricted and physical person to person contact was reduced to the barest minimum as a result of outbreak and rapid proliferation of the pandemic. When the World Health Organization (WHO) came to the resolute conclusion of stopping the spread of the viral pandemic, they suggested a series of safety measures such as hand washing with soap and running water for 20 seconds,

wearing of face masks, social distancing, and sit-at-home/lockdown orders across the nations (WHO, 2020). Following that trajectory, schools were also shut at all levels, leaving students confused about what becomes of their learning and future aspirations. According to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), national school closure was executed in more than half of the world's student populace, in a bid to stop the spread of the pandemic (UNESCO, 2020).

Similarly, data from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) showed that 102 countries around the world closed all schools, while many others closed schools in major cities to stop the spread of the virus, and that over 900 million children and young people stayed away from school (OECD, 2020). Being that learning must continue, teachers and education managers had to devise an alternative means through which students can be reached while they stayed home. This development brought about the widespread usage for the first time, of online or e-learning platforms in many developing countries to provide learning to the teaming students who stayed at home due to the pandemic. The emergence of the COVID-19 therefore made many countries, including Nigeria to not only consider, but to adopt a web-based learning approach to ensure the continuation of the education process. Online or E-learning was no more to be thought of as in future tense, but as a present phenomenon, which helped provide an answer to teaching and learning problems of many nations in the world (Lawal, 2020).

In Nigeria, online learning, though in use before COVID-19 pandemic outbreak (Folorunsho, 2011), was not popular. A few Nigerian schools, such as the University of Ibadan's Distance Learning Centre, National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), and some private universities, in addition to the traditional face-to-face mode of learning had offered e-learning at various levels of post-secondary education (Lawal, 2020). However, following the stay at home order, online learning platforms became the only viable means to virtually continue teacher-student interaction, aided by the ubiquity of information technological (IT) devices such as desktop computers, smartphones, tablets, laptops, palmtops, and widespread internet penetration.

Nadel (2018) in his study, observed that the majority of students see online learning as groundbreaking for education, while others on the other hand have major concerns about the discrepancy associated with its credibility. The

Nigeria University Commission (NUC) had vehemently pushed back against online degrees, and in most places of employment, certificates from such programs were not widely acceptable. Also, being that tertiary institutions in Nigeria were at different stages of teaching and learning at the time of COVID-19 compulsory lockdown – some were still involved in teaching, others examining students while others were awaiting results approval and so on, no institution, teacher or student was ready for what was to come. As a result there was a high propensity that many schools, teachers and students may likely struggled to cope with the demands of online learning due to unpreparedness, and the fact that they were not accustomed to the system of teaching and learning which online platform presents. Nevertheless, schools were shutdown with many not knowing what next to expect.

Sequel to this experience, many researchers have taken it upon themselves to carry out studies especially on what effect the closure had on learners and teachers. Most of these studies have focused on either student's perception of the learning process, courses that can be taught online and those that may be difficult to teach online, mode of examination, grading system, carrying out and submitting assignments among others. Some students have also raised concerns over not knowing if this system of learning is for the long or short term, with nearly every one student having a different perspective regarding the system of learning. Murphy and Bell (2020) noted that pandemics, wars, and natural disasters should not be the only causes of change in the educational system as the world is evolving, and advocated for learning methods that is focused and based on a safer environment with the future in mind.

Among schools that responded to this shift into emergency remote learning due to Covid-19 was Babcock University, a faith based private university in Ogun state, Nigeria. During the period, the school ensured virtual classes were delivered to students through different online learning platforms. Besides, all assignments were handed out and submitted electronically to keep on evaluating students through different evaluation strategies. At the end of the semester, an online exam was assigned through designated online exam platform as determined by the institutions' management as the final evaluation of students' performance. However, one thing is clear; many students and teachers in Nigeria including those at Babcock University who were involved in teaching and learning using various e-learning portals did so for the first time.

Considering the low level of information technology in the country, the energy sector is largely underdeveloped, internet connectivity is slow and poverty still endemic among the populace (Folorunsho, 2011; Giovannella, 2020), one begins to wonder how most students perceived online learning and how they were able to cope with electricity needed to power gadgets and data for internet connectivity especially as the economy was hard hit by the effects of the pandemic. Evidences from literatures such as Norziani (2012), Lawal (2020) and Isra, Hattan, Ayat, Maimonah and Haytham (2020) have shown that both learners and teachers have a certain perception of the use of technological devices as a means of learning. This perception might stem from a lack of previous interaction with these technological devices due to non-accessibility or non-availability of necessary structures. Notwithstanding, many students managed to get involved despite varying in their perception of the entire process. This study therefore aims at examining the attitude and perception of Babcock undergraduates of online learning during COVID-19 induced lockdown.

Research objectives

1. Investigate the attitude of Babcock undergraduates towards online classes during COVID-19 pandemic;
2. Examine the perception of Babcock undergraduates towards online classes curing COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Hypothesis

H₁: There will be no significant relationship between the attitude and perception of Babcock undergraduates' towards online learning during COVID-19.

Literature Review

Attitude of students towards online learning

The growth of technology as an instructional tool is influenced by both teachers' and students' attitudes towards these technologies and their ability to use them successfully (Planow, Bauder, Carr, & Sarrar, 2013). The overall approach a learner adopts will significantly influence the shape of his or her learning outcomes, which implies that attitudes affect learning as an affective component. Graham (1997) defined affective variables as the "emotionally

relevant characteristics of the individual that influence how she/he will respond to any situation." (p. 92). Wenden (1998:52) defined attitudes as "learned motivations, valued beliefs, evaluations, what one believes is acceptable, or responses oriented towards approaching or avoiding." In a sense, attitudes are a form of "metacognitive knowledge" (p. 52). For her, two kinds of attitudes are crucial: attitudes learners hold about their role in the learning process and about their capability as learners. Wenden (1998) also claimed "learner beliefs about their role and capability as learners will be shaped and maintained by other beliefs they hold about themselves as learner" (p. 54), which affects their attitudes towards autonomy. Student attitudes toward learning is an important factor in eventual academic success, which means the more positive students are towards learning, the better and more they may learn (Ghasemi, 1996).

A number of studies indicated both positive and negative attitudes, neither of which seems dominant towards online learning. Among the positive attitudes were that online learning produce greater flexibility and increases student convenience; improve access/interaction with the instructor; produce better grades; and are a more positive overall learning experience. The major negative features were described as limitations on face-to-face interaction, concerns over the use of this technology, and an increased workload. Also, according to Guernsay (1998), learners who are new to computer technology or new to online learning itself experienced some problems about how to use and get access to data on the internet, how to join classes or how to participate actively during class sessions. As a result, they become frustrated, which is the most frequent negative comment related to the use of computers. Also, students who lack confidence in their skills with technology are less likely to use it because "it threatens their senses of competence in front of others" (Guernsay, 1998:7). Simply put, they are afraid of making mistakes. Leite (2014) discovered no significant differences in attitudes between male and female students or between students taking and not taking a computer-related class. Comparison of data from freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior students also did not reveal any significant differences. Among the positive aspects, learners listed the greater flexibility and learner convenience due to time shifting and associated advantages of time management.

Roh, Kim and Yu (2011) indicated that young learners have a more positive attitude towards web use in general, implying that they ought to be more

comfortable with online learning. However, Nadel (2018) claimed that adult students are typically more enthusiastic and structured in their approach to online learning. Perhaps this is due to maturity and recognition of the value of convenient web-based course opportunities. Boling, Hough, Krinsky, Saleem & Stevens (2012) indicates that students' attitudes toward technology often evolve with student familiarity with the technology. Students new to a particular technology may initially exhibit some concern about the role of technology in the learning experience. If this occurs, these students typically demonstrate a reluctance to actively participate in web-based studies. However, a series of studies has shown that familiarity with technology overtime erodes anxious feelings as the user becomes used to the computer and the internet (Jones, 1992). Recent developments can attest to this observation in the sense that many students who were not very comfortable with online learning during Covid-19 pandemic due to unfamiliarity and lack of adequate understanding of various online platforms have since accustomed to it. Many schools, including Babcock University have left some of their general courses involving large number of student online due to apprehension surrounding large gatherings. This development has led to students getting used online learning with many who were not comfortable with it becoming used to the online system of learning. Gifford (2019) carried out a study to determine graduate students' attitudes toward the time spent in taking a course via the Internet compared to taking a class in the regular classroom. Graduate students completed a course in research on curriculum and instruction taught entirely via a Web-based program and email. Students would read articles and post their responses to given questions each week; they would read and post comments to assigned group members. Results indicated that the majority of students felt that more time was spent on the Internet-based class than in the regular classroom. They also indicated that self-discipline and self-motivation were necessary to complete a course via the Internet.

Theoretical Framework

The Social Learning Theory is based on the idea that humans learn from daily interactions with others within a social context. Separately, by observing the behaviors of others, people develop similar behaviors. After observing the behavior of others, people assimilate and imitate that behavior, especially if

their observational experiences are positive ones or include rewards related to the observed behavior. According to Bandura, imitation involves the actual reproduction of observed motor activities (Bandura, 1977). It is rooted in many of the basic concepts of traditional learning theory. Bandura believes that direct reinforcement could not account for all types of learning. For that reason, in his theory he added a social element, arguing that people can learn new information and behaviors by watching other people. According to the elements of this theory there are three general principles for learning from each other. These are Observation, imitation and modeling. The principles of social learning are assumed to operate in the same way throughout life. Observational learning may take place at any age. Insofar as exposure to new influential, powerful models that control resources may occur at life stage, new learning through the modeling process is always possible (Newman, 2007).

Methodology

Descriptive survey research method was applied in this study. A sample of 305 undergraduates was selected using multi-staged sampling technique. A validated instrument was used to gather primary data; analysis of which was carried out using descriptive and inferential statistical tools of mean, standard deviation and linear regression.

Results and discussion of findings

Below is the presentation of results and discussion of findings.

Table 1: Attitudes of Babcock undergraduates towards Covid-19 online classes

Items	SA Freq (%)	A Freq (%)	D Freq (%)	SD Freq (%)	Mean $\bar{x}$
I was able to concentrate during online classes	53 (17.8)	89 (30.0)	145 (48.8)	-	2.99
I was unserious during online classes	13 (4.4)	56 (18.9)	196 (66.0)	32 (10.8)	1.59
I was always late to class for different reasons	26 (8.8)	68 (22.9	129	74 (24.9)	2.20

			(43.4)		
I felt very comfortable participating in online classes	81 (27.3)	12 (4.0)	204 (68.7)	-	1.93
I did not participate in online classes and I was not bothered	-	-	140 (47.1)	157 (52.9)	1.51
Overall Mean					**2.03**

Source: Field Survey 2021

Table 1 show that Babcock undergraduates had a negative attitude towards Covid-19 online classes despite that they participated in the exercise. Results depicts that majority of students were not able to concentrate during online classes ($\bar{x} = 2.99$). Although students disagree that they were unserious during online classes ($\bar{x} = 1.59$), many were always late to online classes for different reasons during Covid-19 ($\bar{x} = 2.20$). The result also showed that many students ($\bar{x} = 1.93$) did not feel comfortable attending online classes during that period. All participants disagreed not to have attended online classes and did not bother about it. This result implies that despite their participation, many students were not comfortable with online classes and consequently had a negative attitude towards it.

Hypothesis test

H_1: There will be no significant relationship between the attitude and perception of Babcock undergraduates' towards online learning during COVID-19.

Table 2: ANOVA & Model Summary Testing Significant relationship between students' attitude and perception towards online learning

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5856.206	2	2928.103	70.081	.000[b]
	Residual	21684.782	294	41.782		
	Total	27540.988	296			

R= 0.461
R Square = 0.213
Adjusted R Square = 0.210

Source: Field Survey 2021

Table 2 shows the ANOVA and model summary computations in relation to the test of significant relationship of attitude and perception of Babcock undergraduates towards online learning. The result indicate that there is a significant relationship of attitude on the perception of Babcock undergraduates towards online learning during Covid-19 lockdown ($F_{(2, 294)}$= 70.081, Adj. R^2= 0.210, p< 0.05). This suggests that the negative attitude of students towards online learning coloured there perception of the mode of learning. Because students had a negative attitude to e-learning, their perception of it was also affected. The model indicates that attitude explained 21 percent (Adj. R^2 = 0.210) variation of students' perception towards online learning during Covid-19 lockdown. Therefore, the hypothesis that there will be no significant relationship of attitudes on perception of online learning among Babcock undergraduates was rejected.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined the attitude and perception of Babcock undergraduates towards online learning during Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. It was discovered in this study that undergraduates' attitude towards online classes was low despite their high level of participation. This finding aligns with that of Planow, Bauder, Carr and Sarrar (2013) who observed that lack of technological prowess can negatively affect the attitude of both the teacher and learner towards technology based online learning. However, the finding also negates that of Roh, Kim and Yu (2011) who indicated that young learners have a more positive attitude towards web use in general, implying that they ought to be more comfortable with online learning. As seen in the result of this study, the young learners here (undergraduates) had more of a negative attitude despite that they have knowledge of mobile technology use. This negative attitude might have resulted from the observation of Barron's (1987) study which indicated that students' attitudes toward technology often evolve with student familiarity with the technology. Students new to a particular technology may initially exhibit some concern about the role of technology in the learning experience. If this occurs, these students typically demonstrate a reluctance to

actively participate in web-based studies. Although Babcock undergraduates actively participated in online learning during Covid-19 lockdown, they were relatively new to such system of learning. This could account for the kind of attitude they developed towards it, coupled with other challenges they had to contend with, which could have added to the difficulty they experienced and the negative attitude they developed toward online learning. The hypothesis test further revealed a significant relationship of attitude on the perception of Babcock undergraduates towards online learning during Covid-19. According to Akinkunmi (2020), online learning should provide students with easily accessible hitch-free platforms to study from remote locations in times of need. But this was not the case as students contended with several challenges during online classes which resulted in the negative attitude they developed towards it. Folorunsho (2011) noted that there are several challenges that tend to militate against online learning especially in developing countries. His observation was based on the nature of underdeveloped infrastructure and the level of technological advancement prevalent in most developing countries including Nigeria. All these put together resulted in a negative attitude and poor perception of e-learning by many Babcock undergraduates who experienced full-fledged online learning for the first time during COVID-19 lockdown.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study examined the attitude and perception of Babcock undergraduates towards online learning during Covid-19. Results revealed that students had a low attitude towards online learning despite that they participated highly. At the beginning of the online classes, students approached it with a high level of expectation, this dropped with time as many struggled through several challenges during that period of COVID-19 lockdown. It is recommended that schools who desire to continue with online learning should improve on needed infrastructure that can enable improved learning experiences for students.

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