

Blended Learning: A Nostrum for Effective Teaching and Learning in Post-COVID-19 Africa

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Abstract

In recent times, one of the major reasons for the promotion and continuous relevance of online learning platforms is to reduce the rapid spread of COVID-19 most especially among the middle age. It is expected to engender continued access to learning anywhere irrespective of time and location. This does not preclude the traditional face-to-face method of teaching from providing an opportunity for robust student-teacher interaction. The combination of these two modes of teaching could be termed blended learning or blended learning, and it is fast becoming a popular approach to teaching in this post-COVID-19 era. Blended learning as an approach to the teaching-learning system is a necessary merging of face-to-face traditional teaching approach and online-based class for actual learning that encourages teacher's control of class activity in post-COVID-19 time. Notwithstanding, the online method of teaching is characterized by problems occasioned by individualization and a series of other challenges in aftermath of post-COVID-19. Blended learning has therefore been shown to encompass numerous benefits that are lacking in either the online or internet-based teaching methods or the traditional face-to-face method of teaching. These are found in examples such as Flipped learning, Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI), live chat and other e-learning environment techniques that have been reported to boost learning outcomes. It is instructive to note that despite the advancements and seeming benefits, teacher-student interaction which is quintessential to student development has been estranged. This is a strong limitation that may make the sole adoption of learning strategies outside the regular classes (Online Learning) more complicated. It is recommended that the blended learning approach should be encouraged to help synchronize the two teaching strategies to maximize the benefits that can minimize or eradicate the inherent deficiencies.

Key words: Blended learning, e-learning, face-to-face method, teaching.

1. Introduction

Education shapes individuals to fit into their respective societies and as a result, it is very expedient for a person to have access to quality education through planned experiences to be a useful member of the society. As it were, education makes available the way for an individual to reach his destiny by inculcating in him acceptable social responsibilities. Education

is about learning experiences that are planned to modify human behaviour that would in turn show understanding, or acquisition of skills

through study, practice and involvement. Such learning occurs through

teachings that are capable of causing changes in human behaviour that are relatively permanent. In this regard, education as a phenomenon that

affects all facets of human activity is always impacted by any freaky disaster that happens in the world (Basilaia, 2020). No wonder, the COVID-19 epidemic has left its footprints on the sand of time and especially in education.

In history, the pandemic has gone into records as the largest disturbance to human activities most especially in the education sector. The aftermath was the extreme challenges to the facilitation of learning. This without a doubt is already having a nearly universal negative influence on learners and teachers around the world; from pre-primary up to universities, adult learning, and skills development establishments. As of mid-April 2020, the record has it that, 94 per cent of children that were supposed to be in school studying and many other individuals worldwide were shut out of education, representing 1.58 billion in over 200 countries across the world (Kabli, Abdellah, Rizzello, Alessandro, Trotta, Annarita, 2021).

This situation has prompted the whole world into the realization that situation planning is urgently needed for academic institutions (Radha, 2019) This is a state or condition that demands humanity's cooperation to urgently salvage and guide students, faculties, academic staff, communities, societies, and the nations in general from the catastrophe that may result in future. The occurrence of the virus which was tagged as one of the deadliest contagious diseases in recent times was most unfortunate.

As a result, most sectors of human endeavours were coaxed to close down and educational institutions were not left behind. This approach served as 'one of the ways to control its spread. In consequence, the academia and all stakeholders had to think of ways to facilitate instruction in order to foreclose the process of formal education going into relegation as a result

of lockdown hence, measures were put in place. As a result of this development, the introduction of e-learning or online learning came into the limelight.

In today's instructional process, teaching and learning have metamorphosed from what they used to be to another level whereby people are now digitally connected for a teaching-learning that is effective and successful. As teacher education and our contemporary world evolve, therefore, practising teachers need to cooperate with curriculum planners and other stakeholders in education to understand what a technology-supported classroom and the lessons resulting from it represent. It facilitates an enabling environment for stakeholders to cooperate, explore, and play with technological tools that make learning a pleasure rather than a task (Amoran, 2021).

There is a diversity of opinions that are related to the use of e-learning and its pedagogy. Some of the opinions bother on approachability, cost, easy-to-use, method of teaching, long-term learning and policy among other factors. However, Fakuade, (2021) posited that the online mode of learning is easily accessible and can even reach rural and remote areas. According to the researcher, it is considered to be a relatively affordable type of learning that lowers the cost of transportation, accommodation, and the overall cost of institution-based learning when compared with regular learning mode (Adedoja & Abimbade, 2013). An interesting aspect of online learning is flexibility because it enables a learner to schedule or plan his time for the completion of courses available online (Fakuade & Ariyibi, 2017).

Nevertheless, findings have also revealed that there are some limitations to online learning or e-learning. According to Olasunkanmi (2020), Nigerian University students had a negative

disposition to the use of e-learning or online teaching as a result of some views that are related to their homefront situations. Some of these negative dispositions were the high cost of data, erratic power supply, internet network fluctuations and distractions from the neighbourhood, friends and relatives. Nonetheless, if the environment had been safe and the necessary infrastructure put in place in rural and urban centres, the learners would have been physically present in the schools and most of the limitations would have been taken care of.

When Face-to-face lectures are combined with technology, it affords an upward thrust to blended learning and flipped classrooms. This range of learning environments possesses the capability of developing the learning skills of the individual (Akingbemisilu, 2017). This is because learners can learn anytime and anywhere and, in the process, they develop new skills that lead to life-long learning. It is heartwarming to note that, education stakeholders give cognizance to the need to rapidly adopt online learning in this dynamic situation. The severe spread of Corona Virus disease has also added more weight to the arguments in favour of e-learning as a panacea for advancement in education in instances of national crisis.

2. E-Learning

E-learning has a special and unique feature such as its training that is simple and web-based. What this means is that one does not need to deploy CDs on the computer. All that is required when it comes to teaching-learning activities online is an internet connection, a web browser, and professionals who will be facilitating learning right from the classroom to the computer screen. This facility also ensures that learning is made available at any time in different locations. Learners can learn or have access to instruction

from home or wherever their location is and as well have access to learning resources that can help to aid instructions. Hence, e-learning can be referred to as the superlative and most reliable platform that allows individuals to learn at their own pace (Lawrence & Fakuade, 2021).

Studies have indicated that E-Learning can be regarded as a platform that promotes the process of instruction in a student-oriented format whereby learners determine what to learn and ways by which learning can be made very dynamic. Thus, it encourages their ability to construct new ideas by themselves. It can be defined as “learning experiences in synchronous or asynchronous environments with the use of affordable and internet access gadgets such as mobile phones, laptops, etc. In asynchronous environments, learners can be independent to communicate with their instructors as well as other co-learners irrespective of location and time (Fakuade & Ogunlade, 2019). The synchronous aspect of instruction is patterned in a way that ensures students’ access to real live instruction with their tutor hence, it is limited to time and location but gives room for immediate response between learners and their teacher (Stiftung, 2018).

To forestall the rapid growth of this virus in human endeavours, drastic measures needed to be put in place and one of such was the integration of e-learning into the teaching-learning process to facilitate impartation in a digital format. This was done through the use of applications that help instructors to have interaction with learners, through video conferencing with at least 40 to 50 students, and discussions with students that keep classes organic via the internet which can be collectively monitored. E-learning also ensures the availability and accessibility of lectures on mobile phones

and not just laptops with the possibility of watching already recorded lectures, instant feedback from students and taking of assignments (Lachner, Andreas, Backfisch, Iris, Stürmer & Kathleen, 2019).

3. Traditional Face-to-face method of Teaching

The teaching setting whereby learners are seated face with their instructors who give information or instruction to them in a confined environment is usually termed as a conventional or traditional mode of teaching. It is, therefore, described as a teaching process whereby students in clusters learn with the aid of printed or available resources in a real-life situation that is timed and set in a particular place or location (Adedaja, 2016). This is a type of teaching or instruction that allows physical communication between instructors and their learners.

Such learners also learn from each other. It could also avail the learners and their teachers of the golden opportunity to learn from one another. This is how the conventional mode of teaching-learning differs from modern-day digital teaching and learning styles. The face-to-face learning method is governed by to do verbs “when and where” which enables the facilitation of learning to be time-bound between the teacher or instructor and the learners i.e., when and where the learning takes place. Furthermore, it is a teacher-centred approach, though it has different variations in different cultures. Teachers are responsible for what to teach and what the learners would learn at a particular time as well as what the classroom would look like (Benson Soong et al., 2001).

Similarly, where the learning would take place, the location of the classrooms and above all, the method adopted makes the learners responsible for their learning achievement and better understanding and recollection of the lessons

given in the classroom (Malik, 2010). Several institutions of learning have now shifted from this type of learning as a result of the worldwide pandemic and it is coming as a pragmatic reaction to the changing needs of the students. Nevertheless, some advantages can be ascribed to this methodology. The learner feels more comfortable in familiar settings and classroom learning which makes it possible for learners to get more information through the teachers, as well as their interactions with other students (Chan & Chua, 2011).

4.0 Teaching & Learning System in Post COVID-19

4.1 Blended learning Approach

Blended learning came into place as a post-COVID-19 child necessity because institutions could not afford to be locked down forever and schools needed to reopen for learning to continue to take place. Blended Learning, therefore, is one of the most recent ways of facilitating instruction that catalyzes the process of solving the global pandemic problem that hit every sector including education. The adoption of the combination of traditional and online modes of instruction increased the yearning for learning during the post-COVID-19 period, leading to an upward movement of effective learning to some extent. It minimized the longtime engagement of learners online and other limiting factors that associate with online learning. It enabled learners to opt for any mode that was convenient for them to learn as well as giving room for the exploration of different approaches to learning. As such, its technology combination provides updated information that suits the learners' needs, through simulations, animations, practical events, exercises and applications (Khader, 2016)

Blended learning is one of the contemporary trends in education that has practically challenged the teacher and his learners in the twenty-first century. It is a veritable teaching strategy used for transmitting knowledge and experience to learners through several means to

achieve the best learning outputs (Ali et al., 2021). Accordingly, this strategy combines the advantages of e-learning and the benefits of the face-to-face traditional learning approach to bring about a significant integration between traditional learning and e-learning (Khader, 2016). In recent times, one of the teaching-learning approaches that are most suitable is blended learning having broken down the traditional walls of stereotype teachings, that does not work for all students by paving way for access to present-day technologies and resources that tailor the learning experiences to suit each student. Blended Learning also offers flexible time frames that can be personalized to each person thus offering them the ability to learn at their own pace (Giarla, 2020).

Without prejudice, the integration of blended learning into the contemporary teaching-learning system would help improve learners' academic performance. As technology is being combined with the traditional way of teaching, learners' interest will increase and they are more likely to get interested in and focus on subjects that were hitherto monotonous like logic or science. There are indications that retention of learning information would likely be on the increase too.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This article has reflected the significance of integrating Blended learning into the teaching-learning system in the post-pandemic period for effective teaching and learning. It seems to be futuristic in approach and trend and has been helpful in the control of social distancing to encourage a face to face classroom interaction that is blended with online technology for teaching and learning. The online method of learning is well suited for everyone, especially during school closure. However, the lesson learnt from post-COVID-19 is that blended learning helps to cater for the individual needs of learners and engenders robust interaction between learners and teachers. The blended approach is more likely to cater for most students that are limited in terms of technology resources that characterize online or traditional face-to-face teaching

experience. Thus, students are encouraged to outgrow their limited learning styles to embrace blended learning and its potential to bring out more important experiences that learners or teachers were not used to.

It is recommended that universities should consistently and coherently get involved in ICT which is fast becoming an indispensable driver in the education enterprise for uniformity and adequate standards. It should also ensure genuine professional development of Education Faculties to carry through the vision for the preparation of a technology-savvy teacher for the 21st century (Amoran, 2017). Learning continues no matter what the societal background is, whether in schools or corporate institutions from all walks of life.

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