

Business Education Trainees During the COVID 19 Pandemic: Empirical Evidence from a Nigerian University

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Abstract

The objective of the paper was to determine how the trainees of Business Education skills acquisition were during the COVID-19 pandemic. Three research questions guided the study. One was answered and two were hypothesized and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The study population was four hundred and sixty-six (466) Business Education students in 100-400 levels for the 2021/2022 academic year. A sample of 266 respondents were used for the study. A structured questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. The instrument was validated by three experts, two were from the Department of Vocational and Technical Education and one was from Measurement and Evaluation, University of Benin, Benin City. To establish the reliability of the instrument, it was pilot tested on thirty (30) students outside the sample population. Cronbach's Alpha statistics was used to analyse the data and a reliability coefficient of 0.72 was obtained. The result of the study showed that the perceived impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on acquisition of skills by Business Education students was high. Equally, there was no significant difference of the perceived impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the acquisition of skills by Business Educations students based on level of study and gender. It was therefore, recommended that managers of education should proactively and frankly make provision for digital and pedagogic facilities that would enhance the acquisition of skill in Nigerian universities, among other things.

Keywords: Business Education, Trainees, COVID-19, Pandemic

Introduction

The Corona Virus scare was one of the biggest problems that recently hit the entire world. In December 2019, Wuhan in China reported the discovery of the virus. It is a contagious illness that claimed thousands of lives worldwide. 219 nations had experienced the fatal virus as at January, 2021 (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). It is largely a respiratory infection that ranges in severity. The coronavirus2 of the genus Beta coronavirus presents acute respiratory syndrome symptoms. It is primarily spread through contact with infectious persons, materials (such as respiratory droplets), objects or surfaces that have been exposed to the contaminating virus. It is characterized by fever, coughing and shortness of breath, in particular. It can progress to pneumonia and respiratory failure if not managed on time.

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization classified it as a pandemic. To stop the spread of the corona virus which had brought the entire world to a standstill, African Union Member States took deliberate actions. The action was the closure of schools at all grade levels, churches, training centres, and gatherings of more than 50 persons. People were required to work from home, stay at home, practise self-isolation and social distancing and follow other restrictions that significantly changed the way people lived in the world. Pandemic refers to a sickness that affects the entire country or the entire planet, whereas an epidemic refers to a disease outbreak that affects a large geographic area and a significant number of the population. All pandemics share the characteristic that begin locally but develop and spread quickly, traversing international borders, as a result of its contagious nature.

There have been numerous outbreaks of infectious diseases, pestilences, and other natural and environmental disasters throughout human history. These events have wreaked havoc and disrupted man's economic, social, political and educational activities as well as other facets of society's daily life. Additionally, it was noted that the history of pandemics is not recent but dates back to many years, causing millions of fatalities while having an impact on a sizable population across several continents.

Schools and other organizations were closed in the United States, India, Australia, France and other countries, with restrictions on social gatherings and sightseeing, and with tight enforcement and sanctions for defaulters. To lessen the resultant hardship of the pandemic, the United States and other developed nations negotiated with their Parliaments to approve enormous sums of money as palliatives for their citizens. Many people lost their jobs, some other organizations and businesses folded up, and the economy was severely affected. Many people who lost their jobs, businesses or organizations due to the pandemic's effects were greatly relieved by that move. Over 1.723 billion trainees were prevented from attending school as a result of the closure which was implemented in 191 nations to slow down the pandemic's rapid spread (the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] assessment, 2020). The pandemic seriously affected educational activities particularly in Nigeria, because the country was very unprepared. Universities were also adversely affected. Our traditional teaching /learning system collapsed with rude shock. Consequently, learning was on unplanned 'holiday' and Business Education trainees were mostly affected due to its skill nature.

To stop the spread of the disease, the Federal Government of Nigeria ordered the shutdown of all schools (from primary to tertiary institutions) and other sectors of the economy in March, 2020. Lockdowns in the global economy typically have significant negative effects on education, including reduced learning opportunities, prolonged programme study times, learning process distortions, job losses, an increase in school dropout rates, and others. According to Onyema et al. (2020), unannounced school closure caused serious issues for pupils, trainers, trainees, parents and society at large. That, in turn had grave implications on the academic interest and achievement of trainees.

Martin and Furiv (2020) enumerated some effects of a large-scale outbreak of pandemic on education to include: school closure, diversion of resources and trainees, lack of at-home learning facilities, lack of access to learning, financial hardship leading to inability of parents to pay school fees, emotional stress, among others. There was an increased cost of digital learning materials both for the trainees and the institutions. The

negative effect of the pandemic was universal but worse and more glaring in developing countries in Africa like Nigeria which lacked what it took to fully embark on on-line teaching/learning and other forms of technology enhanced learning (Onyema et al (2020).

Being faced with this new normal can be very challenging for teachers, learners and parents in developing countries where the accessibility, availability and use of technology in education are not widespread. Apart from the cost of accessing online education, many other factors such as network issues, poor power supply, distractions, poor digital skills, inaccessibility and availability issues can hinder smooth study from home. There is also the problem of time to learn new technologies that might be required when operating from home, and noise that emanates internally or externally from neighbours and the neighbourhoods.

It was revealed that a second wave of the deadly virus with a different strain had hit the United Kingdom and later South Africa before the end of 2020. The Federal Government issued a second lockdown in response to the second wave in Nigeria as a result of the spread of the new sickness. Without a significant policy on how to fill the gap in knowledge and skill loss during the pandemic, schools in Nigeria were closed for almost one year. While the majority of public-school children were kept at home without any kind of online learning arrangement, some private schools somehow utilized online teaching and learning to address the knowledge gap. Due to the practical nature of most of its courses, skill-acquisition programmes like Business Education found it challenging to properly teach and learn without physical contact. Without frequent practice, skills tend to fade and sometimes require double the work to regain lost knowledge.

Business Education is crucial to the development and expansion of Nigeria's economy. It also gives information, skills and competence for individuals to operate well in office occupations and also generate jobs for themselves and others. It enhances personal attributes and strengthens the attitudes of persons who are important for adjustment to personal and employment conditions. The flexibility of a Business Education programme to change and stay up with the needs of its students is essential to its success and survival. To guarantee that the programme's aims and objectives are met, business educators must be willing to adjust and control this new normal. In the same way that it exposes students to the nation's economic structure and give them lifelong skills that will enable them to make sound decisions as either employers, employees, or consumers of goods, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on skill-development initiatives in Business Education. The challenges that Business Education and short-term skill development for out-of-school students and practising teachers must overcome are unparalleled. Depending on availability of energy, internet connectivity, gadgets or media, learning platforms and the readiness of instructors, solutions like home learning vary significantly among nations and population groups. Long-term school closures like those brought on by the COVID 19 pandemic seriously altered the calendar, delayed students' graduation, made students to lose previously acquired skills, raised cost of education, presented health risks, made people afraid to interact with others, and other problems and services. Business Education integrates theoretical and practical knowledge to ensure relevance and self-reliance.

Skill development programmes such as Business Education were greatly affected by the COVID-19 crisis. The challenges faced by Business Education and short-term skill training for out-of-school learners and current teachers are unprecedented. The

application of the new normal learning systems such as learning from home differs substantially across countries and population groups, depending on access to electricity, internet connectivity, devices or media, learning platform and the preparedness of educators. Long time school closure like that experienced during the COVID 19 pandemic resulted in calendar distortion, delay in students' graduation, loss of skills previously acquired, increased cost of schooling, dropout of students from school programmes, health management challenges, fear of interaction and others.

In the view of Onajite (2016), Business Education encompasses education programme for business, office occupation, economic understanding and entrepreneurship. It seeks to develop, in learners, basic skills for personal use in the future. According to Okoye (2013), a Business Education programme is one that instructs students in the art of business creation (marketing), typing and shorthand skills (which are currently in competition with an understanding of and ability to use computers), service delivery, secretarial work, stenography, account clerking, office information system and management. He added that Business Education prepared students in two distinct domains. Training for business and business-related education. Business Education is a subfield of Education that focuses on imparting knowledge of business practices and procedures. Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) candidates who seek admission to training institutions at the 100-level with SSCE results must complete a four-year programme, all things being equal. The Direct Entry (DE) candidates who are admitted in the 200-level are prepared via a three-year programme. Accounting Education, Marketing, Entrepreneurship and Office Technology and Management are some of the major courses available in Nigerian universities Business Education programme. It is not based on gender. This article uses the term "gender" to refer to either of the two sexes (male or female), particularly when taking into account cultural and social distinctions rather than biological ones. UNESCO (2020) warned that even short interruptions in children's schooling can have long-lasting negative impacts on their learning.

To stop the spread of the deadly virus, majority of educational institutions around the world, and Nigeria in particular, were shut down for about a year. As a result, the school year was disrupted, prolonged and less time was dedicated to learning. Students' weekly learning time during the COVID-19 lockdown was reduced by between 4 and 8 hours compared to when schools were opened (the Schul-Barometer (School Barometer) survey which was conducted from March 25 to April 5, 2020 and was targeted at Austrian, Swiss and German students between ages 10 and 19, Huber & Helm, 2020). How the length of the school year affected test performance was examined by Aucejo and Romano (2016). They discovered that adding 10 more school days to the academic year raised test scores in Arithmetic and Reading by 1.7 percent and 0.8 percent of standard deviation. The administrative data from North Carolina public schools were used in their research. That almost resulted in the delay of their graduation. Students who were expected to graduate the previous year were still in school one year after.

There are scanty actual data on how much impact the pandemic had on students' ability to acquire skills in business education. The COVID-19 pandemic seriously disrupted teaching and learning in Business Education in Nigerian universities which unfortunately, were not prepared to handle its onslaught. Online and other virtual learning facilities were not adequate. On the students' part, most of them never had laptops and

other pedagogic facilities were haphazardly organized. The cost of data and epileptic supply of electrical energy for teaching and learning in skills related courses were observed to have had a strong effect on Business Education students in South-South Nigerian universities.

The allegations of the negative effect of COVID-19 pandemic lacked empirical evidence to ascertain their veracity. Its perceived impact on Business Education students' skill acquisition with empirical evidence is the central concern of this study. The perceived effects of the variables of level of study and gender among Business Education students' skill acquisition as a result of covid-19 were examined also.

Research Questions

1. What is the perceived impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Business Education students' skill acquisition in Nigerian universities?
2. Does the perceived impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Business Education students' skill acquisition differ based on level of study?
3. Does the perceived impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Business Education students' skill acquisition differ based on gender?

Hypotheses

Question one was answered while two and three were hypothesized.

1. There is no significant difference between 300 and 400 levels students' perceived impact of the COVID- 19 pandemic on the acquisition of skill in Business Education in Nigerian universities.
2. There is no significant difference between male and female students as regards the effects of the COVID 19 pandemic on their acquisition of skills in Business Education in Nigerian universities.

Methods

The research design for this study was a descriptive survey. four hundred and sixty-six (466) Business Education students in the Department of Vocational and Technical Education, University of Benin, Edo State, deliberately and purposively formed the population of the study. Utilizing stratified random sampling technique, one hundred and twenty-six (126), one hundred and forty (140) and three hundred (300 and four hundred (400) level and 101 male and 165 female undergraduate Business Education students were sampled. 266 students were selected. For this study, the instrument was pilot tested using test-retest method, Cronbach's Alpha statistics was used to ascertain the reliability of the research instrument and it gave a reliability index of 0.72. Mean, standard deviation and the independent sample t-test statistics were used to analyze the data.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation showing the perceived impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on acquisition of skills

Items	Mean	SD	Remarks
Decrease in ability to recall shorthand outlines within the allowed time.	3.41	.743	Agree
Inability to take dictation at the desired speed.	3.08	.863	Agree
Decrease in speed of transcription.	3.20	.762	Agree
Decrease in flexibility of hand movement when writing shorthand outlines.	3.17	.835	Agree
Increase cost of self-health care materials as Covid-19 protocol.	3.27	.829	Agree
Difficulty in students' access to their lecturers without e-learning facilities as a result of long the stay away.	3.18	.836	Agree
Increase in wellness fear among students.	3.05	.870	Agree
Reduced time for skill acquisition	2.99	.871	Agree
Increased students' utilization of online learning facilities	3.12	.849	Agree
Reduction in quality of skills acquired	3.06	.829	Agree
Distortion of academic calendar of students	3.51	.723	Agree
Delay in graduation time	3.46	.753	Agree
Increased cost of schooling	3.38	.733	Agree
Increase in school age of students	3.32	.868	Agree
The health of students was psychologically affected because of the fear of the pandemic	3.17	.746	Agree
Students were not able to interact freely with one another again.	2.80	1.060	Agree
Increased cost of data to access online materials and lectures.	3.49	.811	Agree
Cost of instructional materials increased.	3.53	.748	Agree
Accommodation cost has increased as a result of extended calendar.	3.52	.797	Agree
Students lost their accommodation.	3.08	.934	Agree
Cluster Mean	3.19	0.826	

Note: SD (Standard Deviation)

According to the data on Table 1, the respondents' mean ratings ranged between 2.80 and 3.53 and the standard deviation between .723 and 1.060. Those findings and overall mean score of 3.19 showed that Business Education students had a high and positive perception of the COVID-19 Pandemic's impact on their ability to learn new skills in the University of Benin

Table 2: The independent sample t-test of the difference between 300 and 400 levels as regards the effect of COVID 19 pandemic on Business Education students' acquisition of skills

Respondents	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	p-value	Decision
300	126	63.61	6.95	264	.914	.362	Not Significant
400	140	64.64	8.16				

Table 2 showed a t-test value of 0.914 and a p-value of 0.362. It indicated that no significant difference existed between 300 and 400 level students of Business Education on the perceived impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the perceived impact on their acquisition of skills in Business Education.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference between male and female students as regards the perceived effects of COVID 19 pandemic on their acquisition of skills in Business Education in Nigerian universities.

Table 3: The independent sample t-test of the difference between male and female regards the effect of COVID 19 pandemic on Business Education students' acquisition of skills

Respondents	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-value	p-value	Decision
Male	101	65.12	8.02	264	.602	.547	Not Significant
Elete							
Female	165	64.55	7.08				

Table 3 showed a t-value and a p-value of 0.547, therefore, the hypothesis which stated that there was no significant difference between male and female students' as regards the perceived impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on the acquisition of skills in Business Education was retained ($p > 0.05$).

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study showed that the perceived impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on skill acquisition among Business Education students was high. The findings supported those of Martin and Furiv (2020) which revealed that teachers and students in developing countries like Nigeria were unable to access learning especially skill related courses during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was not unconnected to the lack of technological facilities which were needed for learning without physical contact. Learning of skills becomes difficult when students are not exposed to the machines and other pedagogic facilities which are needed for the acquisition of skills. In our universities, we are still glued to the traditional teaching and learning techniques.

The study also revealed a no significant difference between 300 and 400 level students' as regards the perceived impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on their acquisition

of skills in business education. The result corroborated the study by WHO (2020) which showed that the COVID-19 pandemic caused schools to be closed and, as such, all levels of students of Business Education were not able to acquire the needed skills during the period under study. It was due to the fact that 300 and 400 level students were exposed to the same learning environment. There was no physical learning/contact and equally, facilities to acquire needed skills from physical classrooms were not available. The e-learning facilities for skill acquisition were not available and, where available, they were not only inadequate but inaccessible for effective teaching and learning. Institutions of learning were not prepared for e-learning which was the alternative for schools that were closed in developed countries' universities. In fact, in virtually all public universities in Nigeria, Business Education students, like others, suddenly experienced what could be called inadequate electronic leaning facilities shock.

The findings equally showed that that there was no significant difference between male and female students as regards the perceived impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on Business Education skill acquisition. The findings agreed with the study by UNESCO (2020) which showed the impact of the pandemic that resulted in school closure. The closure of schools affected both male and female students in those institutions of learning. In other words, both male and female students experienced the same challenges of learning skills during the COVID-19 pandemic. That male and female students lived in the same environment, the no significant difference findings were therefore, not a surprise.

Conclusion

The study concluded that the empirical evidence of the perceived high impact of COVID-19 pandemic on skill acquisition by Business Education students did not differ with respect to level of study and gender in Nigerian universities. Acquiring Business Education skills requires regular and consistent practice to attain the desired proficiency. Therefore, adequate planning, allocation and resources, both human and material, should be made available to the tertiary institutions where Business Education is offered. This will help to reduce the perceived effect of the pandemic on the students when they have access to e-classroom that has no physical boundaries.

Recommendations

1. Managers of universities in Nigeria should make proactive efforts to provide necessary resources (electronic, ICT, internet facilities, e-laboratories and environment) needed for a paradigm shift from physical to e-classrooms. When these pedagogic facilities are put in place, students can acquire skills with or without the teacher or facilitator.
2. If these facilities are provided, students/lecturers should be trained on their usage

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