STUDENTS’ PERCEPTION OF COVID-19 ERA ONLINE EXAMINATIONS: ANALYSIS OF MASS COMMUNICATION STUDENTS OF EDO UNIVERSITY NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study interrogates Nigerian undergraduate students’ perception of online examinations during the COVID-19 pandemic era. Using quantitative survey method and a sample size of 41 students of the Department of Mass Communication of Edo University Iyamho Nigeria selected purposively who filled a questionnaire via Google Form between 15 September 2020 and 15 February 2021, the study found out that Nigerian students preferred online examinations to physical examinations and were very satisfied with online examinations. The study also found out that students performed poorly in online examinations compared to physical examinations and that poor internet network and lack of power (electricity) constituted the two major challenges of students during the conduct of online examinations. The study recommends that further studies be conducted to investigate why students have poorer grades in online examinations compared to physical examinations. The study was anchored on the Diffusion of Innovation Theory.

Keywords: COVID-19, perception, online examinations, mass communication students.

Introduction
There is no doubt that Covid-19 Pandemic has raked havoc. The effects have re-ordered the society and recalibrated patterns of doing things in the world, amongst others. Several scholars agree that the world will not be the same again, even after the Pandemic. Manyika (2020) opine that the world after Covid-19 is unlikely to return to the world that was. In the same vein, Saldanha (2020) quip that historically, pandemics force humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew; and that this one is no different. Bremmer (2020) warned that the effect may lead to deglobalisation, and the inevitable promotion of nationalism and my nation first. The above presupposes that the impact of Covid-19 is of immense magnitude. It is so gargantuan that UNICEF's September Report projects that the Pandemic presents tough choices for governments, local communities, health and school systems, as well as families and businesses. The Report further asserts that school closures due to Covid-19 measures pose a great threat to children learning. As of the last count, today (November 23, 2020), according to CNN Report, the virus has infested over 25 million people and a total fatality of 870,000 people. The United States of America (US) having the highest number of infections (5million), and over-250,000 deaths followed by India (2million infections and 150,000 deaths) and Europe, with 1million infections rate and the fatality of 120,000).

Nigeria is not left out or insulated from this odoriferous situation. Available data indicates that the first contact with the dreaded virus (Corona Virus, which was later named Covid-19 by the World Health Organisation) in Nigeria happened sometime on February 28, 2020, when an Italian man, who was on a visit to Nigeria tested positive to Coronavirus. This led to the introduction of several measures to curb or stem-down the spread of the virus. Which the World Health Organisation (WHO) asserted has no cure. Amongst the measures introduced by the Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC), were: Lockdown and imposition of all-night curfew from 10 pm.
to 6 am (West African Time). All schools, including tertiary institutions in Nigeria, were shut down, with no academic activities allowed to go on, apart from online or virtual academic activities. But as the infection grows, the State governments introduced inter-state lockdowns. Also, banished in-person academic activities.

As a result of the above, Edo University Iyamho, armed with the requisite technology for online academic activity, trained human resources, and the technological expertise for online academic activity, deployed same in conducting full-semester lectures and all-examinations for first and second semesters (2019/2020 session), for all her students, Mass Communication department’s students inclusive. Evidence abound supporting the above enunciations. As virtually, all conferences and seminars were held and now continues to hold as webinars. Several schools have also conducted virtual thesis defences. Recently, Edo University Iyamho had a virtual convocation. These giant strides have continued to garner acclaims for the University from other universities across the globe.

**Statement of the Problem**

Platt, Raile and Yu (2014) assert that Online classes are becoming increasingly prevalent in higher education. Online classes are an attractive option for universities facing space constraints, amongst others (Parry, 2010a). Available data shows that most foreign universities’ presidents predict continued growth in online class offerings (Parker, Lenhart, & Moore, 2011). Kaya, (2010) reported an increased demand for online learning method by foreign students advocating for more flexible and convenient models of higher education. Online course delivery methods have the potential to transform the landscape of higher education by expanding educational opportunities, transforming student populations, and prompting the development of new pedagogical methods Platt, Raile and Yu, 2014). The results of several meta-analyses by several scholars (Benoit, Benoit, Milyo, & Hansen, 2006; Bernard et al., 2004; Jahng, Krug, & Zhang, 2007; Sitzmann, Kraiger, Stewart, & Wisher, 2006), however, suggest that online and face-to-face courses are relatively comparable in terms of learning outcomes.

In-spite of the above sterling elucidation, scholars argue that online or virtual academic activities are tedious, owing to several challenges inherent in the Nigerian society. Some of these challenges are listed as inherent Power failure; knowledgeability; distractions; and cost, amongst others. Edo University Iyamho, in adherence to the directive to shut down all schools in Nigeria, issued by the National University Commission (NUC), shut down all academic activities amidst the first-semester examination. This led to another directive by the University for introduction and implementation of full-virtual learning for all academic activities, inclusive of lectures and examinations, for the students of the University, including Mass Communication students. The examination for first and second semesters was held using the University virtual platform. These academic activities for 2019/2020 session culminated in the organisation and holding of a virtual convocation held on November 7, 2020.

Several scholars and eminent persons, including the Governor of Edo State and the Visitor to the Institution, Godwin Obaseke, applauded the University for the giant stride made in this regard – Virtual learning. Despite these notable achievements and encomiums showered on the University, it is uncertain whether the students, particularly, Mass Communication students found and perceived the online learning method glowingly, useful and better than in-person learning method, hence this study. In other words, this study assesses Mass Communication students’ general perceptions of Covid-19 Era-online examination held by the Edo University
Iyamho, focusing, amongst others, on whether students view online lectures and examinations (Online Learning Format) to be equivalent or better than the In-person learning format.

**Objectives of studies**

The broad objectives of this study include to find out the:

1. Degree of students prefer COVID-19 online examinations over physical classroom examination.
2. Degree of students satisfaction with the conduct of the COVID-19 online examinations.
3. The impact of the COVID-19 online examinations on students’ performance.
4. Main challenges encountered by students during the COVID-19 online examinations.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions have been formulated for this research.

1. To what degree did students prefer COVID-19 online examinations over physical classroom examinations?
2. To what extent were students satisfied with the conduct of the COVID-19 online examinations?
3. How did the COVID-19 online examinations impact students’ performance?
4. What were the main challenges encountered by students during the COVID-19 online examinations?

**Theoretical Framework and Review of Related Literature**

The study was anchored on Diffusion of Innovation (DOI). Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) was developed by Everett Rogers in 1962. It is one of the oldest social sciences theories. It originated in communication to explain how, over time an idea or product gains momentum and diffuses (or spreads) through a specific population or social system. The theory identified five adopters for a product, namely, innovators; early adopters; the early majority; the late majority and the laggards, and five stages of the consumer-adoption process - awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption. Rogers, further, listed five perceived characteristics of innovators that help the rate at which innovations are adopted as - relative advantage, compatibility, complex, reliability, and observability. The above elucidates and clearly shows that Edo University’s adoption of the online’s learning platform as a new technology, by the students of Mass Communication, Edo University, may diffuse to other schools in Nigeria, once it is viewed as compatible and advantageous, not complex, and its reliability can be ascertained.

From the foregoing, one could rightly state that, once it is ascertained that the Online Learning Format (OLF) utilised for examination, during the Covid-19 Pandemic era, by the Edo University students, particularly, Mass Communication students, meets the five perceived characteristics outlined above, it will be perceived as better the In-person learning format (ILF), and its adoption will be inevitable.

**Online Learning Format: Definition and Advantage**

Online learning education takes place over the internet. It is often referred to as e-learning among other terms. However, online learning is just one type of distance learning - the umbrella term for any learning that takes place across distance and not in a traditional classroom (Stem, 2014).

Stem (2014) identified the following as the advantages of online teaching and learning:
1. **Convenience**: 24/7 access from any online computer, accommodates busy schedules, no commuting, no searching for parking.

2. **Enhanced learning**: Research shows an increased depth of understanding and retention of course content; more meaningful discussions; emphasis on writing skills, technology skills, and life skills like time management, independence, and self-discipline.

3. **Levelling of the playing field**: Students can take more time to think and reflect before communicating; shy students tend to thrive online; anonymity of environment.

4. **Interaction**: Increased student-to-teacher and student-to-student interaction and discussion; a more student-centred learning environment; less passive listening and more active learning; a greater sense of connectedness, synergy.

5. **Innovation Teaching**: Student-centered approaches; increased variety and creativity of learning activities; address different learning styles; changes and improvements can translate to on-ground courses as well.

6. **Improved administration**: Time to examine students work more thoroughly; ability to document and record online interactions; ability to manage grading online.

7. **Savings**: accommodate more students; increased student satisfaction = higher retention and fewer repeats.

8. **Maximize Physical Resources**: Lessen demand on limited campus infrastructure; decrease congestion on-campus parking lots.

9. **Outreach**: Give students option; reach new student markets; appeal to current students thus increasing enrollments.

However, despite the above-elucidated sterling advantages of the online learning format (OLF), scholars, especially, in third-world countries, with poor internet and energy supply see the model (OLF) as tedious and riddled with mammoth challenges.

**Teaching and Learning’s Paradigm**

Online learning is catalyzing a pedagogical shift in how we teach and learn. There is a shift away from top-down lecturing and passive students to a more interactive, collaborative approach, in which, students and instructor co-create the learning process. The Instructor’s role is changing from the “sage on the stage” to “the guide on the side” (Stem, 2014). He identified and explained the following approaches thus:

**Constructivism**

This point of view maintains that people actively construct new knowledge as they interact with their environment. This is a student-centred approach in which students “co-create” their learning experience. This approach empowers students as active learners instead of just passive recipients absorbing information and reproducing it for standardized tests. Jean Piaget’s constructivism, cited in Mayer (2008), emphasizes the learner as a unique individual; Relevance of the learner’s background and culture; Increased-responsibility for learning belongs to the student; Motivation for learning comes from successful completion of challenging tasks; Instructors as facilitators helping learners develop their understanding of content; Learning is an active, social process; and The dynamic interaction between task, instructor and learner – Synergy.
Constructionism

Constructionism asserts that learning is particularly effective when constructing something for others to experience. This can be anything from a spoken sentence or an internet posting to more complex things like a painting or a presentation. For example, you might read this page several times and still forget it by tomorrow - but if you were asked to explain these ideas to someone else in your own words, or produce a slideshow that explained these concepts, you would gain a deeper understanding that is more integrated into your ideas.

Collaboration

As an instructor, you focus on the experiences that would best generate learning from the learner’s point of view, rather than just publishing and assessing the information you think they need to know. Each participant in a course can and should be a teacher as well as a learner. Your job changes from being the sole source of knowledge, to being a guide and role model. You connect with students in ways that address their own learning needs by moderating discussions and activities in a way that collectively leads students towards the larger learning goals of the class.

Online learning Imperativeness

To say that online platforms are prevalent, now, appears to be an understatement. This is predicated on the fact that Covid-19 Pandemic has enthroned and recalibrated the society to the extent that patronisation of the online platforms for teaching, learning and examination of students has become a new normal. Scholars like, Platt, Raile and Yu (2014) assert that Online classes are becoming increasingly prevalent in higher education. Parry (2009) opine in support, that online classes are an attractive option for universities facing space constraints, amongst others. Further, to underscore the inevitability of the online platforms in teaching, learning and for examination, Parker, Lenhart, and Moore (2011) quip that most foreign universities’ presidents predict continued-growth in patronisation of the online platforms for teaching, learning, and examination.

Scholars agree that online classes are becoming increasingly prevalent in higher education. This is further validated by the Sloan Consortium’s 2010 Survey of Online Learning in the United States, which indicates that enrollment in online courses increased by nearly one million students between 2008 and 2009 (Allen & Seaman, 2010). Whilst the worldwide e-learning market is projected to be worth $ 325 Billion in 2025. It should be noted that in 2017, approximately 77% of United States corporations used online learning, with an indication that 98% of the corporations in the United States planned to incorporate online learning in their program by 2020. Online course delivery methods have the potential to transform the landscape of higher education by expanding educational opportunities, transforming student populations, and promoting the development of new pedagogical methods (Platt, Raile and Yu, 2014). But, some scholars have argued that this rapid embrace of online learning, particularly the widespread adoption of online learning format (e-learning), could lead to negative pedagogical outcomes (Allen, 2006; Allen & Seaman, 2014; and Stem 2014). A central concern of such critiques is whether the online course experience is sufficiently equivalent to or better than the In-person learning format.

Methodology

The quantitative research design was adopted for this study in which data is collected and analysed with the aid of analytical and statistical software that use numerical and mathematical figures (Fischler, 2020). For this study, however, the data will be analysed with the Google Form analysis that is so designed to afford the researcher an understanding of the trends of the data generated from the filled questionnaire.
Population and Sample Size

The Department of Mass Communication is one over 30 programmes at Edo University, Iyamho, Nigeria. It was purposively selected for this study because students of the Department of Mass Communication were by their student highly ICT-compliant and would be properly understood the context of assessing the online examinations since they understood the basic computer deployment necessary for the conduct of such examinations.

Thus, the population of this study is the total number of Mass Communication students at Edo University, Iyamho, Nigeria as of the 2019/2020 academic session. The students come from all four levels of the four year programme as shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100 Level Students</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200 Level Students</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300 Level Students</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400 Level Students</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>81</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) template for determining sampling sizes for various types of populations, for a population between 75 and 99, 63 is the required sample size. Since the population of the entire Mass Communication students of Edo University Iyamho Nigeria is 81, only 41 students responded to the questionnaire sent to all of them via their WhatsApp class platforms. 41 represents 65% of the required sample size of the study which is sufficient enough for the reliability of the results. Therefore, the sample size for this study is 41.

Sampling Technique

A Google Form questionnaire with 8 semi-structured questions was designed for this study and sent to all 81 students of Mass Communication as of the 2019/2020 academic session via their class WhatsApp groups. The questionnaire was prepared after their second-semester Examinations of the 2019/2020 session which held online due to the restrictions of COVID-19 pandemic that made it impossible for the students to return to campus to write their examinations physically. The Examinations ended on 19th September 2020 and the Link was designed and sent to the students from 20 September 2020 to 15 February 2021. 41 students responded to the questionnaire, a response rate of 51%.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Data shows that 70% of all the respondents wrote all their online examinations while another 25% wrote some of their examinations online. Thus, 95% of respondent wrote online examinations in some form. Similarly, an overwhelming percentage of students (82%) used laptops for their students compared to only 10% that used smartphones. This negates findings by Egielewa and Acheme (2021) that students preferred smartphone to laptops in their academic activities.
Research Question 1
To what degree did students prefer COVID-19 online examinations over physical classroom examinations?

Do you prefer online examinations to physical classroom examinations?

39 Antworten

- 23.1% very much prefer online examinations to physical classroom examinations
- 17.9% prefer online examinations to physical classroom examinations
- 12.8% don't know
- 15.4% don't prefer online examinations to physical classroom examinations
- 30.8% don't prefer online examinations to physical classroom examinations at all

Figure 1: Extent of students’ preference of the COVID-19 online over physical examinations.

Figure 1 shows that almost half of the students (46.2%) of the students preferred the online examinations to the physical classroom examinations compared to those who do not prefer the online examinations (41%). Many students argue that their preference for online examinations was based on the convenience of writing their examinations from their respective homes.

Research Question 2
To what extent were students satisfied with the conduct of the COVID-19 online examinations?

Were you satisfied with the conduct of the online examinations?

40 Antworten

- 20% very much satisfied
- 20% was satisfied
- 10% don't know
- 10% unsatisfied
- 42.5% very unsatisfied

Figure 2: Degree of students’ satisfaction with the COVID-19 online examinations.

Related to corresponding to the data from the Figure 1, Figure 2 suggests that students who were satisfied with the online examinations were a little above half of all students (54%) compared to 40% of students who were not satisfied.
Research Question 3
How did the COVID-19 online examinations impact students’ performance?

Do you think the Online Examinations improved your Results/Grades compared to Physical Examinations?
40 Antworten

![Pie Chart]

Figure 3: Extent to which the COVID-19 online examinations impacted students’ performance.

Unlike the indications from Figure 1 and Figure which suggested that students preferred and were satisfied with online examinations compared to physical examinations, data in Figure 3 showed that students performance became worse (35%) compared to when they wrote examinations in physical classrooms.

Research Question 4
What were the main challenges encountered by students during the COVID-19 online examinations?

What were the main challenges that you encountered while writing your online examinations?
39 Antworten

![Bar Chart]

Figure 4: Challenges faced by students during the COVID-19 online examinations.

Data in Figure 4 showed that network problems in the form of a slow network, weak signals, intermittent break in internet network and lack of power supply in which students had to rely on alternative power supply such as generators or simply make do with the available battery power available on their laptops and smartphone service amongst were the major challenges (76%) during the online examinations while noisy environment and difficulty in understanding examinations questions constituted the least challenges (11%) while writing the online examinations. The implication of these is that infrastructural defects at the macro-level (poor Network and power) were the main challenges of students, all of which must also be addressed at the macro level. In other words, the main challenges of students during the online examination came from external forces beyond their control.
Discussion

Since almost half of the students in this study preferred the online examinations than the physical classroom examinations compared to those who do not which the students hinged on the convenience of writing their examinations from their respective homes, this aligns with the view Kaya (2010) who reported that increasing number of students were demanding online lectures a clear indication of the convenience they offer students with studies by Parker, Lenhart and Moore (2011) indicating that more and more Universities are opting of online studies to accommodate the growing demands.

Related to corresponding to the data from the Figure 1, Figure 2 suggests that students who were satisfied with the online examinations were a little above half of all students (54%) compared to 40% of students who were not satisfied. This high satisfaction with online studies aligns with findings by Egielewa and Idogho (2021). Findings also reveal that online that students academic performance became worse compared to when they wrote examinations in physical classrooms.

Findings show that network problems in the form of a slow internet network, weak signals, intermittent break in internet network and lack of power supply in which students had to rely on alternative power supply such as generators or simply make do with the available battery power available on their laptops and smartphone were the major challenges encountered by students during the online examinations closely agreeing with findings by Egielewa and Idogho (2021) who also found out that 42% of all the challenges faced by students in online academic activities were primarily Network problems and lack of power.

The Diffusion of Innovation theory is confirmed in this study because it reveals that technology of internet was deployed in a unique way to students of the Department of Mass Communication of Edo University Iymaho Nigeria, a technology that was in existence but was being deployed for examinations purposes for the first time in the University.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the above findings above, it can be concluded that students of the Department of Mass Communication of Edo University Iymaho Nigeria prefer laptops to the smartphones for their online examinations. Also, 95% of the students preferred online examinations to physical examinations and the students were very satisfied with online examinations. However, the study found out that online examinations negatively affected the academic performance of the students. In other words, the students’ grades were worse than their grades when they wrote physical examinations. Finally, poor internet network and lack of power constituted the two major challenges to students’ online academic activities.

Thus, the following is recommended:

1. The Nigerian Government should improve internet network and power supply in the country as these affect online academic activities of students during pandemics such as COVID-19.
2. Further researches should be conducted to investigate why students prefer online academic examinations to physical examinations
3. There should be further investigation on why students performed poorly in online examinations than physical examinations especially since the students were able to access the questions just like in physical examinations.
References


