INFLUENCE OF BLENDED LEARNING ON ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE OF ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDENTS OF CHUKWUEMEKAODUMEGWU OJUKWU UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the influence of blended learning on the academic engagement and performance of English Education students at Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University. Recognizing the limitations of traditional and online learning methods, the research explores the potential of blended learning to bridge gaps in instructional quality, student engagement, and academic outcome. A descriptive survey design was employed, sampling 100 participants across four academic levels using stratified random sampling. Data were collected via a validated questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and the Spearman's Rank oerder technique. Findings reveled that blended learning significantly enhances student engagement and convenience, categorized as Very High Effectiveness (VHE). However, its influence on material accessibility and examination performance was perceived as Low Effectiveness (LE), indicating areas for improvement. Overall, the study underscores blended learning's nuanced influence, balancing the strengths of traditional and online modalities to foster a more dynamic and interactive learning environment. Recommendations are provided to optimize blended learning strategies, particularly in resource-constrained settings like Nigeria, to enhance academic performance and prepare students for the challenges of the 21st-century knowledge economy.

Keywords: Blended Learning, Academic Engagement, Academic Performance

INTRODUCTION

Education constitutes a basic public good that furnishes man with the basic skills, attitudes, and knowledge needed to freely live in society (Ofozoba & Perpetua, 2023). Quality education has been recognized as a critical component of fostering national and regional development, as it empowers individuals, strengthens communities, and propels economic growth (Noure Elahi, 2015). Education, particularly at the foundational level, is a substantial key to achieving national and regional progress.

The knowledge economy in Nigeria remains untapped for socio-economic development. Diversification, a key investment strategy, helps mitigate risks by spreading investments across different assets. Nigeria could benefit significantly by investing in the knowledge economy, leveraging education and diversification to drive growth and stability (Nwobu&Okechukwu, 2023). Investments in education has proven benefits for personal health and national economic well-being, laying the groundwork for sustained economic progress. (Noure Elahi, 2015).

The landscape of learning has evolved significantly over the decades, driven by shifts in pedagogical approaches, technological advancements, and societal demands (Yirci et al, 2018). Traditionally, education was largely centred on rote memorization, teacher-directed instruction, and standardized curricula aimed at fostering uniformity among learners (Drake & Reid, 2020).This approach, while systematic, often neglected individual learning styles and active engagement, leading to limited scope for creativity and critical thinking.

In the 21st century, a paradigm shift towards student-centred learning emerged, emphasizing critical thinking, collaboration, and adaptability to real-world problems. Technologies such as Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have played a transformative role in reshaping educational methodologies, enabling more inclusive, flexible, and dynamic learning experiences (Edafiogho, 2007). As educators and policymakers seek to address diverse learning needs, the integration of digital tools into education has become paramount.

Traditional learning, characterized by physical classrooms, textbooks, and teacher-led instructions, has long served as the bedrock of education systems. It is grounded in structured lesson delivery, direct interaction, and a shared physical environment that facilitates immediate feedback and peer-to-peer collaboration (Mkpa, 2019; Williams, 2009). This method typically involves lecture-based delivery, with students passively listening and learning predetermined facts and skills (Fox-Turnbull, 2017). While traditional teaching can yield useful results, it may not provide students with valuable skills for long-term knowledge retention (Tularam&Machisella, 2018).

The limited use of technology is another hallmark of traditional learning, with studies showing that many primary school teachers do not incorporate digital tools in their instruction (Sumardi et al., 2020). This approach often results in less development of students' higher-order thinking skills and may not adequately prepare them for 21st-century challenges (Sumardi et al., 2020). However, traditional methods can still be effective in content mastery, with many teachers demonstrating strong subject knowledge (Sumardi et al., 2020).

In Nigeria, where resource allocation to education has historically been inadequate, traditional methods have struggled to meet contemporary learning demands (UNESCO, 2022). Challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, limited access to learning materials, and outdated pedagogical practices have further exacerbated educational inequalities, highlighting the need for more adaptive and innovative approaches.

The rise of digital revolution is reshaping economies around the globe, propelling growth, generating employment opportunities and introducing innovations at an extraordinary rate (Orji et al, 2024). Online learning, one of the results of these revolutions has represented a transformative shift in education, leveraging technology to break barriers of time and space. Enabled by advancements in internet connectivity, multimedia tools, and digital platforms, online learning offers unprecedented flexibility and accessibility. It allows learners to access a plethora of resources, participate in virtual discussions, and engage in self-paced learning, fostering autonomy and inclusivity (Pelgrum, 2006).

In higher education, online learning has gained significant traction, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated a global transition to remote learning (Mollenkopf et al, 2020). Online learning environments utilize a variety of tools, such as video lectures, discussion forums, and virtual simulations, to enhance learning experiences. The benefits of online learning include increased flexibility, convenience, and access to a broader range of

educational resources. Students can engage with course materials at their own pace, accessing information from anywhere with an internet connection. This flexibility can be especially advantageous for students with diverse schedules or geographic constraints(Mollenkopf et al, 2020).Despite its potential, online learning is not without challenges. Issues such as digital literacy gaps, limited internet access in underdeveloped regions, and a lack of direct interpersonal interaction often hinder its effectiveness. Additionally, online environments can present distractions and require a higher degree of self-discipline from students (Mohee et al, 2020).

Blended learning integrates the strengths of traditional and online learning, creating a hybrid model that combines in-person instruction with digital resources and activities (Putera&Ariany, 2021). This approach capitalizes on the immediate engagement and interaction of traditional classrooms while leveraging the flexibility and personalization of online platforms (Tian, 2023). By blending these modalities, students can benefit from a more comprehensive and customized learning experience.

In higher education especially English Education, blended learning has been recognized as a solution to the limitations of both traditional and online methods. It fosters an interactive and dynamic learning environment, enhances critical thinking, and promotes collaborative problem-solving. Studies have shown that students in blended learning environments often outperform their counterparts in purely traditional or online settings, as the combination of face-to-face and virtual components creates a more engaging and holistic learning experience (Roff, 2018).

Engagement and academic performance are critical determinants of success in English education. Engagement, encompassing behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, is essential for fostering intrinsic motivation, critical thinking, and language proficiency (Ali, 2004). A high level of engagement allows students to actively participate in discussions, comprehend complex linguistic structures, and apply their knowledge in real-world contexts. Academic performance, on the other hand, serves as a tangible indicator of a learner's understanding and application of English language skills. Proficiency in English is particularly significant in higher education, where it often serves as the medium of instruction and a gateway to global opportunities (Mkpa, 2019; Edafiogho, 2007). In regions like Nigeria, improving academic engagement and performance in English education is imperative for producing graduates capable of competing in the global knowledge economy (Ofozoba et al., 2023).By blending classroom instruction with online resources, English language learners can benefit from a more personalized and interactive learning environment, enabling them to develop and apply their language skills in a variety of contexts (Tian, 2023).

To prepare students for a technology-shaped world, education must become more innovative, with blended learning emerging as a preferable model for developing crucial 21st-century skills (Antunes, 2020). While traditional learning environments offer in-person interaction and hands-on experiences, they are often limited by geographical constraints and infrastructure issues (Munna & Hossain, 2024). The integration of technology in education presents both opportunities and challenges for students, teachers, and institutions (Antunes, 2020).

Research Question

This study examines the influence of blended learning on academic performance of English Education students in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, focusing on its effectiveness in addressing the challenges of traditional and online learning. The research is guided by the research question:

- How does blended learning influence students' engagement in English education?
- What is the difference in mean academic performance scores of English education students in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University using the blended learning approach?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Research design is an arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance with the research purpose. It is the conceptual structure within which research is conducted. This study employed descriptive survey design to assess the influence of blended learning on the Academic Engagement and Performance of English Education Students in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University. Descriptive survey is defined as a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals. The descriptive survey design was relevant to this study as the researcher was only to report the influence of blended learning on the academic Performance of English education students without manipulating variables.

Population of the study

The population for the study consists of 220 students of the department of Arts and Social Science Education, COOU. This comprised 61 (100 level), 32(200 level), 75(300 level), 52(400 level) students of English option.

Number of English Education Students

S/N	Level of Study	Number of Students
1.	100L	61
2.	200L	32
3.	300L	75
4.	400L	52
	Total	**220**

Source: Arts and Social Science Education Department (2024)

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample size is the number of participants in a given study. Through a stratified random sampling technique 100 participants were selected for this study. The stratified random sampling technique was utilised to select 100 respondents. Stratified random sampling divides a population into distinct strata based on characteristics, ensuring accurate and representative analysis by taking random samples from each stratum (Sharma, 2017). In this case, from the above table, the distribution of sample size was determined by 25 participants from each level of study.

Instruments for Data Collection

The study utilised questionnaires for data collection. The questionnaire method was chosen because of time factor. The method can reach a large number of subjects who are able to read and write independently. A questionnaire is a carefully designed instrument for collecting data in accordance with the specification of the research questions. The questionnaires which was developed by the Researcher were soliciting data from students on the influence of blended learning on the academic performance of English education students in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University. The questionnaire instrument is titled

"questionnaire on Influence of Blended Learning on Academic Performance" (QIBLAP). The study utilised a closed ended questionnaire. The research instrument was adapted from previous studies of Chinwe &Akudolu (2023).

A 4-pointrating scales ranging from VHE (Very high extent), HE (High extent), LE (Low extent), and VLE (Very low extent) was used in the questionnaire. The study is correlational, and the Spearman's Rank Order technique was used with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) as data analysis method.

Validation of the Instruments
To ensure the validation of the instrument, the initial draft of the instrument was subjected to face validation. It was done by the supervisor and two experts in the field of Measurement and Evaluation at Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Anambra State. These experts were requested to critically examine the instrument in terms of relevance of the content and clarity of the statement. They were also requested to advice the researcher on the suitability of the rating scale. Comments from these experts were taken into consideration in the final modification of the research Instrument.

Reliability of the Instruments
To determine reliability of the instrument, the researcher conducted a trial on representative sample of 10 female and 10 male students from Madonna University, Nigeria. The Cronbach Alpha Statistical analysis was used to determine a reliability of 0.79.

Method of Data Collection
Secondary and primary data were utilised for this study. Secondary data was collected from online journals, books, periodicals, while primary data was sourced through the instrument of questionnaires.

Method of Data Analysis
Data that were collected from the field were coded and entered into the computer for analysis using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) computer software for windows programme to enable analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools (mean and standard deviation).

RESULTS
Research Question 1: How does blended learning influence students' engagement in English education?
Table 4.1: Mean and standard deviation effect of blended learning on Academic Performance scores of English education students.

S/N	Items	Mean	Std.dev	Decision
1	Helps to increase student's engagement in class	3.13	1.32	VHE
2	Enhances convenient learning	3.26	1.28	VHE
3	Makes access to materials easy	2.12	1.42	LE
4	Enhances better performance in examinations	2.25	1.45	LE
	Grand Total	**2.69**		**LE**

VLE 1.0-1.99, LE= 2.0-2.49, HE= 2.50-3.49, VHE= 3.5-4.0

Table 4.1 shows blended learning helps to increase students' engagement in class and enhances convenient learning; both have mean scores above 3, indicating a positive perception towards these aspects. The standard deviations are relatively low, suggesting consistent responses among participants. These factors are categorised as Very High

Effectiveness (VHE). However, whether blended learning makes access to materials easy and enhances better performance in examinations have mean scores below 3, indicating a less positive perception compared to the previous items. The standard deviations are still relatively low, suggesting consistency in responses. These factors are categorized as Low Effectiveness (LE). The grand total mean score is 2.69, which suggests an overall perception leaning towards effectiveness, although not as high as the items categorized under Very High Effectiveness (VHE).

The result of the study showed the difference in Mean Academic performance scores of English Education students at Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University in Anambra State, revealing varied perceptions. Aspects fostering increased engagement and convenient learning were viewed favorably, categorized as Very High Effectiveness (VHE). Conversely, elements pertaining to material accessibility and exam performance garnered fewer positive perceptions, falling under the category of Low Effectiveness (LE). Despite an overall perception of effectiveness, there is room for improvement in specific areas. This study underscores the nuanced influence of blended learning on academic performance, highlighting both strengths and areas for enhancement.

From the above, the analysis showed that there is significant influence of blended learning on academic performance of students at Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University in Anambra State. The findings of this study were consistent with Ilorah et al., (2018) who revealed in their study that blended learning influences students' academic achievement. In the same vein, Hinampas et al., (2018) found that blended learning enables students to do better in academic performances.

CONCLUSION
In conclusion, the study delved into the influence of blended learning on the academic performance of English Education students at Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University in Anambra State, revealing diverse perceptions. While aspects promoting increased engagement and convenient learning were positively viewed, indicating Very High Effectiveness (VHE), elements related to material accessibility and exam performance received less favorable perceptions, categorized as Low Effectiveness (LE). Despite an overall perception of effectiveness, there remains room for improvement in specific areas, underscoring the nuanced impact of blended learning on academic performance and highlighting both strengths and areas for enhancement.

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