

CHALLENGES AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS BLENDED LEARNING AMONG COLLEGE OF EDUCATION STUDENTS IN GHANA

Matthew Nyaaba¹ & Salifu Zibreal Sandawey²

¹Faculty of Education, University for Development Studies, P. O. Box TL 1350, Tamale, Ghana

²Gambaga College of Education, P. O. Box 33, Gambaga, Ghana

Corresponding Email: mnyaaba@gacoe.edu.gh

Abstract

One of the teaching modes adopted during the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic was blended learning among the colleges of education in Ghana. This mode was extended to remedying infrastructure deficit in the colleges of education resulting from the introduction of a new 4-year Bachelor of Education Basic Education Curriculum in Ghana. This study was conducted to find out the attitude and challenges faced by college of education students in blended learning (instructions). A sample of 486 students from Gambaga College of Education constituted the population. The study employed a descriptive research design with quantitative method to collect data, using both online and paper questionnaire. The data analysis involved multiple statistical procedures: frequency counts, simple percentages, and standard deviation. The study exposed that participants had a negative attitude toward blended learning. This was assumed to be associated to the numerous challenges the students faced in their blended learning experiences. Further, the findings revealed among other challenges of blended learning that the teaching of practically demanding courses like calculus, methodology and others results to rote learning and poor performance. A good number (85.8%) of the participants indicated that blended learning deprives them from social interactions and other co-curricular activities vital to their learnings. Almost all (98.1%) of the participants stated that poor network connectivity affected their participation in blended learning. However, a little above half agreed that assessment feedback on blended learning meets their expectations. It is therefore recommended that the government, institutions, and facilitators should consider these challenges and make the appropriate decisions regarding the implementations of blended learning at the colleges of education in Ghana.

Key Words: attitude, blended learning, challenges, colleges of education, COVID-19 pandemic

Introduction

The emergent closure of schools against the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak brought about emergency remote teaching, to ensure that students are not left idle, which was launched by governments and tertiary institutions across the world including in Ghana (Omulando & Osabwa, 2021). Therefore, the conventional methods (traditional face to face teaching) was replaced by online/e-learning (virtual learning). In this situation, the virtual instruction emerged as an asset to connect with students at the colleges of education to keep them engaged and prevent loss of study hours while the academic activities were still in progress in Ghana.

In Ghana, this emergent remote teaching was capitalized to solve a pending challenge of infrastructure deficit as a result of the introduction of the New Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) Basic Education Curriculum. In 2018, the government of Ghana in consultation with the Ministry of Education introduced a four-year Bachelor of Education in Basic Education to replace the 3-year Diploma in Basic Education at the colleges of education (Ampomah, 2021).

This change was aimed at producing highly trained professional and motivated teachers who can address the diverse needs of learners to meet the demands of the 21st Century Teacher Education.

However, there seems to have been a delay in putting up infrastructure to cater for the high number of students for the 4 cohorts. The programme was introduced with no adjustment in the existing infrastructure for the Diploma programme. Therefore, students were bound to face residential accommodation and lecture halls problems. In 2021, there was the need to adopt blended learning approach as an extension of COVID'19 emergent virtual learning to remedy the infrastructure deficit facing the colleges.

The blended academic work which run face-to-face alongside virtual teaching and learning started January 2021 in the colleges of education in Ghana. The blended learning involved some learners experiencing in-person tuition for a period of six weeks whiles their colleagues stay at home and engaged in virtual learning for six weeks at the same time. This was rotated till the end of the semester.

A study conducted by Gyamfi, and Gyaase in 2015 revealed that majority of university students showed positive perceptions of blended learning environment. However, during the peak of COVID'19 emergency remote learning, many students outlined some challenges, such as slow internet connectivity, lack of internet access, etc which hindered the effectiveness of the virtual learning sessions and pointed out ways to improve the online learnings (Aboyinga & Nyaaba, 2020). Thus prior to the blended learning approach, this study sought to ascertain the attitude of pre-service students in Gambaga College of Education towards blended learning as well as the challenges they face in the approach.

Research Questions

- i. What are the challenges that College of Education Students face in blended learning in Ghana?
- ii. What is the attitude of College of Education Students towards blended learning in Ghana?

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey design with a quantitative method. The method was a single-phased method where quantitative data are collected and analyzed to get findings of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The key assumption for adopting this was to establish the larger views of the participants quantitatively which aimed at improving the generalization of the study.

The convenience and census sampling techniques were adopted for this study. Conveniently, Gambaga College of Education students were sampled easily because they were in the same college with the researchers whiles all the accessible groups were involved in the study. The sample did not include students from other colleges as it was assumed that significant number

of the students from Gambaga College of Education were found across the country as their colleagues in other colleges and so may have the same experiences. The census sampling was used to select pre-service students at the various levels. Lavrakas (2008) stated that census study occurs if the accessible population is very small or it is reasonable to include the entire accessible population. The study was made up of all the accessible population which involved 312 males and 162 females with a total of 486 students. One hundred and eighty-nine (38.9%) students were in level 200 (Second Year Students), 153 students (31.5) were in level 300 (Third Year Students) while the remaining 144 students (29.6%) were participants from level 100 (First Year Students).

Data Collection Procedure

In the data collection, 13-item questionnaire scale was adapted from the works of Bakeer (2018) and Ja' ashan (2015) on Students' Attitudes towards Implementing Blended Learning in Teaching English in Higher Education Institutions and the Perceptions and Attitudes towards Blended Learning for English Courses respectively was used to collect data on pre-service teachers' attitude towards blended learning and the challenges (ATBLC) they face in Ghana. The items on the questionnaire were rated on a 5-point Likert scale of 1 – 5 with a mean of 3. Using the Likert scale for 13-items on the questionnaire, a descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data collected. The adapted questionnaire underwent content validation by 3 experts (colleague tutors in Gambaga College of Education and University for Development Studies). During the content validation, modifications were done on some items to ensure clarity and unambiguity. Since the instrument was adapted with minor modifications, the reliability research study that was conducted on the original instruments was applied in this study (Korb, 2012).

The questionnaire was made up of two parts; the first part contained items that were used to collect data on respondents' demographics. The second part contained the 13-items on attitude towards blended learning and the challenges the respondents face in blended learning. Each item consisted of a statement followed by five weighted options; Strongly Agree (SA) = 1, Agree (A) = 2, None (N) = 3, Disagree (D) = 4 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 5. For the purposes of analysis and easy conclusion, Strongly Agree and Agree were merged as 'Agree' whereas Disagree and Strongly Disagree were also merged as 'Disagree'.

Data Analysis

The responses of the participants to the questionnaire were organized into frequency counts, and converted into percentages. The results were used to describe attitude of the pre-service teachers towards blended learning and the challenges they face in Ghana. Respondents' with mean scores less than the average mean of 2.0 were considered to have negative attitude while respondents with mean scores greater than 2.0 were considered to have positive attitude. Negative worded items were recoded. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Challenges and Attitude towards Blended Learning

Items	A	N	D	M	SD
There is high cost of data bundle to access online courses and lessons"	471 (96.9)	15 (3.1)	0 (0.0)	1.03	.17
Poor network connectivity affect my full participation in blended learning"	477 (98.1)	6 (1.2)	3 (0.6)	1.02	.19
I lack digital device (laptops and high specification smart phone) to fully participate in lessons"	417 (85.8)	42 (8.6)	27 (5.6)	1.20	.52
The school fees for blended learning is too high	459 (94.4)	27 (5.6)	0 (0.0)	1.11	.46
Blended learning deprives me from social interactions and other co-curricular activities vital to my learnings"	414 (85.2)	24 (4.9)	48 (9.9)	1.25	.62
Blended learning is very stressful with its accompanying travels and luggage controls. "	396 (81.5)	30 (6.2)	60(12.3)	1.31	.68
Blended learning promotes my digital literacy through various ICT tools."	336 (69.1)	60(12.3)	90(18.5)	2.49	.78
Assessment feedback on blended learning meets my expectations."	246 (50.6)	27 (5.6)	213(43.8)	1.93	.97
There is insufficient technical know-how on the part of tutors and students with regards to the online learnings platforms and ICT tools."	474 (97.5)	12 (2.5)	0. (0.0)	1.05	.31
Blended learning involves a major content-based knowledge which prevents student teachers from practical and pedagogical skills needed for our profession"	417 (85.8)	42 (8.6)	27 (5.6)	1.20	.52
There is a lot of distraction at home that affect my online learnings"	458 (93.8)	15 (3.1)	15 (3.1)	1.09	.38
Blended learning results to health related issues such as eye problems and migraines as an aftermath of prolonged stay on digital devices for lessons"	375 (77.2)	30 (6.2)	81(16.7)	1.40	.76
The teaching of practically demanding courses like calculus, methodology and others results to rote learning and failure during exams. "	444 (91.4)	15 (3.1)	27 (5.6)	1.14	.48

Attitude towards Blended Learning

From the Table, the means for the items ranged from 1.02 to 2.49 and the SD ranged from .17 to .97. Almost all the items obtained a mean score below 2.0 except one (2.49). The items

which obtained the lowest means indicating negative attitude towards blended learning was on 'poor network connectivity affect my full participation in blended learning' (1.02, SD=19), which was followed by the statement 'there is high cost of data bundle to access online courses and lessons' (1.03, SD=17), and the highest mean (2.49, SD=.78) was on 'blended learning promotes my digital literacy through various ICT tools' whereas the statement 'assessment feedback on blended learning meets my expectations (1.93, SD=.97) was little below the average mean. This clearly shows that the participants had negative attitude towards blended learning as this was assumed to have been influenced by the challenges they faced in blended learning. The percentages were used for further discussion of the findings on the challenges of blended learning.

Challenges of Blended Learning

High Cost

The findings showed that the cost of blended learning is relatively high as compared to the traditional face-to-face learning. Majority (96.9%) of the participants specified that there is high cost of data bundle to access the online lesson sessions in blended learning. Equally almost all the participants were of the view that the school fees for blended learning is too high. Students continued to pay the same schools as they paid for their full time traditional face-to-face learning. Another claim supporting the high cost of blended learning was on the fact that the participants view it as requiring digital devices (laptops and high specification smart phone) to enable them to fully participate yet majority of them lacked these digital tools.

Poor Performance

Majority (91.4%) of the participants believed that the teaching of practically demanding courses like calculus, methodology and others lead to rote learning and failure during their exams. Few (5.6%) of the participants disagreed to this statement while the rest (3.1%) were indecisive. More than eighty percent (85.8%) of the participants posited that blended learning involves a major content-based knowledge which prevents student teachers from practical and pedagogical skills needed for their profession. More to this, the participants (85.2%) agreed that blended learning deprive them from social interactions and other co-curricular activities vital to their learnings. However, a little above half (50.6%) of the participants agreed that assessment feedback on blended learning meets their expectations whereas some (43.8%) disagreed to this claim and the rest (5.6%) were uncertain.

Distractions

Again, the finding discovered that blended learning is very stressful with its accompanying travels and luggage controls. About ninety percent (93.8%) of the participants indicated that there is a lot of distraction at home that affect their online learnings in blended learnings. Over seventy-five percent (77.2%) of the participants established agreement on the statement 'blended learning results to health related issues such as eye problems and migraines as an

aftermath of prolonged stay on their digital devices for lessons'. However, a good number (69.1%) of the participants were of the view that blended learning promotes their digital literacy through various ICT tools.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study revealed that pre-service teachers at the colleges of education in Ghana have negative attitudes towards blended learning which is assumed to have resulted from the numerous challenges they face in this mode of learning. The challenges faced by the pre-service teachers' ranged from high cost of blended learning, distractions that impede their smooth learnings which eventually lead to poor performance. However, the findings showed that blended learning promotes digital literacy among students through various ICT tools with some of the assessment feedback meeting students' expectations. It is therefore recommended that the government and other significant stakeholders should ensure that these challenges are remedied for smooth implementation of the 4-year Bachelor of Education in Basic Education Curriculum at the Colleges of Education in Ghana.

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