

LECTURERS' PERCEPTION ON VIRTUAL TEACHING PRACTICE ASSESSMENT: A FOCUS ON COLLEGES OF EDUCATION.

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Abstract

This study investigated lecturers' perception on virtual teaching practice assessment in Colleges of Education, Southwest, and Nigeria. The general objective of the study encapsulates divergent responses of lecturers in Colleges of Education on the possibilities of utilizing virtual teaching practice assessment procedures post-Covid-19. This study is a descriptive research of the survey type. Multistage sampling procedures were used in randomly selecting state owned Colleges of Education and 120 lecturers from a population of 385 lecturers in the Departments of English and General Studies of Colleges of Education in Southwest, Nigeria. An e-survey design was utilized in obtaining data for the study. Four research questions were raised for the study where each was analyzed using weighted means and standard deviation. The main finding revealed that a significant number of lecturers accepted the workability of virtual teaching practice assessment while others appeared less proficient in digital appreciation. Furthermore, a majority of College lecturers strongly agreed to the utilization of virtual assessment in a Covid-19 resurgent era. Recommendations included the need for government, National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and Management of Colleges of Education to harness efforts toward training lecturers and student-teachers in virtual procedures related to teaching practice assessment.

Keywords: Lecturers' perception, virtual teaching practice, Colleges of Education, Southwest, Nigeria

Introduction

The importance of training and retraining pre-service English language teachers in Colleges of Education cannot be overemphasized in a context where education is considered as a potent tool for the emancipation of human existence. In most developed climes, language teacher education forms the bedrock for almost every facet of national development. The United Nation's Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) emphasizes that 15-20% of a country's annual budgetary allocations should be allocated to education. Also, the training of teachers, for every level of formal education in Nigeria, cannot be complete without exposing them to regular communicative enhancement through exposure to teaching practice exercises. However, the COVID-19 pandemic appears to have affected the process of almost every teacher training programme in Nigeria. The mandatory teaching practice exercise for final year undergraduates in Colleges of Education is in danger of further diminishing

their instructional competences, including communicative skills in the language of instruction.

A significant number of scholars have attested to the voracity being accorded Virtual technology in form of online instruction all around the globe. With the current ebb in various pedagogical and spoken English skills of undergraduates in Colleges of Education, a further widening of the gap caused by the inability of teacher trainers to assess pre-service teachers on the field is likely to worsen the already impoverished teacher education system in the country. Most educators in tertiary institutions generally, and Colleges of Education in particular are engrossed in mapping out strategies for engaging their students in “normal” academic activities through virtual tools such as Google Suite, Zoom and social networking platforms. It is expected that online academic activities for lectures will be extended to online teaching practice supervision. This feat has significant advantages in a 21st century period where Nigeria has 92.3 million internet users and is projected to rise to 187.8 million in 2023 (statistica.com)

Teaching practice exercises in a new normal, especially with the resurgence of a new strain of Covid-19 virus, would include digital training of both supervisor and supervisee on a vast scale. To revert to the on-site mode of interaction during field assessment of student-teachers is inadvertently becoming impossible, except the COVID-19 pandemic is overwhelmed by the eventual discovery of an effective vaccine. However, until the vaccine is found and successfully administered globally, the educational system must continue.

The COVID-19 and the Nigerian educational scene present a scenario of desperate needs demanding desperate measures. The second wave of the pandemic, as evidenced in Adejoro's (2020) observation is likely to become reliant of more of online than conventional means of instruction. No doubt, most Nigerian Colleges of Education are experimenting with online lectures and social networking parameters such as Google Meet, Zoom, Learning Management Systems (LMS) and a host of virtual instructional media. However, the researcher assumes that lecturers would be better equipped with pedagogical and communicative skills hinged on an exposure to digital virtual assessment models and training packages for teaching practice exercises in Nigeria. In the light of this observation, the perception of lecturers involved in teaching practice supervision in Colleges of Education, need to be considered prior to an eventual execution of virtual instructional mode of teacher practice assessment in the digital space.

Statement of the Problem

Teaching practice exercises in Colleges of Education are largely organised for enhancing professional conduct of student-teachers in their respective academic

disciplines. Similarly, a significant proportion of evaluating the pedagogical qualities of student-teachers depends on exposure of these teachers to teaching practice exercises annually. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has altered this academic exercise. Consequently, the new normal has transformed formal instruction from conventional to online pedagogy in teacher education in Nigeria. Prior to COVID-19, there appeared to be a significant population of English language teachers in the Nigerian educational systems which may be viewed as an anathema in teacher education in Nigeria. The pandemic has halted the annual and mandatory teaching practice exercise for these teachers in Colleges of Education in Nigeria, in particular, thus signalling a threat to quality output of required professional English language teachers. Furthermore, the learner in Nigerian schools stand a chance of being exposed to half-baked teachers, especially in the use of incoherent mediums of instruction. Hence, there is the dire need to ascertain the perception of lecturers that would be responsible for assessing student-teachers through virtual instructional media with a view to improving and sustaining communicative skills as a prerequisite for teaching in primary and junior secondary schools in Nigeria.

Purpose

The following purposes of this research are as follows:

1. examine the supervisors' level of acceptability of virtual teaching practice assessment media across the Southwest Colleges of Education
2. investigate the virtual digital literacy level of lecturers involved in teaching practice exercises in Colleges of Education in Southwest, Nigeria.
3. determine the supervisors' attitude towards virtual tools for assessing student-teachers during teaching practice
4. investigate the level of institutional support for virtual instruction towards promoting virtual digital literacy training in Colleges of Education in Southwest, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions are generated for this study:

1. Do lecturers accept the workability of virtual instructional tools for teaching practice assessment ?
2. Are lecturers adequately digitally literate to utilize virtual tools for teaching practice assessment?
3. Does virtual instructional tools contribute to effective supervision of student-teachers' communicative skills while on the job?
4. Are lecturers provided with relevant institutional support in using virtual instructional tools for teaching practice assessment?

Literature Review

Teaching practice exercises have been viewed as an essential prerequisite for English language pre-service teachers towards obtaining the Nigeria Certificate of Education (NCE) in readiness for teaching in primary schools in Nigeria. Rembe et al. (2016) views teaching practice as the preparatory stage for exposing pre-service teachers to teaching techniques, teaching strategies, teaching methods and further exposure to teaching and learning activities within the institution of learning. Similarly, Babatunde (2016) notes that significant pedagogical and content knowledge attained in Colleges of Education and Faculties of Education in universities are impacted on the student-teachers which are later practicalized during teaching practice exercise.

A significant number of pre-service language teachers in Nigerian Colleges of Education had the teaching practice exercise for 2019/2020 truncated due to the unexpected occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Egbe (2020) observes that the pandemic has exacerbated calls for educational transformation at both domestic and international levels. As an antidote to bridging the instructional divide involving the lecturers and student-teachers participating in formal instruction in Nigerian schools, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) made some recommendations which included setting up of distance learning and open educational applications and platforms by schools and teachers to reach learners remotely. The implication of these recommendations on teacher training programmes underpins the need to afford student-teachers and their supervising lecturer the opportunity to continue assessing student-teachers on teaching practice albeit through alternative means of formal instruction. Faloye and Obateru (2021) view these changes as digitalization of the educational process. Consequently, as a result of a truncation in teacher-training programmes in Colleges of Education, in particular, presumably unprepared language teachers may not be appropriate to instruct in English language in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria.

Yusof & Halim (2014) buttress the need to expose supervisors as well as student-teachers to essential digital and communicative skills as an essential prerequisite during training in accredited teacher-training citadels, including Colleges of Education. Furthermore, Poth (2016) reiterates the vital link between digital instructional tools and communicative competence. With the expected reliance on virtual instructional platforms for teaching practice exercises and based on the forecasted advent of the resurgence of COVID-19 pandemic (Adejoro, 2020), language teachers- in -training may still need innovative means such as virtual instruction to communicate with learners. Resultantly, the COVID-19 pandemic appears, and very emphatic too, to be one of the major reasons for a major global tilt towards virtual and interactive model, particularly in tertiary institutions of learning in Nigeria.

According to Singh and Thurman (2019) virtual instruction and assessment showcases the dexterity and innovative approaches to learning experiences in synchronous or asynchronous contexts with the aid of devices with internet connectivity such as mobile phones, laptops, tablets and so on. In this process, the student-teacher and supervisor can be in virtual contact anywhere in the world. The use of virtual assessment entails innovative digital procedures involving internet connectivity, video, audio, sufficient data for supervisor and supervisee (Amoah & Naah ,2020)Scarcia-King (2011), Cano and Garcia(2013) and Faloye, Obateru and Alonge (2021) note that evolving virtual instructional trends requires innovative strategies on the part of teacher and student considering immense pedagogic benefits for the educational context in Covid-19 pandemic situations.

The use of virtual learning environment for teaching and learning contexts is probably one of the concepts that appear to alter the frontier of knowledge acquisition in today's educational arena which includes academic programmes designed for teacher training exercises (Nwabude et al., 2020, p. 6). A shift to online instruction amidst a reoccurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic is expected be of immense benefit to the educational system globally (Karataş & Tuncer, 2020). Consequently, the new normal entails that lecturers involved in the annual teaching practice exercise should be significantly digital compliant based on the global shift from onsite learning to a virtual mode.

Literature has continually expressed the prerequisite upgrading of academics from total reliance on face-to face instruction to either a blend of face-to face and virtual or total virtual instruction. A report from UNESCO (2020) showed an unbelievable figure of 1,38 billion learners that were prevented by the covid-19 pandemic from learning in national schools around the globe. Also, Covid-19 pandemic has been reported to have truncated teaching and learning of over 46 million learners in Nigerian schools (Hussain (2020). In essence, there is the need for teacher- trainers to embark on a digital approach to training and assessing pre-service language teachers in readiness for a second wave of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Nigeria, as an entity, cannot afford to concede the production of qualified language teachers to another lockdown-driven educational holocaust.

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive research of a survey design. A structured e-Questionnaire was used to gather relevant data through a hybridization system comprising a Google Form (survey) and a dedicated WhatsApp platform and Google Sheet. The research instruments comprised electronic data collection platforms (Google Form and WhatsApp) and retrieval systems (Google Sheet). The lockdown period

during the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the use of electronic means of data collection for the study.

The population of the research comprised 385 academics in the Departments of English and General Studies of Colleges of Education in Southwest, Nigeria. A multistage sampling procedure was used to randomly select one government -owned College of Education from each of the six states namely Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Ondo, Ekiti and Osun states. Simple random sampling was used in selecting 120 lecturers adjudged to be qualified to supervise student-teachers in Colleges of Education.

The items on the e-questionnaire were validated by experts in Tests and Measurements through the electronic mail system. A reliability coefficient of 0.87 was attained using Cronbach's alpha to adjudge the reliability level of the e-questionnaire. The questionnaire exhibited a psychometric scale in form of a 5- scale Likert questionnaire with 20 items. A multiple-choice selection option for Q1-5, 11-20 consisted of Strongly *disagree*, *disagree*, *neutral*, *agree* and Strongly *agree* while Q6-10 comprised self-rating scale of *Poor*, *Fair*, *not sure*, *Good* and *Excellent*

Demographic items were displayed in section A which required background profiles of the respondents such as:

- (i). Gender: Male / female
- (ii). Status: L3- L1 & SL -CL.

Part B of the survey consists of four sections that focused on: (a) lecturers' views on the workability of digital instructional tools; (b) lecturers' self-assessment on their digital literacy levels; (c) virtual instructional workability for assessing student-teacher's communicative skills and (d) perception on institutional support for a shift to virtual instructional platforms. Data was retrieved and analyzed using interval scale to interpret means and standard deviation with SPSS.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: Do lecturers accept the workability of virtual instructional tools for teaching practice assessment ?

Table 1: Responses to lecturers' acceptability of the workability of virtual instructional tools for teaching practice assessment.

S/N	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	The use of virtual tools for assessing student-teachers' knowledge of subject matter is attainable	3.20	1.112
2	The use of virtual tools for observing and correcting possible pedagogical mistakes during teaching is achievable	3.37	1.061
3	Virtual tools are capable of observing student-teacher and learner interaction during instruction	3.37	1.054
4	Assessment of student-teachers' lesson notes can be done and made available to them using online tools such as emails	3.37	1.157
5	Grading of e- assessment sheets can be done online	2.28	1.077
Weighted Mean		3.12	

Table 1 showed the responses to lecturers' acceptability of the workability of virtual instructional tools for teaching practice assessment. It was held that the use of virtual tools for assessing student-teachers' knowledge of subject matter is attainable and that the use of virtual tools for observing and correcting possible pedagogical mistakes during teaching is achievable.

It was further shown that virtual tools are capable of observing student-teacher and learner interaction during instruction while assessment of student-teachers' lesson notes can be done and made available to them using online tools such as emails. It was however held that grading of e- assessment sheets cannot be done online.

Summarily, sequel to the value (3.12) obtained for the weighted mean, which was above the average mean response of (3.0) for the 5 Point Likert Scale rating, the table revealed that lecturers do accept the workability of virtual instructional tools for teaching practice assessment

Research Question 2: Are lecturers adequately digitally literate to utilize virtualtools for teachingpractice assessment?

Table 2: Responses to whether lecturers are adequately digitally literate to utilize virtual tools for teaching practice assessment.

S/N	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Downloading and sending documents via email on android phones	2.18	9.58
2	Downloading and sending documents via email on laptop computers	2.39	1.110
3	Navigating from start to Google Meet/ Classroom active environment on an android phone	2.68	1.304
4	Navigation from start to Google Meet/Classroom environment on a laptop computer	2.48	1.230
5	Setting up Google Meet invitation links through Google Calendar	2.27	1.333
Weighted Mean		2.40	

Table 2 showed the responses to whether lecturers are adequately digitally literate to utilize virtual tools for teaching practice assessment. It was revealed that most lecturers cannot download and send documents via email on android phones and also could not download and send documents via email on laptop computers.

It was further shown that most lecturers can neither navigate from start to Google Meet/ Classroom active environment on an android phone nor navigate from start to Google Meet/Classroom environment on a laptop computer. They also found it difficult to set up Google Meet invitation links through Google Calendar.

Summarily, sequel to the value (2.40) obtained for the weighted mean, which was below the average mean response of (3.0) for the 5 Point Likert Scale rating,the table established the fact that lecturers are not adequately digitally literate to utilize virtual tools for teaching practice assessment.

Research Question 3: Does virtual instructional tools contribute to effective supervision of student-teachers' communicative skills while on the job?

Table 3: Responses to whether virtual instructional tools contribute to effective supervision of student-teachers' communicative skills while on the job

S/N	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Virtual tools can be used to monitor student-teachers' spoken English	3.05	1.136
2	Virtual tools can be used to assess student-teachers' writing on the Chalkboard	3.42	.992
3	It is necessary for cooperative teachers to participate in virtual assessment of student –teachers	3.54	1.020
4	I can use virtual tools to assess student-teacher's activities after the lessons	2.43	1.121
5	Conventional teaching practice supervision of communicative skills is effective than that of virtual assessment.	3.27	1.051
Weighted Mean		3.14	

Penultimately, Table 3 showed the responses to whether virtual instructional tools contribute to effective supervision of student-teachers' communicative skills while on the job. It was found that most lecturers believed that virtual tools can be used to monitor student-teachers' spoken English and assess student-teachers' writing on the Chalkboard.

It was further held that virtual instructional tools are necessary for cooperative teachers to participate in virtual assessment of student –teachers and that conventional teaching practice supervision of communicative skills is effective than that of virtual assessment. It was however held that most of the lecturers cannot use virtual tools to assess student-teacher's activities after the lessons.

Summarily, consequently, the value (3.14) obtained for the weighted mean, which was above the average mean response of (3.0) for the 5 Point Likert Scale rating, the table revealed the fact that virtual instructional tools contribute to effective supervision of student-teachers' communicative skills while on the job.

Research Question 4: Are lecturers provided with relevant institutional support in using virtual instructional tools for teaching practice assessment?

Table 4: Lecturers' response towards availability of institutional support in using virtual instructional tools for teaching practice assessment

S/N	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	My institution supports me with regular retraining and training workshops on digital literacy	1.91	1.138
2	My institution provides computer systems (laptops/desktops) for instructional purposes	1.88	.801
3	My institution ensures I have access to internet services with adequate bandwidth	2.03	1.041
4	My institution provides regular power supply during office hours	2.36	.896
5	My institution provides regular power supply during office hours	2.72	.954
Weighted Mean		2.18	

Lastly, Table 4 showed the responses of lecturers on the level of relevant institutional support in using virtual instructional tools for teaching practice assessment. It was found that their institutions most often do not support them with regular retraining and training workshops on digital literacy and do not provide adequate computer systems (laptops/desktops) for instructional purposes.

Furthermore, respondents revealed that their institutions do not ensure they have access to internet services with adequate bandwidth and do not provide regular power supply during office hours, as well as not being able to provide regular power supply during office hours.

Summarily, consequently, the value (2.18) obtained for the weighted mean, which was far less than the average mean response of (3.0) for the 5- Point Likert Scale rating, hence the table revealed that lecturers appear not to be provided with adequate and relevant institutional support for virtual assesment naching practice assessment.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed relevant academic information in the realm of language teacher education. Presently, there appears to be a resurgence of the dreaded Covid-19 pandemic with India likely being worst hit. Consequently, language teacher education (LTE) endangerment should be avoided with urgent consideration of a shift from conventional to virtual teaching practice supervision. Hopefully, global trends in language teacher education comprising digital instructional strategies of evaluation, teaching methods and approaches would benefit all stakeholders in the teaching industry peradventure the resurgence of Covid-19 pandemic, God forbid, becomes a reality in Nigeria. (Anyanwu & Iwuamadi, 2015).

The world witnessed the importance of virtual instructional tools during the lockdown saga, most especially in the teaching and learning context. Based on this historical assertion, findings of this study further underpinned the necessity of investigating the need to integrate virtual instruction and assessment in the mandatory teaching practice exercise. Results from this study revealed the eagerness of lecturers to utilize virtual assessment procedures through Google Meet or related virtual platforms for the evaluation of student-teachers. This finding corroborates the assertion of Bidabadi, Nasrifahani, Rouhollahi, & Khalili (2016) which is suggestive of the fact that teachers should be in tandem with 21st century educational practices with a view to capacitate human and material wares for the benefit of the future generation of teachers. Furthermore, the study of Spante et al. (2018) underpins the findings of the study as regards the significantly low digital literacy level of some lecturers in Colleges of Education. However, the digital incompetencies of a significant number of lecturers in Colleges of Education may likely be as a result of inadequate infrastructural support form their institutions. Thus, Egbe (2020) reinforces the findings of this study in the area of institutional support for virtual instruction.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were outlined in relation to this study:

1. The Nigeria Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) should embark on massive retraining of lecturers in digital appreciation through virtual tools. The training should include not only basic procedures for digital operations but also evaluative content.

2. State Governments should declare a state of emergency in Colleges of Education within its purview as regards virtual instructional education for academics and students.
3. Schools of studies in Colleges should organise periodical in-house workshops on virtual assessment procedures (VAP) for teaching practice exercises. The Micro teaching course content should include VAP .
4. Management of Colleges of Education and Faculties of Education should approach TetFund for digital softwares and hardwares support initiatives towards jump starting virtual assessment of pre-service language teachers amidst a resurgence of Covid-19 pandemic.

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