Students' Perceived Ethical integrity and quality issues with E-learning in Nigerian Tertiary Education

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Abstract

Our society is witnessing a dramatic change which is also significantly impacting both our social and economic spheres of life, most especially the education sector. The current Covid-19 pandemic has imposed a change in the way curriculum-based education is currently been run. Citadels of learning, the world over have been forced to either adapt or wait out the storm. Most institutions have however chosen the former option by switching all academic activities to online platforms. This has fundamentally challenged the way learning and education are being delivered in a disruptive manner. This study, therefore, seeks to gain an insight into the perception of third and final year undergraduates students in Nigerian universities, on the overall impact of the change from traditional learning to e-learning. Data was gathered via questioners and analyzed. The result shows that the online mode of learning has indeed had a marginal impact on the overall ethical integrity concerning the dissemination of course contents.

Keywords: e-Learning, Ethical Integrity, COVID 19, Assessment

1. Introduction

Traditionally, in most parts of the World, education is delivered within the walls of a classroom with a teacher who is in charge of educating the student on the current topics of a particular subject and students who at the end of the program will be tested on what they have been taught. With the advent of smaller and cheaper computers today, which follows the notion of Moore's law (Rotmanarchive, 2020) coupled with ever-increasing internet speed, there has been a steady progression from classroom-based teaching to internet-based teaching.

Education, according to Smith (2020) can be defined as the wise, hopeful, and respectful cultivation of learning undertaken in the belief that all should have the chance to share in life while the National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition (2010) defines schooling as the process of imparting knowledge and skills to individuals through curriculum and instruction, experimental learning, and work-based learning. Both definitions help us to understand that education can occur anywhere which is why learning environments can be divided into formal and informal.

The curriculum-based education, which is the most dominant in Nigeria tertiary institutions is essential because its goal is to provide individuals with the necessary tools to become productive citizens, pursue higher education and lifelong learning, engage in meaningful employment, and work toward achieving personal goals (NASET, 2010) The Covid-19 pandemic has made it necessary for most institutions of higher learning in Nigeria to shift from a classroom-based teaching routine to delivery of curriculum contents via the internet. This shift has become imperative for schools that want to remain relevant and keep up with their academic calendars.

It is pertinent to note that before the pandemic, just eleven (11) Federal Universities had approved online Distance Learning Centers (MySchoolGist, 2019), and even at that, not all courses are available. This shows that various courses require different levels of intensity to deliver the course's contents most acceptably. For instance, some courses require a practical component to be fully understood. Giving this situation, It can be quite challenging to assess the quality of such an online mode of learning. Proponents of online distance learning have argued that it allows for easy admission of students, flexibility in learning, faster track to graduation especially

in the case of industrial actions in Nigeria, innovative curricula adapted to students, peculiarly updated resources (Pop, 2020) but all the aforementioned points suggest that the skill of online delivery of course contents require a mental and paradigm shift from the traditional mode of teaching by lecturers and investments in information technology infrastructure. This can only be achieved through technical training and the acquisition of learning equipment. It is also important to mention the fact that online learning can also be new for students who are not very computer literate, hence they could be passive and docile in the knowledge acquisition process.

With the assumption that Universities are willing to foot the above-stated bills and with students who are used to a classroom setting for learning and life in a country with a projected internet penetration of 65.1% in 2020 from 56.4% in 2019 (Clement, 2019), with the Nigeria Naira purchasing power parity of 7.61% dollar (Knoema, 2018), the question then is what is the impact on the integrity of teaching via e-learning.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought about a situation where tertiary institutions have to adopt Online teaching methods for the delivery of their course contents. Before now, the mode of teaching was classroom-based where a lecturer and students are confined to a classroom. This situation gives a form of formal and hierarchical setting and ensures physical interactions and demonstrations where necessary between both parties.

Given that many lecturers were not trained and possibly not used to online platforms for their teaching before now, this, therefore, justifies the need for a study to analyze ethical integrity issues perceived by students in the delivery of courses by their lecturers. This study analyzed the perceived ethical integrity issues by students in the delivery of course contents via online platforms taking into account how courses are conducted, planned, and assessed. The study was carried out using online questionnaires subdivided into three sections that reflect the objectives of this research work.

Data collected was limited to third and final year students of tertiary institutions whose universities have adopted online teaching. Using this category will enable us to get a valid comparison because such students would have a better understanding of the differences between online and classroom learning. This set of students may also find it harder to adjust to this new mode of learning.

1.2 Research Questions
Has the online mode of learning impacted negatively the level of ethical integrity in the delivery of course contents?

1.3.1 Hypotheses
Null Hypothesis
H_o: Online learning has not impacted the ethical integrity of the learning

Alternate Hypothesis
H_1: Online learning has negatively impacted the ethical integrity of the learning

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 E-Learning
Online learning, distance learning, and E-learning are all terms used to describe education that takes place over the Internet. This form of learning can be done over long distances (in some cases, inter-Continental). This form of learning removes the need for a classroom and also sometimes the need for a specific time of delivery of lectures.

According to Stern (n.d.), some types of distance learning are Correspondence Courses- conducted through regular mail with little interaction, Telecourses- where content is delivered via radio or television broadcast. CD-ROM Courses- where the student interacts with static computer content, Online Learning- Internet-based courses offered synchronously and/or asynchronously., Mobile Learning- utilizing devices such as cellular phones, PDAs, and digital audio.

Chernev (2019) posits that the worldwide e-learning market is projected to be worth $325 Billion by 2025 while E-learning increases retention rates by 25% to 60%. E-learning has led to an increase in income for 42% of US organizations and IBM saved approximately $200 million after switching to e-learning.

The facts above show that the world has embraced e-learning and if properly managed would become a money-spinner for organizations that properly implement it. These facts are supported by the number of students who are involved in online courses. The statistics of online learning grew from 33.1% in 2017 to 34.7% in 2018 (Lederman, 2019) in the United States representing a student count of one (1) online student in every three (3)

Fig 2.1. E-learning retention rates (Gutierrez, 2016)

Given these statistics, we see that E-learning has come to stay and can only get bigger in decades to come.

2.2 E-Learning in Nigeria

The peculiarity of a student to admission ration in Nigerian universities lays credence to the inevitability of online learning in Nigeria. In 2020 alone over 1.9 million candidacies wrote the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board Examination (EduCeleb, 2020) while there are below 1 million slots for admission in all government-run tertiary institutions (Adesulu, 2019). Most Private Universities in Nigeria on the other hand do not usually have the capacity and funding to take in as many students as may be needing admission. Further still, tuition in private universities is usually on the high end of the spectrum which makes them unaffordable for students who cannot pay such bills.

The lack of funding, proper academic environments, and other dishonored agreements usually between Government and Universities usually result in the unwanted extension of students stay in the university. Going by the lack of social amenities for the disabled in society, online learning can become the bridge that will give all the same academic opportunities.

Given the above, we can conjure that online learning may just be the solution needed to the educational conundrum because it will provide up to date facilities and flexibilities that will be of benefit to both student and teachers provided it is well planned, executed, and controlled.

However as it is with information technology, the expected smooth sailing process may just not always be the case. Downtime in the delivery of online subjects can easily make a student lose interest and thereby disrupts the overall coordination and effectiveness of the class.
Peculiar to the Nigerian landscape are issues of

1. Purchasing power: Because the Naira value is nothing to write home about against the Dollar (which, most international trades are based upon), the acquisition of the requisite tools maybe just be beyond the financial strengths of the teacher, student, and even the academic institution in some cases

2. Power outages: the cost of conducting online courses may rise astronomically because of the epileptic power supply situation in Nigeria which will force students and teachers alike to get alternate sources of electricity which are usually more expensive to operate.

3. Cost of accessing the internet: although it has fairly improved from what it used to be, the cost of buying data is still on the high side for most, and given that online classes mostly make use of videos and tons of resources, the overall volume may sometimes run into gigabytes of used up data which has an impact on all parties involved

These above-mentioned points show that, although online learning may be the solution to incessant issues of education in Nigeria, it may not be viable for all. As shown in fig 2.2 and 2.3
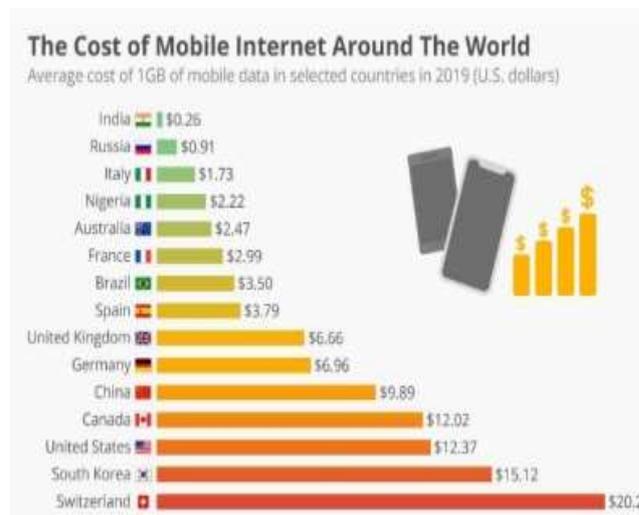

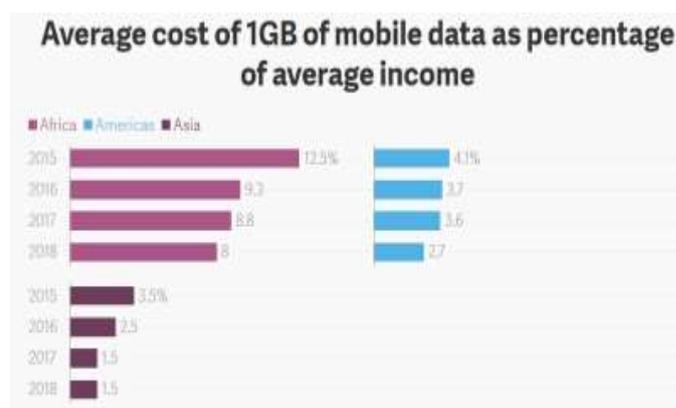Fig 2.2 Cost of the Internet (McCarthy, 2019)

Figure 2.3 cost of data v income (Kazeem, 2019)
Figures 2.2 and 2.3 show that although the cost of data is relatively lower in Nigeria compared to other countries, it takes a toll on the average income.

2.3 Review of Related Works

Stahl (n.d) argued that online teaching can pose a moral threat to the integrity of education because e-teaching is driven from the business angle of profit-making. The work argues that although all stakeholders can influence a lot about e-teaching not all influences can have the same impact. The writer, through a small focus group of students, argues that there are concerns regarding the morality of teaching in this online format these concerns may snowball into a societal issue that all may need to grapple with. While the writer is correct about such concerns, it is pertinent to know that the use of knowledge is subjective and those that want to learn will learn for specific purposes. The writer fails to recognize that the traditional model of education is also profit-driven even though it is made to look like it takes a back seat in the scheme of operations. By investigating the impact of online learning, Rakes & Dunn (2010) showed that a major

concern is the support of students learning in this segment of the university population i.e. the impact of effort regulation, self-regulatory skill, and intrinsic motivation. They show that academic procrastination was the most harmful part of a student's academic life and therefore not the influence of business on academic online learning.

Kitahara & Westfall (2007) posit that in providing quality education using online Distance Learning (DL) as the delivery mechanism, a university must face new challenges to ensuring academic integrity in the behavior of its students. They show that student attitude plays an important role in the overall success of the scheme; hence, they introduced issues relevant to promoting academic integrity, published Standards of Conduct, while exemplifying the nature of the problem, and assesses a technology based approach to its solution. Their findings show that students who wish to obtain an unfair advantage over other students are now armed with new and interesting opportunities, tools, and resources with which to obtain that unethical edge, these new technologies and tools make the collective job of the University, instructors, course delivery system designers and publishers much more difficult, In the face of these difficulties much more thought, time and energy must be spent in designing DL courses to maintain academic integrity

Xu & Jaggars (2013) used a large administrative dataset from a statewide system including 34 community and technical colleges. they employed an instrumental variable technique to estimate the impact of online versus face-to-face course delivery on student course performance. The travel distance between each student's home and college campus served as an instrument for the likelihood of enrolling in an online section of a given course.

Also, college-by-course fixed effects controlled for within- and between-course selection bias. Analyses yield robust negative estimates for online learning in terms of both course persistence and course grade, contradicting the notion that there is no significant difference between online and face-to-face student outcomes—at least within the community college setting. They posited that both two-year and four-year colleges focus on evaluating and improving the quality of online coursework before engaging in further expansions of online learning.

This study has helped to unveil the impact of the sudden change of academic teaching model from the perspective of the receivers (students) who are to also adjust and bear part of the financial burden of this model. Furthermore, this study has shown students' preference, if students prefer the online model over the customary class model or vice versa or are indifferent to either.

3.0 Methodology
This study has gathered data from third and final year university students, using questioners designed on Google forms and distributed through social media platforms. Answers to questions were scaled using a 6-point Likert scale.

Due to the limitations of online platforms and the fact that boundaries can become non-specific as a result of the removal of the classroom and school environment, the questionnaires were designed based on the following modalities as an adaptation of the position of the professional learning board of the year 2020.

1. Conduct i.e. how lecturers conduct themselves, conduct and lectures
2. Assessment i.e. testing the understanding of students regarding lectures delivered
3. Planning i.e. the methods lecturers have adopted in the delivery of their course's contents

4.0 Results and Discussions
The analysis of the questionnaire is presented below in form of charts and tables.
Have your lecturers been able to maintain a high standard in the delivery of content via the online platform?
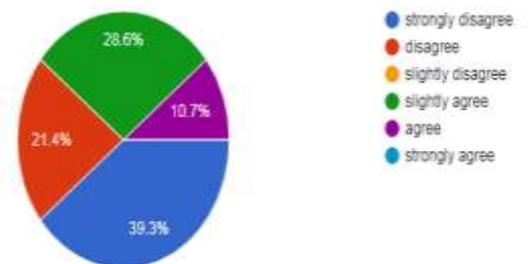

Figure 4.1: Response to delivery standard

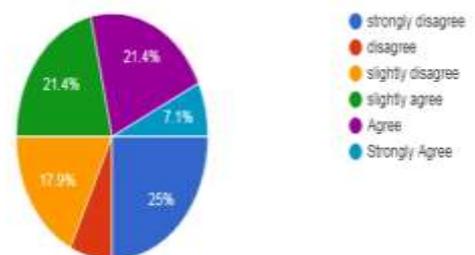Have your lecturers kept to time in the delivery of course contents?

Figure 4.2: Response to punctuality

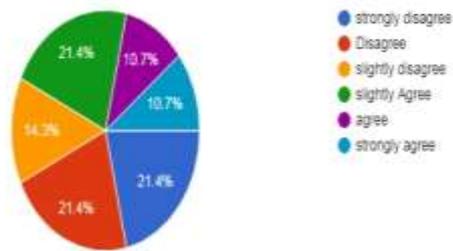Are your lecturers sympathetic to student's shortcomings concerning their courses?

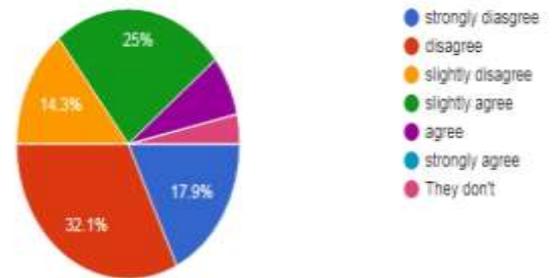28 responses

Figure 4.3: Response to lecturers' sensitivity

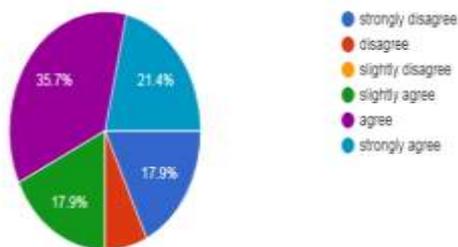Do your lecturers conduct themselves professionally when using the online platform?
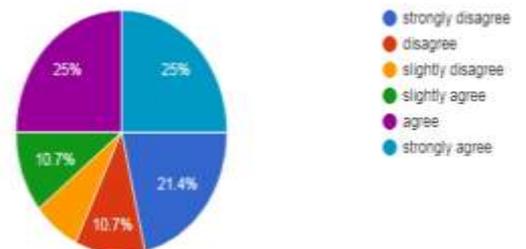
28 responses

Figure 4.4: Response to professionalism

Do lecturers abuse their powers on the platform?

28 responses
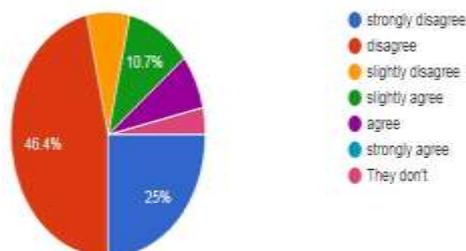
Figure 4.5: Response to appropriate usage of power

Do your lecturers show preferential treatment?

28 responses

Figure 4.6: Response to partiality

Are lecturers accessible and responsive to further explanations and follow-up questions?

28 responses

Figure 4.7: Response to accessibility

Do lecturers deliver creative contents that are easy to understand?

28 responses

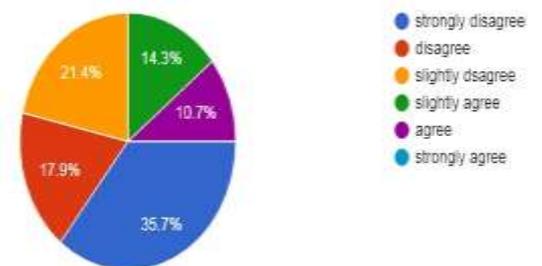Figure 4.8: Response to quality of contents

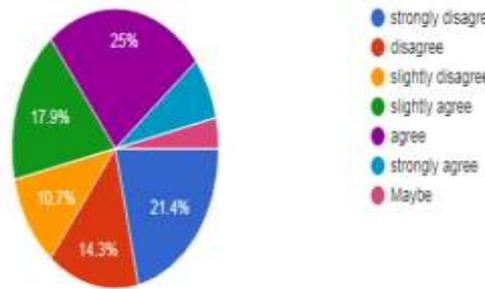Do your lectures reflect the goals of the course?

28 responses

Figure 4.9: Response to contents' relevance
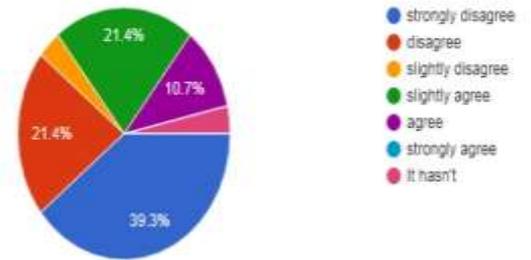
28 responses

Figure 4.12: Response to learning drive

Do your lecturers make it a point to test your knowledge of topics?
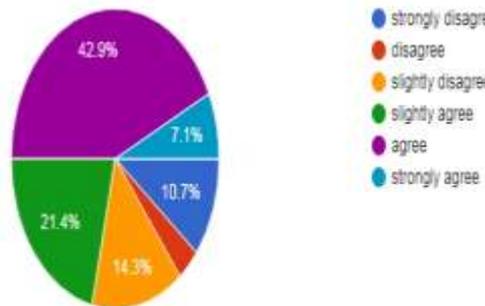
28 responses

Figure 4.10: Response to test of knowledge gained

Would you say the online platform is preferable to the classroom?
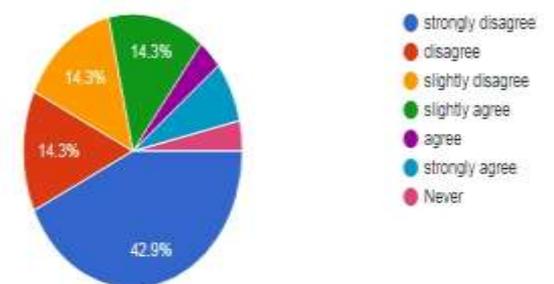
28 responses

Figure 4.13: Response to the efficiency of the online platform as a means for academic learning

Would you say the online platform has been burdensome on your learning trajectory?
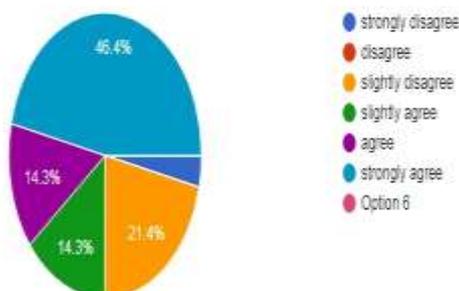
28 responses

Figure 4.11: Response to ease the learning

Do you think the sudden change in the mode of lecture delivery has watered down the effectiveness of your lecturers?
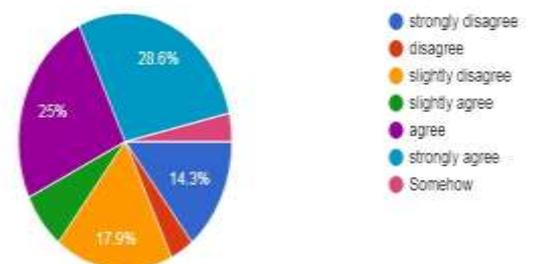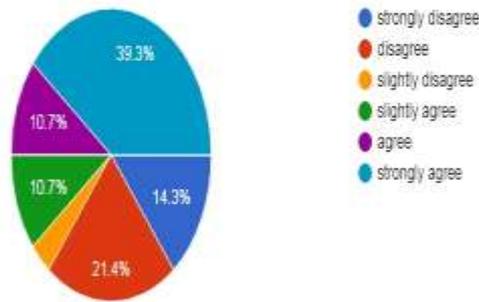
28 responses

Figure 4.14: Response to lecturer's effectiveness on the online platform

Since the inception of the online platform, has it given you the impetus to study more?

Does the school environment give a sense of seriousness over the online platform?

28 responses

- strongly disagree
- disagree
- slightly disagree
- slightly agree
- agree
- strongly agree

39.3%
10.7%
10.7%
14.3%
21.4%

Analysis

Making use of questions that are directly related to learning and our study objective, we, therefore, consider questions: 1,3,7,8,9,10,11,12, 13,14, & 15.

Target Questions	%For online learning	% Against online learning
Have your lecturers been able to maintain a high standard in the delivery of content via the online platform?		
Are your lecturers sympathetic to student's shortcomings concerning their courses?		
Are lecturers accessible and responsive to further explanations and follow up questions?		
Do lecturers deliver creative contents that are easy to understand?		
Do your lectures reflect the goals of the course?		
Do your lecturers make it a point to test your knowledge of topics?		
Would you say the online platform has been burdensome on your learning trajectory?		
Since the inception of the online platform, has it given you the impetus to study more?		
Would you say the online platform is preferable to the classroom?		
Do you think the sudden change in the mode of lecture delivery has watered down the effectiveness		

of your lecturers?		
Does the school environment give a sense of seriousness over the online platform?		

From the questionnaire, the total of responses for and those against are 517.9% and 539.2%. Although marginal, we see that the online platform has affected learning. We, therefore, accept H_1 and reject H_o

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendation:

This study has focused on getting the perception of students about the online learning model that has been thrust on most universities in Nigeria. The online learning method has become a necessity in the event of a pandemic outbreak. Based on the responses and observation from the survey. There is a marginal drop in the quality of learning which simultaneously affects the overall ethical integrity and quality of education.

This marginal drop may be the result of the challenges associated with online learning like; difficulty in adapting to the virtual environment, low computer literacy among the students, dependency on the Internet and technology, an absence of support and offline learning, extensive coordination required in e-learning, also the fact that everything can not be taught on the internet and lastly the complexity of the course. (Paschal, 2018) . It is therefore evident that effective and quality online learning can only be achieved when the above challenges are mitigated and overcome.

The result obtained in this study might vary if carried out on a larger population and wider population. Hence, for further research, it is therefore recommended that a larger population size of students be tested to obtain a more robust perspective on the effectiveness and comparism of traditional and online mode of learning.

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