VIRTUAL LEARNING AS AN IMPETUS FOR BUSINESS EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN THE MIDST OF COVID-19 IN NIGERIA

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Type of manuscript: review paper

Abstract: *The modern virtual learning is the complex process of using electronic technology and resources to have better access to teaching and learning with or without any physical classrooms. Today, virtual learning has become a valuable way of teaching, learning and research in education, with the terrible emergency of the COVID-19 pandemic in the world. This study critically examined the modern virtual learning as an impetus for the business education programme in the midst of COVID-19 in Nigeria. It vividly considered the concept of business education; virtual learning and business education; obvious benefits of virtual learning in the business education programme; certain challenges facing virtual learning in realising the goals of business education amidst COVID-19. It further presented various virtual learning tools that can be used in delivery of business education lessons. Finally, the paper concluded that despite numerous benefits attributable to the adoption of virtual learning in the business education programme, there are currently many relevant issues that still need to be resolved and put in place to achieve its benefits and as well correct the negative perception and slow use of virtual learning among students and teachers. Also, the modern virtual learning would have been the best alternative teaching method for business education amidst COVID-19 provided majority of Nigerian learners have access to Internet facilities. It was also recommended among other things that government and different stakeholders in the education sector should endeavour to make provision for good Internet facilities, stable electricity and good working computers at all levels of education (especially in business education). Modern teachers and students should also be provided with necessary training techniques regarding virtual learning. That is done for active teaching of business education programmes so as to enhance and sustain teaching and learning through virtual learning delivery at all levels of education.*
Keywords: virtual learning, programme, business education, COVID-19, Nigeria.
JEL Classification: A20, F20, I21

Introduction. It was clear that COVID-19 had recently resulted in a lockdown of every sector (especially, the education sector) and this had caused the school programme to be suspended for over six months. To prevent students from falling behind in their academic pursuits, various nations throughout the world saw appropriate to use virtual teaching techniques. The epidemic has revealed significant inequities in the field of education, according to Bansal (2020). Many children who are less fortunate or live in rural regions are left out, even if several private schools in metropolitan areas involve their pupils in online learning. As it relates to wealthy countries, the majority of schools could not afford the necessary web resources to engage in online teaching successfully.

Observation has shown that the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted education. It made policymakers look for quick and workable answers to the challenges associated with learning while dealing with COVID-19. Teaching students the practical skills, attitudes and information necessary in business contexts, occupational settings and societies can be considered one of the parts of business education. In certain situations, students who complete this programme will be self-employed. According to Adegoke (2017), business education is a component of vocational education that helps students gain the skills they need to be employable in the workforce or to work for themselves and contribute to the country's economic growth. These education aspects need to be given the appropriate thought by searching for alternatives to conventional teaching amidst COVID-19 to keep the programme alive. It seems that virtual learning could be used as an alternative way to teach students during the lockdown to protect the future of the nation's economy.

Utilising virtual learning is the process of an online classroom environment to disseminate information, knowledge, skills and the right attitude to the students. Sahu (2020) observed online learning and teaching include digital technologies that permit learners and teachers to interact effectively without face-to-face interaction. It appears that period of the COVID-19 pandemic is a typical example of times when the conventional teaching paradigm could not work for teaching activities. During this period, measure against social isolation were taken; students and teachers were not allowed to interact physically, disrupting teaching and learning (UNESCO, 2020). Teaching and learning in business education require interaction between students and teachers which may not only be physical (Akhtar et al., 2019). Online education has historically been crucial in helping some institutions overcome the challenges of maintaining educational continuity during global crises. This foundation served as a basis for the current study. It looked at virtual learning as a tool for business education programmes under COVID-19 in Nigeria.

Literature Review. Concept of business education. Business education appeared to be a process of instructing learners on the practical skills and knowledge needed in a place of work, occupational field, business environment and self-employed business. Anao (1986) and Ojeaga and Igbinedion (2012) argued that business education is an educational process to prepare people for roles in enterprises, such as employees, entrepreneurs, employers or simply as self-employed persons. Business studies are taught at the junior secondary school level and are a pre-vocational topic. They prepare students for further studies and help them develop the comprehension and attitudes necessary for successful advancement in their educational pursuit. Besides, it serves as an introduction to the social sciences which raises manipulative skills, inventiveness and respect for labour dignity (Igbinedion and Epumepu, 2011). According to the National Policy on Education (2014), its educational courses at the secondary and post-secondary levels that include bookkeeping, keyboarding, marketing, accounting, office education, office management, store-keeping, co-operative education and desktop publishing/word processing.

One goal in business education, which serves as a component of technical and vocational education, is to prepare students to gain information, skills and work expertise necessary on the job, the task now possible with the traditional teaching approach. Uko-Aviomoh and Ajuluchi (2008) noted that business education is a significant component of vocational and technical education, working to equip students with the knowledge and skills they need to find employment, whether by starting their own small business or by finding gainful employment that make use of their skills. In light of the present economic downturn, it has become increasingly difficult for instructors and learners in the programme to organise the classroom effectively to accomplish this admirable objective of business education using the traditional method of teaching and learning. To address the issue of the learning challenges that this period presents, modern teaching methods are employed. According to Kwache (2007), the speed of change brought on by new technology has significantly impacted how people interact around the globe, with no exception in education. Essentially, why do modern and developing technologies pose a threat to the established modes of instruction and administration in the field of education? Business education is not spared from the global paradigm change from the old approach of teacher-centred learning to current ways of ICT playing a vital role. Instead of relying solely on textbooks and printed materials, like teaching and learning in business school have done it in the

past, ICT has a tremendous speed at delivering flexibility, improvement in the standards and quantity of education. The benefits of adopting e-learning systems as a teaching tool vary in terms of students' ability to gain necessary skills and knowledge on their own (practically, in any sector).

To achieve the objective of business education stated in the National Policy on Education (2014), students of business education would be able to communicate, collaborate and cooperate with other learners worldwide through virtual learning and evaluate global libraries regardless of their residence place. As to training of teachers through seminars, workshops and other formal and informal activities, students and teachers in practice may learn from integrating ICTs across the curriculum to assist learning, which can be utilised for both initial and ongoing professional development (Yusuf, 2007). The capacity of students to gain the expertise and knowledge they need without face-to-face connection with the teachers would improve through online learning in an era of global crises like COVID-19.

Virtual learning and business education. The Nigerian school programme closedown and social isolation are required due to COVID-19. Because of this, the government and the World Health Organisation searched for solutions to ease the difficulties facing schooling in the wake of COVID-19. Replacing the face-to-face style of instruction with online learning leads to virtual learning as a mechanism for disseminating learning material to students, especially in practical lessons like business education. The Latin expression «virtual» gives the English word «virtual» its literal meaning of «possible». Numerous factors and circumstances have an impact on the chances (Podhajecka, 2018). This virtual process takes place within the current system with comparable dynamics and goals; it does not represent the actual process.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisations (UNESCO) recommended that educational institutions implement virtual teaching based on social distance bedause of COVID-19 (Bansal, 2020). If online learning is ineffective or not implemented as an alternate method of instructing students during the lockdown, the business education programme is influenced by the social estrangement. A substitute for personal or traditional teaching is online learning. As a means of teaching business education, online or virtual lessons may be realised in numerous locations at each level of the learning process without need for teachers and students to participate (Sanford, 2020). In this case, participants are placed into groups based on timing (Kommers et al., 2019). Since the word «virtual»implies «possible», it is necessary to conclude the educational process by adapting to the conditions (Nwadiani and Egbri, 2022).

There are methodological and technological issues with managing and sharing information in the online learning environment. Communication and information exchange with leadership or administration are the main tasks of the online learning process. For the virtual learning environment, the educational setting, participation and authenticity of communication are controlled by technologies, computer tools and other IT sources (Gadre et al., 2011). The business education programme uses technologies and computer tools to distribute learning materials in line with the primary purposes of virtual learning. As a result, virtual learning appears to help students acquire practical skills and knowledge needed in the workplace under the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through various internal and external websites or any learning management structures for efficient classroom instruction of business education amidst COVID-19, educational institutions connect teachers and students (Crawley, 2012). It relies on the resources that an institution has available. Several online programmes are used to do the task; some are free others are not. The institutions provide them following their demands and funding. If the current web apps are unable to meet their demands, they may arrange to have new ones developed by software developers. These are all learning management systems, either virtual or online (Crawley, 2012). All parties involved in the teaching-learning process, including instructors and students, need proper training. The dependability of online teaching tools must be guaranteed because they are the only means of communication between the stakeholders. The entire online business school teaching procedure will end if these seizures are successful.

In the virtual learning process, all participants of business education studies log in simultaneously online, and the single teacher or instructor delivers the teaching material in the lecture form. All stakeholders are involved in the process where information, discussion, question answering, etc. is practised. It is called the collaborative group-based learning. This seems to necessitate effective teaching of business education amidst COVID-19 so as to ensure prompt actualisation of its goal.

Virtual learning tool use in delivery of business education lessons. Omolola (2019) posited that there are various tools for business education lessons during virtual classes:

- **Computer-based training (CBT).** Any course of instruction whose principal mode of delivery is a computer is known as computer-based training. An organisation or educational intranet used in providing

CBT courseware; in this scenario, the teacher is not required to have access to the Internet or a website. For the transmission of learning materials, just a computer, projector, scanner and multimedia tools like speakers, audio and video are required. Alternatively, web-based training may be provided online. Because CBT excels at teaching keyboarding, word processing, information management and business mathematics, among other disciplines, it used to teach business education. Students can use CBT to understand how to use computer programmes like Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint and other Office suites relevant to their chosen field of study.

- **Web-based training (WBT).** It is a cutting-edge method of distant learning that transforms computer-based training via tools and techniques of the Internet, intranets and the World Wide Web (Kilby, 2009). Web-based training is used to deliver the business education information live and in a way that supports self-paced, self-directed learning from any location.WBT can also be applied to delivery of students' remedial instruction. It is used by the instructor to evaluate and analyse students objectively.

- **Collaborative learning.** It is online education that depends on communication between students and teachers (Siadaty and Taghiyareh, 2008). Particularly, allowing for collaborative and student-centred learning is virtual learning. When employing interactive online learning tools like shared whiteboards, shared application software, chat capabilities and audio/video across the network within business education, each teacher is guiding students in a virtual classroom setting. According to Brown (1998), the e-learning technology supports learning principles in three different ways: through self-directed learning, interactive instruction, critical analysis.

- **Informal virtual learning.** It can also help to facilitate informal learning in business education. Through the Internet and e-learning, business education students can learn outside the course-based materials and traditional classrooms and can study about other important things that affect their lives. Students also have the opportunity to earn during holidays and vacations without necessarily being taught by their teacher. Martinez (2003) noted that incorporating technology like e-learning into education may provide students with an experience that would otherwise not be available to them. For example, computer simulations allow students to discover principles through their active engagement.

Methodology and research methods. Data for writing this paper were sourced through review of scientific literature (articles, book chapters, electronic sources, etc. mentioned in the reference list). The below-stated results are obtained through describing and observing methods. The latter deals with practical experience of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.

Results. Based on observations about the practical experience of virtual learning as a result of COVID-19, the following virtual learning advantages were discovered:

- For students, distance and location do not matter, and neither do time zones;
- With the asynchronous Internet-based instruction, students have a 24/7 access to virtual education resources;
- The synchronous online instruction enables direct communication between teachers and students;
- Students who study online may engage with subject-matter experts and obtain current and pertinent learning resources via the Internet;
- Situated learning is easier since students may finish online courses at home or work and contextualise their learning;
- Online resources may be updated to meet changing learner needs; students can immediately view the changes;
- When students have access to online resources, it is simpler for teachers to guide them to the knowledge that best suits their requirements.

However, a range of the COVID-19 virtual learning disadvantages were defined:

- The online learning does not allow proper monitoring from teachers. It gives avenue for learners to choose to be either industrious or lazed in leaning activities designed by teachers;
- A lack of connection between students and between teachers. Since the method is designed to avoid social gathering and face-to-face discussion, there will not be any interaction between teachers and students on learning activities (in spite the fact that some aspects of business education allow such interaction);
- Other social interactions cannot be had. In business education programmes, there are various field trips (such as business seminars, SIWES and workshops) which cannot be performed through virtual learning amidst COVID-19;
- Learning is always at risk because of bad online connections and applications. Some students loose the interest in virtual learning whenever the web connection and application are obstructed or work erratically.

AR&P **sciendo** Health Economics and Management Review, Issue 2, 2023
ISSN (print) 2786-4626 ISSN (online) 2786-4634
Sumy State University

It is possible for learners to divert attention to others unprofitable areas which likely to affect their concentration (while business education needs full concentration);

- No alternate way of teaching. In face-to-face learning, if teachers discover that students are not assimilated as expected, they may employ the play-away method or any best alternative method to instill the interest of students to learn effectively but in virtual learning. Once the method has been designed for learning, it cannot be changed in line with class room situations;
- The lack of Internet resources for all pupils, particularly in rural locations. The most impediment factors to the virtual learning are lack of Internet resources for all pupils. This is due to economic situations in Nigeria. Government neglects education sectors and individuals provide online facilities for their children amidst COVID-19. Even some students from rural areas cannot afford to buy data for online learning. Especially amidst COVID-19, most Nigerians strive for means of sustainability in term of basic needs rather than online facilities for their children.

Conclusions. The paper shows that virtual learning has been a valuable method for distance learning so far. Adequate Internet facilities are put in place especially amidst COVID-19 while social distancing and lockdown rules are order of the day. For effective teaching of business education that embedded with practical and theoretical aspect of learning, the virtual learning would have been the best alternative teaching method amidst COVID-19. It would assist learners to be fully engaged while the total lockdown rule has been observed. However, moost Nigerian citizens find it difficult to have access to virtual learning because of poverty levels and technological backward of our country. That impedes online teaching amidst COVID-19.

Recommendations. Concerning the discussion and results, some suggestions for this study were made:

- Government should make provision for Internet facilities at all levels of education (especially, for business education programme);
- Policy makers should ensure that every individual student has access to virtual learning. This should extend to those who are domiciled at rural areas as well;
- There should be proper monitoring of virtual learning from teachers to ensure appropriate using of Internet facilities for business education programmes amidst COVID-19;
- Education administrators must consider practical aspect of business education programmes with virtual learning development amidst COVID-19;
- The appropriate training in virtual learning should be given to teachers and students so that they may actively teach business education programmes;
- Seminars should be held to raise instructors and students' knowledge of important issues as regards the virtual learning usefulness in business education programmes amidst COVID-19.

Conflicts of Interest: Authors declare no conflict of interest.
Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.
Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

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Віртуальне навчання як фактор розвитку програм бізнес-освіти в Нігерії у період пандемії COVID-19

Сучасне віртуальне навчання – це складний процес використання електронних технологій і ресурсів для оптимального доступу до викладацьких матеріалів як в аудиторному режимі, так і онлайн. Сьогодні віртуальне навчання стало цінним способом викладання, навчання та дослідження в освіті, враховуючи кризову ситуацію з пандемією COVID-19 у світі. У цій статті критично розглянуто сучасне віртуальне навчання як фактор для розвитку нігерійських програм бізнес-освіти в розпал пандемії COVID-19. Студія яскраво представляє концепцію бізнес-освіти; віртуальне навчання та бізнес-освіту як взаємопов'язані феномени; очевидні переваги віртуального навчання в програмах бізнес-освіти; певні виклики, з якими стикається віртуальне навчання в реалізації цілей бізнес-освіти в умовах COVID-19. Крім того, було представлено різні віртуальні навчальні інструменти, які можна використовувати під час проведення занять у сфері бізнес-освіти. Нарешті, зроблено висновок, що, незважаючи на численні переваги впровадження віртуального навчання в програми бізнес-освіти, наразі існує багато актуальних проблем, які все ще потрібно вирішити. У такий спосіб можна примножити переваги віртуального навчання, а також виправити його негативне сприйняття та повільне залучення серед сьогоднішніх студентів і викладачів. Крім того, сучасне віртуальне навчання було б найкращим альтернативним методом навчання для бізнес-освіти в умовах COVID-19, якщо б більшість нігерійських здобувачів мали доступ до Інтернету. Серед іншого було також рекомендовано, щоб уряд та різні зацікавлені сторони в освітньому секторі доклали зусиль для забезпечення якісного доступу до Інтернету, стабільного електропостачання та

справних комп'ютерів на всіх рівнях освіти (особливо в сфері бізнесу). Сучасні викладачі та студенти також повинні працювати з релевантними методиками віртуального навчання. Це робиться для активного викладання програм бізнес-освіти, щоб покращити та підтримувати якісне забещпечення освітніх потреб нігерійського населення.

Ключові слова: віртуальне навчання; програма; бізнес-освіта; COVID-19; Нігерія.