

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE PERCEPTION OF OFFICE MANAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY STUDENTS ON VIRTUAL TEACHING AT WALTER SISULU UNIVERSITY IN IBIKA SITE

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected Education systems, Universities and Colleges. In an attempt to save the academic year, most governments around the world have temporarily closed educational institutions and recommend universities to introduce virtual teaching. Currently there is scanty information on student perception on virtual teaching. This study utilised a qualitative research strategy, interviews via teams was conducted using a samples size of 25 office management and Technology Student at Walter Sisulu University in Ibika Site, South Africa. The main objective of this study was to investigate the perception of Office Management and Technology students on virtual teaching. The finding revealed that virtual teaching helps students to save cost. The findings also revealed that significant numbers of students do not have access to internet and laptops that is powerful enough to support online learning. In addition, low internet connection is a major concern in virtual teaching and some student may have these technology resources however still struggle with using it. This study recommended practical examples on alternative ways for students to effective used online learning technological resources.

Keywords: Virtual Teaching, Internet, Perception, Advantages, Disadvantages.

INTRODUCTION

Virtual teaching is education that takes place over the internet. It is often referred to as “elearning” The etymological definition of the word virtual teaching is described in Ostankowicz-Bazan (2016) as an innovative approach to deliver instruction to audience, using the Web as the medium. Some researchers’ views virtual teaching as educational material that is presented on a computer (Ostankowicz-Bazan, 2016). Ostankowicz-Bazan (2016) argued that the virtual teaching is not only presentation of materials, the lecturer and students must be focus on the course. The discourse on virtual teaching has attracted a growing number of scholars who have attempted to explain the perception of people on online learning and teaching. Perception is the way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted. Studies on perception has been conducted in many fields. For example, Spangle Hodne, Schierling (2002) study on student perception focused was to understand whether student satisfaction in online courses. 1,200 students were evaluated from 118 online courses in six universities and compared to the classroom-based courses. The findings revealed that online contribute to high-quality of communication skills, leadership, problem solving, and commitment to value learning than classroom-based courses. In another related study on student perception of virtual learning, Green and Singh (2004) compare both the advantages and disadvantages that online learning can

offer to students. The finding suggests that on online graduates may potentially benefit the workforce and society. The findings also suggest that there is lack of face to face interaction and threat of isolation caused by reduced levels of interaction in the online environment. Online learning is only an option to those in the society who can afford it financially. In another related study, Richardson and Newby (2006) investigated the degree to which students cognitively engage with their online courses. The findings indicate that as students gain experience with online learning, they come to take more responsibility for their own learning. Moreover, Otieno and Osoro (2014) study on the learners' perspectives of virtual learning. The findings from the study indicate that when there is greater social and teaching presence, learner's satisfaction increases. Otieno and Osoro (2014) are of the opinion that provision of support in terms of teaching presence and instructional resources needs to be enhanced. Facilitators of Blended Learning courses have to be more proactive and initiate frequent online discussions to enrich their courses.

Additionally, Guennoun and Benjelloun (2015) study evaluate the impact of the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in higher teaching of physics, this study aims in particular to identify the perceptions which these students have after learning the course of electricity integrating the ICT. The results of their investigation also show that the use of these tools in this course has provided an easy and convenient access to its scientific content and improved the learning of 48.4% of the questioned students. Similarly, in Durban, South Africa, Padayachee (2017) study focused on a generic framework of the ISO 9126 external software quality model to ascertain the perceptions of educators with regards to virtual learning system (VLS) functionality and non-functional quality characteristics. The study proposed model of representing VLS quality and provide practical contribution on the improvement of VLS quality characteristics.

Eastern Cape is one of the poorest provinces in South Africa, currently experiencing the second highest confirmed cases of coronavirus pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected Education systems, Universities and Colleges. Most government around the world have temporarily closed educational institution in an attempt to contain the spread of COVID-19. DHET Ministry announced on 22 May 2020 that universities should introduce the E-Learning Strategy also known as Online Teaching and Learning Standards in order to save the academic year. However, a study conducted by Internet Access in South Africa, shows just 25.2% of people in the Eastern Cape have Internet access. Slow internet connectivity is a barrier to online teaching and learning. Face-to-face instruction between students and lecturers is very crucial for student's success, because teachers facilitate how and why learners engage with course content. Removing this interaction on such a large scale is will impact how lecturer teach and how students learn. Significant proportion of studies has almost always taken place in developed economies, such as USA (Stonebraker & Hazeltine, 2004; Stephanic et al., 2012), in China (Zheng & Lin, 2017), South Africa (Padayachee, 2017), however, none of these studies focus on student's perception on online teaching in the Department of Technology, Butterworth Campus, Walter Sisulu University, in South Africa. Thus, this study filled the gap in the literature. The objectives of this study was to investigate the student's perception of Office management and Technology on virtual teaching.

The Link between Internet Connectivity and Virtual Teaching

Dealing with slow internet connection

According to Garrote, et al. (2010) slow internet connection is a major concern in virtual teaching. Lecturers and students always have to find a way to work around this. For example, using blended teaching and learning to assist virtual teaching. This method is chosen because stable internet connection cannot be guaranteed. Another method used by teacher is by uploading comprised media and issuing of materials in memory sticks to enable students with slow connectivity problem to access task and the materials.

Technology know-how for non tech-savvy students

Husniyah (2018) is of the opinion that teachers always give instruction to students on how to access online classroom however sometimes students face challenges accessing the online classroom. Thus, to solve this problem, some teacher provide handout to student. Freeman and Holden (1986) explained that virtual teaching exposed students to more varied materials and resources such as Youtube videos and other websites. In return, students receive updated information hence affecting how they engage or response to tasks given to them. Which provide more room for discussion and exploration of authentic materials which helps them in understanding the subject in question.

More motivated students

According to Peacock (1997) students are motivated they engaged in varied authentic material which makes them enjoy learning. Students are also motivated when they learn with their own space which is the opposite of face-to-face teaching.

Advantages of virtual teaching

Virtual Learning does help save costs

According to Cox (2013) virtual teaching helps student to save costs, because student do not have to travel to campus to gain new skills or knowledge.

Virtual Learning does makes the education more available

Gros and García-Peñalvo (2016) are of the opinion that virtual teaching enable student from other countries to study certain course of their degree in the world's best universities. The benefits allow students to communicate and study with people coming from different cultures.

Virtual Learning does makes students more mobile

Al-Saai, Al-Kaabi and Al-Muftah (2011) stated that virtual teaching make learning accessible from any place at any time they find comfortable for as long as you have internet access. For example, people can learn while in the bus, at home or during your gym training.

Virtual Learning does makes the whole learning process more entertaining

According to Bisol et al. (2015) virtual teaching makes the whole learning process fun and entertaining. Students can communicate with people from different chats and forum groups, share information and knowledge on social media and so on. Some students find this interesting and refreshing; the more interested they are the more they learn.

Disadvantages of a Virtual Learning

ELearning depends on technology a lot

De Boer, Wesselink and Vervoorn (2016) stated that virtual teaching depends on technology a lot. These authors argued significant number of students do not have access to internet and laptops that is powerful enough to support online learning. They add that some student may have these technology resources however still struggle with using it, these may require that those who experience technophobia/or challenges be trained to alleviate the challenges.

Some students find it hard to motivate and organize themselves

Kopp et al. (2014) stated that some students cannot organised themselves or self-motivate which in return can affect their performance in the studies, due to missing deadlines, or getting prepared for exams while some can do with no efforts.

Some students might feel isolated

According to Pedersen and Lui (2003) in face-to-face classroom, teachers set learning objectives and students work to meet the objectives however in virtual teaching the teacher then work as facilitators and students determine their objectives. As a result, some students may feel isolated due to lack of personal connection with their instructor and may feel deprived of support (Shishehchi et al., 2010).

The feedback might not be enough

Muniasamy and Ejalani (2014) stated that feedback is one of the most important aspects of learning however in virtual teaching; online instructors in some cases might not have enough time to give feedback and work properly with students hence these could lead to students falling behind and not completing the courses successful in record time.

RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Neuman (2000) research design should focus on how to plan, collect and analyse data. The study utilised a purposive sampling. Blumberg et al. (2011) assert that a purpose sampling is chosen to select participants knowledgeable and able to contribute meaningfully to the investigation. The population of the study were Office Management and Technology students. The requirement to participate in the study the student must be a registered in higher institution and must have been in the institution for more than a year. Morse (2000) recommended that the adequate sample size of qualitative are anywhere from 5 to 50

participants. Drawing from the population of 145 a samples size of 25 office management and Technology Students at Walter Sisulu University in Ibika Site, South Africa were chosen for the study. In this study, the researcher utilised a qualitative research paradigm. According to Brynard and Hanekon (2006) a qualitative research paradigm help researcher conduct in depth interview via teams with 25 students in office Management and Technology Department in Ibika site, Walter Sisulu University to seek an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

According to Weerawardena and Mort (2006), the collection and analysis are influenced by the type of questions the study seeks to address. Weerawarden and Mort (2006) suggested that open-ended questions, followed by prompts used to elaborate on the discussion and to elicit the views and opinions of the participants were utilized. Thus, data were collected through in-depth interviews via teams with the students in the Department of Office Management and Technology. The interviews were of paramount importance as they helped to validate what the literature postulates regarding perception of online teaching. In total, twenty-five (25) interviews were conducted with Office Management and Technology students. According to Gwija (2014) one of the objective of data analysis is to determine the consistent pattern that emerge throughout the analysis. In line with Gwija, the consistent pattern was categorised into themes. Blumberg (2011) assert that content analysis is utilised to transform transcribed data into teams. In line with Blumberg, the transcribed data were then categorised into themes in accordance with the research objective.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study are reported in phases following the research objectives and emerging themes. In the first phase, the theme questions and associated findings are presented in a tabular form. In the second phase, the respondent's answers are presented word verbatim. In the final phase, a summary of the finding relating to the theme question presented and aligned with the literature study.

The link between internet connectivity and virtual learning

The objective of this subsection was to investigate the link between internet connectivity and virtual learning of office management and technology students. The results are presented in the Table 1, and accompanying by direct quotation

Theme question: what are the link between bad internet connectivity and virtual learning? What are the link between good internet connectivity and virtual learning?	
Domain	Interview findings
Internet connectivity and virtual leaning	Sixty five percent (65%) of Office Management students agreed that Good internet connectivity allows for smooth running of virtual teaching, but bad internet connectivity becomes a barrier to virtual teaching.

The objective of this question was to determine the link between internet connectivity and virtual learning. In answer the theme this is what the students have to say:

“In order for students to access virtual classes and for instructors to schedule an online class, internet connectivity is needed. We are able to attend classes using communication devices regardless of the geographical area as long as there is an internet connection”

“Good internet connectivity allows for smooth running of virtual teaching, but bad internet connectivity becomes a barrier to virtual teaching. “

“Without internet connectivity, virtual learning would be impossible because we rely on internet for us to be able to attend online classes, access study materials, submit our assignments and even writing online tests”.

Summary of the finding with regard to the forgoing quotation. It was revealed that majority of Sixty-five percent (65%) of Office Management students agreed that Good internet connectivity allows for smooth running of virtual teaching, but bad internet connectivity becomes a barrier to virtual teaching. This finding corroborate with Amritesh and Jeayarams (2019) once narrated that the place and time independence of virtual teaching allows students to have a huge amount of efficiency in where and when they contribute to learning subjects. Thirty-five percent (35%) of student’s agreed that Lack of internet connectivity is a main issue because most of them find themselves being unable to attend an online session which have a negative impact on their academic performances. There is lack of engagement and motivation between students. Students also claim that they see virtual teaching as a boundary that restrict them from having a face-to-face interaction with their peers and lecturers as Jiang and Ting (2017) also relate that some students feel isolated and lack peer support since there is minimal interaction between students in an online class.

The problems that students face on virtual teaching

The objective of this subsection was to investigate the problems that students face on virtual teaching. The results are presented in the Table 2, and accompanying by direct quotation.

Table 2	
THE PROBLEMS THAT STUDENTS FACE ON VIRTUAL TEACHING	
Theme question: what are the problem students faced on virtual learning?	
Domain	Interview findings
Problem students face in virtual learning	Seventy percent (70%) of Office Management students agreed that <i>most of them are from rural areas and they are not exposed to internet and that can lead them to do mistakes and errors as they tend to be nervous when using online system</i>

The objective of this question was to determine the problems that students face on virtual teaching. In answer the theme this is what the students has to say:

“We are from rural areas and we are not exposed to internet and that can lead them to do mistakes and errors as we tend to be nervous when using online system”.

“We prefer to have a lecturer in front of us during lecturing time because we are not familiar with virtual teaching and we become demotivated by this new learning system introduced to us. As a result, we then develop negative emotions towards virtual teaching because of fear of using technology. Furthermore, we fear or anxiety towards computers and also a hostile aggressive thought about computers”

Summary of the finding with regard to the forgoing quotation. It was revealed that majority of Sixty-five percent (70%) of Office Management students agreed that *not having a well background on computers which results in technophobia which is explained by Gyu Ha, Page and Thorsteinsoon (2011) as the resistance to talking about computers or even thinking about computers. They explain it further as the fear or anxiety towards computers and also a hostile aggressive thought about computers.*

Disadvantages of virtual teaching

The objective of this subsection was to investigate the disadvantages of virtual teaching. The results are presented in the Table 3, and accompanying by direct quotation

Table 3	
DISADVANTAGES OF VIRTUAL TEACHING	
Theme question: what are the advantages of virtual teaching	
Domain	Interview findings
advantages of virtual teaching	<i>Seventy percent (71%) of Office Management students agreed that them agree that virtual teaching saves time, they are able to attend classes in comfort of their home and there are no transport costs</i>

The objective of this question was to investigate the *disadvantages of virtual teaching*. In answer the theme this is what the students has to say:

“Virtual teaching saves time, we are able to attend classes in comfort of our home and there are no transport costs. Also, the adoption of e-learning provides the institutions, as well as their students or learners much flexibility of time and place of delivery or receipt of information according to learning environment.

“With virtual learning, we are able to re-visit the recordings and play them as much as we want until they understand the content delivered”.

“The cost reduction as the best advantage of virtual teaching, we don’t commute to campus saves transportation costs and we don’t have to buy lunch”

Summary of the finding with regard to the forgoing quotation. It was revealed that majority of Sixty-five percent (71%) of Office Management students agreed *they are able to attend classes in comfort of their home and there are no transport costs. As Smedely (2010) also*

mentioned that virtual learning is flexible when considering the time and place because every student has the luxury of choosing the place and time that suits him/her.

The objective of this subsection was to investigate the disadvantages of virtual teaching. The results are presented in the Table 4, and accompanying by direct quotation

Table 4	
DISADVANTAGES OF VIRTUAL TEACHING	
Theme question: what are the disadvantages of virtual teaching	
Domain	Interview findings
Disadvantages of virtual teaching	Seventy percent (80%) of Office Management students agreed that <i>lack of personal interaction between students and lecturers is one of the major challenges they face during virtual teaching.</i>

The objective of this question was to investigate the *disadvantages of virtual teaching*. In answer the theme this is what the students has to say:

“Lack of personal interaction between us and lecturers is one of the major challenges we face during virtual teaching. As Virtual teaching consists of internet connection”

“Another disadvantage of virtual teaching that is that poor network connection become a problem as it leads to failure to attend or have an access on their virtual classroom, and sometimes we are being kicked out by network during the class or online test which leads poor academic performance”

Summary of the finding with regard to the forgoing quotation. It was revealed that majority of Sixty-five percent (66%) of Office Management students agreed that the lack of connectivity seems to be the cause of concern as Tariq (2020), once stated that even though students can access recorded virtual training modules wherever they are and whenever they want, but they are depending on how good or bad the connection is for them to access classes. Students also complained that with virtual teaching, they are unable so socialise with their peers and having physical group discussions as that is one of their strategies that they tend to use in order for them to better understand the topic or assists each other on the modules.

RECOMMENDATION

Slow internet connection is a major concern in virtual teaching. The study recommended that Lecturers should record their lessons and disseminate to students in order for students to utilise links when they need to Lecturers should support their online lessons with saved recordings and other resources that can be issued to students via memory sticks. Some student may have these technology resources however still struggle with using it. The study also recommended that training needs to be given to students on how to you these technological resources.

CONCLUSION

This paper has highlighted the perception of Office Management and Technology Student on Virtual teaching at Walter Sisulu University in Ibika Site. This study interviewed a sample of

25 office management and Technology Student at Walter Sisulu University in Ibika Site, Eastern Cape, South Africa. The main contributions of the study were: Slow internet connection is a major concern in virtual teaching. Lecturers and students always have to find a way to work around this. Teachers always give instruction to students on how to access online classroom however sometimes students face challenges accessing the online classroom. Thus, to solve this problem, some teacher provide handout to student. Virtual teaching exposed students to more varied materials and resources such as Youtube videos and other websites. In return, students receive updated information hence affecting how they engage or response to tasks given to them. Which provide more room for discussion and exploration of authentic materials which helps them in understanding the subject in question. Students who are motivated engage in varied authentic material which makes them enjoy learning. Students are also motivated when they learn at their own pace which the opposite of face-to-face is teaching.

Virtual teaching helps students to save costs, because students do not have to travel to campus to gain new skills or knowledge. Virtual teaching enables students from other countries to study certain course of their degree in the world's best universities. The benefits allow students to communicate and study with people coming from different cultures. Virtual teaching makes learning accessible from any place at any time they find comfortable for as long as you have internet access. For example, people can learn while in the bus, at home or during your gym training. Virtual teaching makes the whole learning process fun and entertaining. Students can communicate with people from different chats and forum groups, share information and knowledge on social media and so on. Some students find this interesting and refreshing; the more interested they are the more they learn.

Virtual teaching depends on technology a lot. Significant numbers of students do not have access to internet and laptops that is powerful enough to support online learning. They add that some student may have these technology resources however still struggle with using it. In addition, these may require that those who experience technophobia/or challenges be trained to alleviate the challenges. Some students cannot organised themselves or self-motivate which in return can affect their performance in the studies, due to missing deadlines, or getting prepared for exams while some can do with no efforts. In face-to-face classroom, teachers set learning objectives and students work to meet the objectives however in virtual teaching the teacher then work as facilitators and students determine their objectives. As a result, some students may feel isolated due to lack of personal connection with their instructor and may feel deprived of support. Furthermore, Feedback is one of the most important aspects of learning however in virtual teaching; online instructors in some cases might not have enough time to give feedback and work properly with students hence these could to lead to students falling behind and not completing the courses successful in record time.

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