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Virtual Instructional Packages and Pre-Service Language Teachers' Communicative Skills: Empirical evidence from Nigerian Colleges of Education.

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the effect of virtual instructional tools on the learning outcomes of pre-service English language teachers in Nigerian Colleges of Education. The rationale of the study was hinged on the premise of virtual instructional adaptation in a post-OVID-19 era. The design for the study was a two- group pre-test post-test quasi-experimental design. The research design comprised pretest and post-test observations, treatment with virtual instruction and normal instruction in a non-virtual space. Using multistage sampling strategy, 100 samples were randomly selected from two Colleges of Education in Southwest Nigeria. The experimental and controls groups consisted of 50 samples each comprising 25 females and 25 males. The instruments for the study were validated achievement tests and marking guides including a test-retest reliability study with a reliability coefficient of 0.87 which was considered as moderately high for the reliability of the instruments. Two null hypotheses were raised and tested at 0.05 levels of significance using Two- Way ANOVA as statistical tools. The findings revealed that there was significant effect of virtual instructional tools on pre-service English language teachers' learning outcomes using the pre-test mean scores and post-test mean scores. Also, the findings showed that there was significant gender effect of virtual instructional tools on the virtual learning outcomes of pre-service English language teachers' communicative skills in English. Pedagogical implications of the findings in respect to virtual instructional tools in a post-COVID-19 era were highlighted and suggestions preferred towards enhancing pedagogical and communicative competencies of pre-service English teachers in Nigerian Colleges of Education.

Keywords: Virtual Instructional Packages, Pre-Service ,Language Teachers, Communicative skills, Nigerian Colleges of Education.

INTRODUCTION

The significance of education for national global development cannot be overemphasized. Specifically, almost all facets of human life are hinged on educational development. Indeed, the success or otherwise of educational systems around the world has been underpinned by the regular training and retraining of teachers in relevant communication skills.

Language educators underpin the importance of determining learning outcomes of pre-service language teachers based on their proficiency in the use language with emphasis on the medium of instruction in junior secondary education in Nigeria. From my experience as teacher trainer, a significant number of pre-service language teachers are incapable of communicating effectively in English as a second language

In Nigerian Colleges of Education, one of the global benchmarks for quality language otherwise known as BMAS includes, but not limited to, attaining a paradigmatic shift from teacher-centredness to interactive pedagogy. Currently, the global pandemic leaves lecturers and students with limited option than to shift to a virtual mode of instruction. This unexpected but relevant academic trend is further compounded with the likelihood of post covid-19 parameters for teaching and learning excluding, perhaps, the conventional means of interaction. The Junior Secondary School curriculum emphasizes the use of English as a medium of instruction and a second language respectively during the initial three years in junior secondary school education in Nigeria. In this regard, the utilization of virtual tools in Google Suite, for instance, showcases relevant instructional tools for use by lecturers and students. In the new normal era, Google Meet, among other features in Google Suite, are evolving as necessary and mandatory tools for training and developing the required communicative skills for teacher education, with emphasis on English at JSS 1-3 levels of education in Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In Nigerian Colleges of Education, teaching and learning depends, to a large extent, on non-virtual instruction before the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, the pandemic has transformed teaching and learning from physical contact to a virtual pedagogy. For example, as at April 2020, over 46 million children were deprived from schooling in Nigeria due to the lock-down.(Hussain, 2020). Prior to COVID-19, there seemed to be a dearth of poor quality language teachers in the Nigerian educational systems which has often been a source of concern to relevant stakeholders in Nigeria. Currently, the ease of the lock-down has continued to expose the digital and pedagogical lapses of these lecturers and learners. Teaching and learning must continue to evolve for the unending production of quality language pre-service teachers in Nigeria generally and Ekiti State in particular. To this end,there is a vast pedagogical lacuna between second language instruction on television and radio and virtual interactive instruction with the post-covid-19 pandemic setting in. Hence, for an upgrade of quality English language teachers from the conventional paradigm to an adaptable and inevitable digital milleau, there is the dire need to experiment with the utilization of virtual instructional tools without delay. Hence, through programmed virtual training and instructional models, both teachers and learners stand to benefit immensely as a result of developing relevant global communicative skills in English . .

LITERATURE REVIEW

The major objective of training students in Colleges of Education is to provide educational service for primary and post primary schools in Nigeria. In view of the pandemic, instruction in English as a second language in schools has become more virtual and learner-centered than conventional. Javed (2017) notes that the focus of language educators is shifting towards empowering learners to become independent beyond the conventional classroom context. The world, in general, and Nigeria in particular, cannot afford to allow half-baked language teachers take control of children.

Similarly, Lotherington and Ronda (2014) buttress the need to expose language teachers to essential communicative skills during training in Colleges of Education. No doubt, COVID-19 pandemic has induced major global tilt towards a virtual and interactive model, particularly in tertiary citadels of learning in Nigeria. Consequently, the new normal entails that pre-service teachers intending to utilize English as subject and medium for instruction need urgent digital upgrading. Hussain (2020) notices that over 46 million students are affected by school closure in Nigeria as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, there is the need to acclimatize teacher training tasks with urgent exposure of pre-service language teachers to the use of virtual instruction as the post-COVID-19 pandemic era is already manifesting in the Nigerian educational space.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is grounded on Vygostky's theory of Social Constructivism. In line with this study, Social Constructivism emphasizes intertwining theoretical frameworks such as social interactionism and cognitivism which enhances the learners' interaction within simulated social context. Furthermore, the study is hinged on the theory that reveals a predisposed modification of the learning context to include the utilization of new technologies in language learning

Objectives of the Research

The objectives are to:

1. Examine the effect of virtual instructional tools on the learning outcomes of pre-service language teachers' communicative skills in English during a post- COVID-19 pandemic era in Southwest Colleges of Education,Nigeria.
2. Determine the efficacy of the virtual teaching-learning curriculum for Schools of Languages in promoting virtual digital literacy training in a post-COVID-19 pandemic era.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were generated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H_{01}: There is no significant effect of virtual instructional tools on pre-service language teachers' learning outcomes using their the pre-test mean scores and post-test mean scores.

H_{02}: There is no significant gender effect of virtual instructional tools on the virtual learning outcomes of pre-service English language teachers' communicative skills in English

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a two- group pre-test post-test quasi-experimental design. The research design comprised Pre – test observations, Post-test observations, treatment with Virtual instruction and normal instruction in a non-virtual space.

The population of the study consists of students of College of Education undergraduates offering English as a single major in Schools of Languages in 12 Colleges of Education in Southwest, comprising Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Oyo, Ekiti and Ondo States. Krejcie and Morgan was used to randomly select the required sample for the study.

A multistage sampling strategy was utilized in selecting two Colleges of Education in Southwest Nigeria which comprise Ondo, Oyo, Lagos, Ogun and Ekiti states. A simple random sampling technique was used to select 50 students in College of Education, Ikere- Ekiti and 50 students in Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo. Furthermore 100 intact students were able to participate in the experiment comprising 50 male and 50 female students. The samples in both groups were exposed to a pre-test and posttest two weeks before the COVID-19 pandemic was officially declared in Nigeria. The experimental group was exposed to virtual instruction on Google Meet as treatment while the control group was taught without the use of virtual instruction. The face and content validity of the research instruments were ensured by specialists and experts in the Department of Arts and Language Education and Tests, Measurement and Evaluation in the Faculty of Education, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti. The final draft of the standardized achievement test and marking guide were inputted in the Google Quiz environment as an online automated evaluation package.

A test-retest method was utilized in determining the reliability of both achievement test and its marking guide. The instruments were administered on 25 students outside the scope of the research within a space of 2 weeks. Spearman Brown's analyzer on SPSS 23 generated a reliability coefficient of 0.87 which was considered as moderately high for the reliability of the instruments.

Data was retrieved immediately after the posttest as automated quiz responses on Google Sheet in Excel format. The data was transformed to variables and data inputs on SPSS 23 and analyzed with Two -Way ANOVA comprising Post-Hoc analysis (Sheffe), descriptive and inferential statistics.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant effect of virtual instructional tools on pre-service language teachers' learning outcomes using the pre-test mean scores and post-test mean scores.

Table 1: Effect of virtual instructional tools on pre-service English language teachers' learning outcomes.
Test of Between -Subjects Effects

Source	Type III sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power[b]
Corrected	21.667[a]	85	.255	1.071	.473	.867	91.000	.484
Model Intercept	150.416	1	150.416	631.748	.000	.978	631.748	1.000
Pretest scores	5.193	31	.168	.704	.798	.609	21.810	.278
Posttest scores	7.929	28	.283	1.189	.377	.704	33.303	.477
Pretest scores* Posttest scores	7.913	25	.317	1.329	.294	.704	33.236	.523
Error	3.333	14	.238					
Total	250.000	100						
Corrected Total	25.000	99						

a. R Squared = .867 (Adjusted R Squared = .057)
b. Computed using alpha = .05

Table 1 showed the analysis of the effect of virtual instructional tools on pre-service language teachers' learning outcomes using the pre-test mean scores and post-test mean scores. It was shown that the significant value is 0.473 with F-value of 1.071 which is greater than 0.05. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there was significant effect of virtual instructional tools on pre-service language teachers' learning outcomes using the pre-test mean scores and post-test mean scores.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant gender effect of virtual instructional tools on the virtual learning outcomes of pre-service English language teachers' communicative skills in English.

Table 2: Gender effect of virtual instructional tools on the virtual learning outcomes of pre-service English language teachers' communicative skills in English.

Tests of Between -Subjects Effects

Source	Type III Sums of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power[a]
Corrected	985.070[a]	3	328.357	1.577	.200	0.47	4.732	.404
Model Intercept	172640.50	1	172640.250	829.350	.000	.896	829.350	1.000
Group	445.210	1	445.210	2.139	.147	.022	2.139	.305
Gender	533.610	1	533.610	2.563	.113	.026	2.563	.354
Group*Gender	6.250	1	6.250	.030	.863	.000	.030	.053
Error	19983.680	96	208.163					
Total	193609.000	100						
CorrectedTotal	20968.750	99						

Table 2 showed the analysis of the gender effect of virtual instructional tools on the virtual learning outcomes of pre-service English language teachers' communicative skills in English. It was shown that the significant value is 0.200 with F-value of 1.577 which is greater than 0.05. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there was significant gender effect of virtual instructional tools on the virtual learning outcomes of pre-service English language teachers' communicative skills in English.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study have shown the pedagogical efficasy of utilizing virtual instructional tools as a boost for learning outcomes involving pre-service English language teachers' communicative skills. The instructional tools comprise virtual applications such as Google Meet and related tools located in Google Suite. Furthermore, the findings provided relevant insight in to the possibilities of hybridizing teaching and learning processes involving virtual instructional tools with social media-based platforms such as Whatsapp and conventional email environments. Similarly, the challenges of formal instruction in a post-COVID-19 era are expected to become eased with adequate inclusion of virtual technology in programmes of teaching and learning in Nigerian Colleges of Education (Egbe, 2020). The study revealed significant impact of virtual instructional tools on the communicative skills of pre-service teachers which are considered as being vital in a pandemic stricken context in English. This finding is in consonance with the study carried out by Inyang-Abia (2020) which emphasized urgent inclusion of virtual technology and relevant pedagogy in the curriculum of teacher education in Nigeria. Inadvertent, digital ttransition and transformation are imperatives of the new reality no matter the insularity and desire for the old order.

In most studies related to the interactive effect of gender on learning outcomes in communicative skills, there seems to be findings emphasizing less significant effect of gender on students' performance. Hence, in related studies carried by Bichi (2015) and Fan et al. (2015) reveal findings that are contrary to finding in this study which reveals significant interactive effect of

gender on learning outcomes pre-service English language teachers in communicative skills in English. Consequently, the significant interactive effect of gender on the learning outcomes of pre-service English language teachers' communicative skills is likely an impact of significant impact of digital competence on second language learning in virtual space. Adigun et al. (2015, p. 3) recognized the significant interactive effect of gender on virtual instructional prowess displayed by female learners than their male counterparts thus supporting the findings of this study on gender significance in learning outcomes in a virtual-based space. Nevertheless, this study has attempted to create a bridge between pre-service teachers synchronous learning modes such as face to face contexts and asynchronous learning space which emphasizes self-learning and learner-centredness with the support of virtual applications.

CONCLUSION

The need to incorporate virtual instructional tools in the teaching and learning space with particular reference to a post-COVID 19 era has become a new normal activity for all facets of education in Nigeria. Reimagining education and stimulating positive changes in teaching and learning is an option that is likely not negotiable with the possibility of a second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic (Kim,2020). Presently, Spain, Italy, The United States of America and the United Kingdom, to mention few, have started experiencing a rise of COVID-19 pandemic cases. In the educational sector, such nations would need to reinforce teaching and learning structures with virtual instructional systems for the prevention of a fall in quality education.

In the Nigerian educational perspective, the urgent need to utilize virtual instructional tools has been reinforced by findings in this study. Reservations for online learning or distance education are old fashioned and should be adequately replaced with global digital trends, especially in the teacher-training institutions of higher learning such as Colleges of Education. Afterall, maintain good quality teacher-education in a country is expected to significantly determine the academic, socio-economic and cultural output of that nation. Similarly, there is the dire need to set-up a Nigerian teacher- educational system that is valued-based, rich in cultural, cognitive, constructive communicative, as well as creative, critical, and civic components and competencies within our understanding of digital humanities (Egbe,2020). In order to achieve a paradigmatic shift from non-digital teaching and learning activities to an essentially vital virtual instructional medium, the following recommendations have to be carefully implemented.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Government and Management of Colleges of Education should embark on digital and pedagogical retraining and training of lecturers in the utilization of virtual instructional tools.
2. Pre-service teachers should be exposed to the use of basic features of virtual instructional tools such as Google Meet, Zoom as well as becoming conversant with the use of institutional based emails.
3. Government and Governing Councils of Colleges of Education should make digital literacy, not merely computer literacy, a mandatory requirement for staff recruitment and retention especially for academic staff.
4. Government should ssubsidize and incentivize data bundles for academic staff and students in Nigerian Colleges of Education through Private Public Partnership (PPP) initiatives.

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