



HYBRID LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN TEACHER EDUCATION: UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR, NIGERIA AS A CASE STUDY

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(Received 4, October 2022; Revision Accepted 3, January 2023)

ABSTRACT

The influence of hybrid learning environments on professional development in teacher education was the focus of this paper. It also examined how professionalism in teaching relates with reflective teaching. In this paper, hybrid learning environments was defined as educational model that utilizes the benefits of both on-line and on-campus learning. All the lecturers (742) and students (2,046) of the three Faculties of Education, University of Calabar constituted the population of the study (2,788) from where a sample size of 500 (140 lecturers and 360 students) was selected. Multiple sampling methods were adopted in selecting the sample, including stratified, simple random and purposive sampling methods. A 15-item researcher made questionnaire was used to elicit data from respondents. It was a survey research study and descriptive statistics (frequency counts, weighted means, standard deviation and percentages were adopted for data analysis. A mean score of 2.00 formed the significant/acceptance level. It was found that hybrid learning environments are models of professional development in teacher education especially in the post COVID-19 pandemic. It also found that professionalism in teaching relates positively with reflective teaching. It was recommended that more learning and teaching opportunities should be created by universities and colleges for flexibility in instructional options and that continual deepening of knowledge and skills should be encouraged.

KEYWORDS: Professionalism, Hybrid learning environments, Reflective teaching, Internet, Teacher education.

INTRODUCTION

Professional development is a lifelong process through which any teacher, at any stage of development, has room for improvement. Indeed, "the continual deepening of knowledge and skills is an integral part of any profession and teaching is no exception' (Garet, Poster, Desimone, Birman and Yoon, 2001, p. 916). Whether you are preparing to teach, experiencing your first time in teaching, or a veteran

professional, professional development is critical to your success in teaching. In addition to face-to-face interacting in a traditional classroom, the internet provides a rich array of technology resources for teachers' and students' learning (Ornstein and Levine, 2006; UNESCO, 2020).

The quality of teachers in any nation has a lot in common with the standard of education, and the standard of education shares a lot with the available learning opportunities for

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professional development. The emphasis on teachers' professionalism is affirmed by the National Planning Commission (NPC), (2004) that at least 80 percent of teachers at all levels of education in Nigeria should be professionals (Mohammed, 2014, Ukpor, Ashibi, Akpan, & Okon, 2014; Okon & Ubi, 2021; Okon, Owan, & Owan, (2022), Obot, Apebende, Okon & Bekomson, 2020). The Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) which was established by ACT 31 of 1993 now CAP T. 3 of 2004, in fulfillment of the quest for the professionalization of teaching has a vision of making teachers' quality match with international standards.

Professional commitment and responsibility of teachers behoove them to be reflective practitioners. Reflective teachers are those teachers who frequently observe and think about the results of their teaching and adjust their methods accordingly. Professional teachers think of multiple instructional strategies to encourage students' development of critical thinking and problem solving as well as alternative ways of learning (Owen, 2012; Omori, Okon & Etan, (2022), Doran (2017). Anike (2018), Obioma, Apeji, Omole & Lawani (2014), identified the synonyms of professionalism to include: Competent, skillful and dedicated, and contextualized its usage to mean working to a high standard, being consistent in attitude (not allowing emotions or personalities to influence you). They see professionalism in teaching as a value-led activity in which the commitments of a teacher become entwined with his/her professional role. DFEE (2001, 2007) noted that high quality professional development activities do enable teachers to build higher levels of expertise, which is worthwhile in itself. Both professional development and expertise are products of enquiry, training and study (Pollard, 2010).

In a study on what makes professional development effect. Garet et al, (2001) identified a variety of sources for professional development to include:

- "Self-assessment for professional growth.
- Teacher workshops
- Teacher centres
- Professional development schools
- Supervision and mentoring of student teachers,
- Graduate study; and
- The internet".

The internet, a component of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has turned the world into a global village and opened learning opportunities to knowledge seekers (Samson, Victoria and Daniel in Omede, 2014; Ojerinde, Ariyo & Akintunde, 2014). There have been drastic changes in instructional delivery in the educational system in the 21st Century that have created many opportunities for people to excel professionally. Essien, Akpan and Essien in Essien and Anthony (2018) reported that the internet gives educators ample opportunities to widen their scope, experience, information accessibility and to communicate within and outside any academic environment. Indeed, the internet is an indispensable tool used for expertise development in recent time (Parkay & Stanford, 2004; Doran, 2017, Day, Stober, Sammons, Kington & Gu, 2007).

Internet facilities have made the use of online learning a possibility, a situation where learners can receive instructions from the comfort of their homes. A combination of online learning with face-to-face classroom activities is referred to as hybrid learning. In the simplest of terms, hybrid learning can be defined as instructors taking both on-line and off-line classes simultaneously for the students. The term hybrid means 'mixture'. The Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary explains hybrid to mean something that is the product of mixing two or more different things. On-line learning has changed the way that people can earn academic qualifications in significant ways. In hybrid learning educational model, some students attend class in-person, while others join the class virtually from home or office (Owlabs, 2021).

The new phrase that is commonly referenced when discussing on-line learning is a hybrid learning environment. Typically, when we hear the phrase hybrid learning environment, what is being referenced is a combination of some on-line course-work and some traditional (on campus) course-work. UNESCO (2020), asserts that in hybrid learning environment students will complete a large amount of course work through an online site developed specifically for their course. In addition, they will complete a portion of work in a more traditional face-to-face setting. In this type of learning, while time spent in the classroom decreases, the amount of time working autonomously increases. The goal is for students to have flexibility of completing their work on their own schedule while also receiving the benefit of learning in a more hands-on setting. In a hybrid learning system, students are

receiving the best of both worlds (Ratkovitch, 2019). Many colleges and universities are now offering students additional on-line support services like online library access, online academic advising, on-line tutoring and on-line bookstores.

The goal of on-line facilities is to minimize how much time a student must spend on campus. This was common especially during the peak period of COVID-19 Pandemic (Ratkovitch, 2019). Other reasons why hybrid learning environment is a good option are as follows:

First is that some students like the combination of flexibility as well as some face-to-face contact. While on-line flexibility is wonderful, some students still like the option of having the on-campus experience.

Second reason why a hybrid option is an excellent choice is that it allows students the opportunity for hands on experiences. The best way to learn experientially is to have opportunities to work directly with the faculty as well as your peers.

Third reason is that some learner prefer a hybrid environment simply because some schools are not operating fully on-line at this point (Owllabs, 2021).

As more and more universities are moving to a fully on-line learning system, some are opting to promote a hybrid approach, Gayar (2021) advised that when you are considering which programme will work best for you it is important to find out whether the expected professional degree is fully on-line, fully on-campus or a hybrid of the two. The question is, do hybrid learning environments improve professionalism in teacher education?

Professional development in teacher education can only be fully realized in a school context with favourable learning culture (Pollard, 2010; DFES, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

Professional development in teacher education has been viewed as necessary endeavour to enhance expertise in teaching. Some practitioners in the field of teaching have made series of efforts in exploring new models of encouraging intending teachers, student teachers, practicing teachers as well as veteran teachers to improve their teaching expertise. The adoption of hybrid learning environments was perceived by some educators (Owllabs, 2020; Gayer, 2021; OECD, 2022), as effective model

for professional development in teacher education.

This study was therefore designed to examine the influence of hybrid learning environments in improving professional expertise in teaching using University of Calabar as a case in point.

Purpose of the Study

The study was aimed at finding out the influence of hybrid learning environments on professional development in teacher education. Specifically, the study:

- i. examined the extent to which hybrid learning is practiced in University of Calabar.
- ii. The influence of hybrid learning environments on professional development in the University of Calabar.
- iii. The relationship between professional development in teaching and teachers reflective teaching.

Research questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- i. To what extent is hybrid learning environment practiced in University of Calabar?
- ii. How does hybrid learning environment influence professional development in teacher education?
- iii. How does professional development in teaching relate with reflective teaching?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted survey research method. The University of Calabar, Calabar in Nigeria was the study area, specifically data were collected from the Faculty of Education of the University. The target population was all the 742 lecturers and the 2,046 students of the Faculties including graduate students. Multiple sampling techniques were adopted to select a total sample size of 500 (360 students: third year, fourth year and graduate students and 140 lecturers). To select the students, the three groups of students as stated above were purposively chosen. This means that the students as stated above were stratified on the basis of their year of study. In each stratum 120 students were selected using simple random sampling method. This was done during the general meetings of each group. One hundred and twenty pieces of papers were written "YES" and others were written "NO" and folded and shuffled into a container from where all those who blindly picked "YES" were considered selected. To select the lecturers, the

four departments were wholly chosen to include the researchers' departments. At their different staff meetings, simple random sampling method was adopted in selecting 35 lecturers per department, giving rise to 140 lecturers.

Fifteen structured questionnaires were used to elicit information from the 500 respondents. The questionnaires were trial tested in Institute of Education of same University. The reliability of the items was tested using the Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha reliability measure and an estimate of 0.70 was obtained. A four-point rating scale was adopted: True (T), Some What True (SWT), Some What False (SWF) and False (F), and Strongly Agree (SA),

Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). A total of 498 questionnaires were appropriately filled and returned, about 99.6 percent retrieval rate.

The test statistics adopted for data analyses were descriptive statistical tools which were Frequency Counts (F), Weighted Mean Scores (\bar{X}), Standard Deviation (SD) for Table 1 and 2, while Table 3. Frequency counts and percentages (%) were used. A mean score of 2.00 was used for decision making, and a score of 2.00 and above was acceptance level while any score below 2.00 was not accepted for items in Tables 1 and 2.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: To what extent is hybrid learning environments practiced in University of Calabar?

Table 1

Frequency counts (F), Weighted mean scores (\bar{X}) and Standard Deviation (SD) to items on whether or not hybrid learning environments is in full practice (N = 498)

S/n	Statement	T	SWT	SWF	F	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1.	Hybrid Learning is Practiced in My School because During course registration students have the options of on-campus course work or off-campus course work..	1	15	184	298	1.43	.49	Not accepted
2.	Students have no options to select mode of learning: part on campus, part off-campus or hybrid of both.	284	186	20	8	3.51	.51	Accepted
3.	During COVID-19 pandemic era some theses supervision were done on-line.	264	104	90	40	3.19	.91	Accepted
4.	Post COVID-19 pandemic era witnessed mass registration of off-campus course-work.	1	21	188	288	1.27	.98	Not accepted
5.	Students' awareness of hybrid model learning is not high.	244	120	101	33	3.15	.82	Accepted

The analyses in Table 1 show that the mean scores (\bar{X}) of the items range from 1.27 to 3.51 and their standard deviations range from 0.43 to 0.99. Items 1 ($\bar{X} = 1.43$ and $SD = .49$) was not accepted, meaning that the school has no provision for hybrid learning. The result in item 4 ($\bar{X} = 1.27$ and $SD = .98$) was equally not accepted, that even after COVID-19 era hybrid learning was not in practice in the University. Results 2 ($\bar{X} = 3.51$, $SD = .51$), 3 ($\bar{X} = 3.19$, $SD = .91$) and 5 ($\bar{X} = 3.15$, $SD = .82$) were accepted.

Items 2 is in confirmation with item 1 that there is no hybrid learning environment in the University. Item 3 appears unique that some student's theses were supervised on-line during COVID-19 era. This result on project supervision is not enough reason that hybrid learning is practiced in the school. More so, item 5 reveals that many of the respondents did not have high awareness about hybrid learning environments.

Since all the conditions that qualify a hybrid learning environments are not fully met in

the University at the time of this study, it is therefore concluded that the school does not practise hybrid learning. This finding confirms with the observations by Owillabs (2021), and Gayar (2021) that not all schools practise hybrid learning environments. Students who are interested in this model of learning need to look elsewhere for now.

Research questions 2

How does hybrid learning environments influence professional development in teacher education?

Table 2

Frequency counts (F), Weighted mean scores (\bar{X}) and Standard Deviation (SD) of participants opinion on influence of hybrid learning environments professional development in teaching (N = 498)

S/n	Statement	T	SWT	SWF	F	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1.	Taking on-line courses with some on-campus courses provides steady growth in knowledge.	230	146	86	36	3.14	.91	Accepted
2.	On-line support services e.g. on-line library, on-line book stores, etc. encourage continual learning.	216	134	92	66	3.04	0.86	Accepted
3.	Decreasing time of on-campus classroom course work and increasing time of off-campus course work widens learners' scope of skill development.	181	211	96	10	3.13	.85	Accepted
4.	Hybrid learning is highly self-motivating.	119	190	100	89	2.66	.46	Accepted
5.	Flexibility in completing course work on one's own schedule is excellent for professional development	182	213	86	17	3.12	.78	Accepted

The summary statistics for all the 5 calibrated items about influence of hybrid learning environments on professional development indicated a positive link between them. All the items show a mean score (\bar{X}) of 2.00 and above and a range of standard deviation (SD) = .46 to .91 as shown in Table 2.

A close look at Table 2 reveals that items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 bear the following mean scores (\bar{X}) and standard deviations (SD): 3.14, 0.91, 3.04, 0.86, 3.13, 0.85, 2.66, 0.46, and 3.12, 0.78 respectively. This means that hybrid learning

environments influence professional development.

Opinions expressed by respondents show that hybrid learning where fully practiced promotes professional development in teacher education. This finding corroborates the assertion of Pollard (2010) and DFES (2006), that professional development in teacher education only be fully realized in a school context with favourable learning environments.

Research question 3

How does professional development in teaching relate with reflective teaching?

Table 3

Frequency counts (F) and percentages (%) of participants opinions on the relationship between professional development in teaching and reflective teaching (N = 498)

S/n	Statement	F %	SA	A	D	SD
	As a professional teacher:					
1.	I always think of inventing new method.	F	178	186	90	4.4
		%	35.7	37.3	18.1	8.8
2.	I see a student difficulty in learning not as a defect in the student but a defect in my own instruction	F	172	188	84	54
		%	34.5	37.8	16.9	10.8
3.	I do not need to continually examine my experiences to improve practice.	F	54	90	196	158
		%	10.8	18.1	39.4	31.7
4.	I seriously think about how to teach effectively.	F	168	184	90	56
		%	33.7	36.9	18.1	11.2
5.	I do not need to adjust methods of teaching irrespective of situations.	F	38	100	178	182
		%	7.6	20.1	35.7	36.5

From Table 3, item 1, out of 498 respondents, 364 (73%) agreed that they always think of inventing new methods of teaching, 134 (26.9%) disagree in their opinions. Item 2, 360 participants about 72.3%, agreed that they see students' difficulty in learning as their own teaching defect, while 138 (27.7%) disagree. Item 3, 144 (28.9%) agree that they do not need to examine their experiences in order to improve practice while 360 (72.3%) who disagree with the item are those who continually examine their experiences to improve practice. Item 4, 352 (70.6%) agreed that they seriously think about how to teach effectively whereas 146 (29.3%) disagree with the item. In item 5; 360 (72.3%) have need to adjust their methods of teaching depending on situations while 138 (27.7%) agree that they do not have the need of varying their methods of teaching.

The general opinion as depicted by participants reveal that professional development in teacher education improves teachers reflective teaching, an ideal quality of teaching. Owen (2012), Parkay and Stanford (2014), Doran (2017) Essien and Anthony (2018) are exponents of this school of thought which is concurred by this study finding.

CONCLUSION

Hybrid learning environments as a model of receiving instructions in some higher institutions is not fully a practice in the University of Calabar. The practice of hybrid learning promotes professional development in teacher education, besides, it reduces students'

congestion on campus. Hybrid learning is a worth-while programme of receiving instructions from colleges and universities. Professional development in teacher education in turn improves teaching reflection.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made based on the findings: University of Calabar should improve on its learning opportunities by including hybrid learning environments fully. Intending and practicing teachers should be encouraged to continually deepening their knowledge and skills to make them experts or remain experts in teaching.

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