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Learner Support Services and Business Education Students' Readiness for Online Learning at the University of Calabar

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Abstract
This study investigated how learner support services at the University of Calabar predict business education students' preparation for online learning. Two specific objectives were established, two research questions were posed, and two null hypotheses were developed and tested at a significant level of .05. Pertinent literature was reviewed. The population consisted of 147 University of Calabar 400-level business education students. This population also formed the sample using a census process. Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire with 40 items that were validated by five specialists from the University of Calabar. Cronbach Alpha statistics were used to establish the questionnaire's reliability, yielding reliability coefficients of 0.88 and 0.85 for the independent sub-variables and dependent variable, respectively. Following the administration of the questionnaire, the data collected was analyzed using linear regression analysis to test the hypotheses. The results show that academic and technological support services strongly predict business education students' preparation for online instruction at the University of Calabar. Based on these findings, the study recommends that lecturers, counsellors, and academic technicians should encourage students to participate in digital education by offering intellectual, emotional, and other support services.
Keywords: learner, support, services, online, learning

Introduction
Students set out on an intellectual trip via the halls of many institutions, looking for insight and direction with the expectation that they will graduate with the abilities and information required to succeed in life. To ensure that they are not doing this journey alone, students rely on a variety of learner support services (LSS) (Willems & González-DeHass, 2016). Learner support

services are connected and engaging knowledge and assets (Stewart, 2019), designed to help learners achieve their goals from the moment of initial inquiries to graduation and frequently for the rest of their lives (COL, 2002). Learner support services encompass all facets of the institution's delivery, including the quality of the learning activities and all facets of the interactions between the staff and the students. They consist of giving the learner a personal mentor, counselling, services from the library, multimedia tools centre, feedback, training kits, instruction, and managerial assistance planned and tailored to help the student succeed.

The aforementioned resources and services successfully guide, support, and help students with their unique demands while meeting their goals for independent study, group learning, and overall growth. According to Babatunde (2010), they also foster the feeling of being connected to a given school and allow individuals to participate in lectures outside the convenience of their private homes while finishing projects at nearly every moment of the academic year in a supportive, inclusive, and responsive environment. Learner support services work to identify and support individuals with various learning needs both within and outside of the classroom. For people that maintain a rigorous professional life as well as household tasks, courses taken online are ideal. Furthermore, internet-based courses are less expensive given that they lack the necessity of travelling to a location, enabling people to avoid spending money on petrol along with automobile maintenance. Classes given online are especially beneficial for those that commute often. Learners may seek a career elsewhere using a digital studying style without moving there. The use of computerized lectures offers learners courage that pushes them to learn more (Asaph & Raja, 2016).

The primary objective of instructional assistance in the internet-based medium of schooling is to create a favourable environment for students where they can grow in confidence and, as a result, facilitate their ability to succeed personally in achieving their distinctive educational along with career objectives through providing an array of tools, services, and directions to these individuals (Ipaye, 2007). Useful assistance for learners, according to Shikulo and Lekhetho (2020), allows learners to manage their educational as well as individual stresses. As a consequence, colleges and universities are able to draw in freshmen, raise their growth rates, and enhance their educational achievement generally, and employment prospects, alongside preparedness for the continuous pursuit of knowledge via the Internet.

It is crucial to provide high-quality assistance to learners, particularly in virtual learning environments where students may be geographically separated from their lecturers and peers. They encounter particular demands and difficulties related to their studies, families, social lives, and occupations. Without proper learner assistance services, a top-notch educational endeavour gets challenging as the concerns aforementioned may lead to frustration and programme abandonment. Effective digital education involves a variety of high-quality services for students to go along with the different course materials that are made available to all students equally (Delvaline, 2005). Among these services are those that provide educational assistance, technical aid, administrative assistance, and counselling assistance. However, the scope of this study is restricted to academic and technological support services.

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According to Gurney and Grossi (2019) and Arifin (2018), educational assistance services are a combination of teaching services, and educational assets offered to learners to help them study more effectively and satisfy course-specific goals. Similarly, Tamuliene (2014) argues that academic support essentially exists to assist learners to fulfil their social, psychological, and emotional desires, as they are tied to their ability to study. Academic support services, according to Chow et al. (2007) and Kaur and Abas (2004), are linked to the delivery of educational material, covering the goals of instruction, curriculum, and instructional approach alongside assessment and input on the manner in which students learn.

Education assistance is multifaceted; it includes several pedagogical techniques which could enhance learners' learning opportunities and eventual achievement. Among these tactics is scholastic guidance, in which learners receive advice regarding ways to meet their educational goals using digital devices, and intellectual coaching including supplemental programmes. As stated by Munyaradzi and Addae (2019), it includes instruction on the best ways to use the relevant educational materials, instructional seminars, voluntary mentorship, useful services offered by libraries, technical support, and educational networks. Schools can choose the approach to take when providing individuals with various education-related services. While some schools allow all course participants, regardless of specialism, the liberty to create networks of practice, other educational organizations make certain that the tasks of the learner's assistance programmes are explicitly defined and effectively carried out because educational assistance is crucial to enhancing the experiences of learners while also changing the way they learn.

In some schools, the educational assistance staff also help learners who are enrolled in online courses to understand ways to study; understand fundamental academic abilities including browsing via the internet, studying using various formats which are readily accessible, as well as ways to engage with classmates as well as programme instructors using various learning modalities. Learners are also taught to learn on their own, know why they will be evaluated, and also know what requirements will be used (Arifin, 2018; Gurney & Grossi, 2019). The aforementioned cognitive assistance plays a significant role in preparing people for web-based studying via the remote instruction procedure. Efficient scholastic aids have established themselves as a critical aspect in assuring learners' achievement in school. Individuals become fatigued by the absence of scholarly aid, begin to detach when they lag adrift in their studies, and eventually drop out (Fluke et al., 2014).

Technology support services are another help that learners receive in order to learn virtually. Technology support services are offered by professionals to end-users through the use of digital tools. Help might be delivered via a variety of channels, including telephone, aid workspace, machine-accessible knowledge-based approach, internet logging in, as well as seldom utilized channels (Ralph, 1991). Sife et al. (2011) refer to "installation, operations, servicing, handling of networks, including safety" (p58) as parts of technical assistance. To both teachers and learners, assistance with technology is crucial. Educators require technical guidance to make sure they are equipped with the tools and know-how to incorporate technologies in their instruction. Students benefit from aids in technology by developing the abilities required to satisfy their requirements for education. The quality as well as the scope of technical aid that

learners are given access to affects how well they do in studying via the internet (Mir, 2017). As a result, the capacity of learners and educators to effectively employ digital devices may be affected without sufficient assistance (Nawaz & Khan, 2012).

Now more than ever, the educational setting is fluid. As a result, people today learn in methods that are substantially dissimilar from those that were initially intended for the system of schooling. The concept of school is being reinvented in a variety of ways to match the changing needs of contemporary Internet learners as a result of the development of advanced educational technologies. To stay up with the internet-savvy population, many colleges and universities are replacing conventional materials with cutting-edge technology (Explorance, 2023). Modern society functions by adapting to the shifts that are occurring. Similar to other industries, schooling has experienced a considerable rise in recent years. Most outdated instructional methods are becoming less effective. Regarding the whole growth of students, just conceptual understanding is insufficient. Contemporary approaches to instruction incorporate innovative ideas with practical methods. With technical support, combining education and innovation may prove advantageous for humanity as a whole (Pant et al., 2021).

To take full advantage of an innovative approach to instruction, instructional staff and learners require regular and on-demand assistance from the technological assistance divisions. Regrettably, investigations show that relying upon the Internet assistance group is a significant problem for those who use virtual education because the majority of technological devices are frequently underutilized because lecturers lack trust in utilizing them (Chipembele & Bwalya, 2016; Abu-Shanab et al., 2020). Additionally, whenever teachers attempt to use cutting-edge devices in their lessons but they do not function, they become upset because they realize they lack the expertise to repair them. When it occurs repeatedly, they give up on the innovation thereby making the use of the electronic technique in schooling problematic. However, via an array of backing systems, students may gain the technical know-how required for participating in programmes on the Internet, get help anytime they encounter technological obstacles, grow independently, or have a lower demand for help (Lowe, 2005). One of the avenues for assistance that learners may leverage to learn digitally is online instruction.

Digital education is described as education provided by computers or mobile devices which learners often receive over the World Wide Web independent from a normal educational setting (Ellman & Schwartz, 2016). It is an internet-based approach to education which gives students greater freedom to explore a variety of knowledge streams. Learners have complete control over how they utilize instructional materials in addition to the details of when, how, what, where and why they learn (Panuwatwanich & Stewart, 2012).

Despite the benefits of studying via the Internet, the bulk of Nigerian universities' business education students still relies heavily on instructor-led instruction (Agius, 2004). When subjected to the aforementioned learning style, business education undergraduates find it challenging to participate in and benefit from courses offered digitally. While a few schools have updated their educational services to accommodate digital connectivity, few institutions of higher learning are hurrying to extend opportunities for learners of various backgrounds through the provision of web-based programmes while many are yet to embrace cutting-edge

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technologies. As a result, a lot of students who struggle with technology-mediated education and do not have the capacity to handle its requirements receive little or no assistance especially those that are in the universities that do not give sufficient attention to advanced educational technologies. Aside from this, most virtual teachers do not have resources for directing battling internet students to campus-based offerings. Although it is reasonable that some educational organizations find it difficult to fulfil their obligation to offer a wide range of readily available aids for in-person as well as remote learners, failing to take measures runs a possibility of producing digital immigrants.

One blatantly obvious solution is to recognize that there exists an imperative for deliberate commitment to the development as well as provision of efficient digital learner assistance programmes which assist individuals in acquiring the skills and traits needed to engage in effective virtual education. It may be claimed that more variation, higher demands over managing oneself alongside technological confidence in oneself, knowledge about information, as well as the possible separating effects of the virtual educational setting make the necessity over thoughtful focus on giving encouragement increasingly crucial to learners' success (Brindley, 2014). Every learner's requirement would not be met by a web-based model that offers a single style that suits everyone. Similar to how they decide to attend the classes they want, learners can opt for using aid programmes only on the school's premises, only remotely, or a combination of all. Learners who study remotely require internet access, while a growing number of on-site learners are needing to utilize virtual services for their education due to their adaptability in meeting needs such as timetables for work, and parental duties, among additional obligations. A lot of learners are used to utilizing technologies whenever they need them in both their private and public lives. This establishes a standard for daily internet use not just for their educational programmes but also for the resources which facilitate them to succeed. While choosing an institution of higher learning, certain learners are starting to prioritize having access to reliable electronic services for learners. Not only is their desire true, but it might also grow into being seen as an essential component within the framework of thriving in the digital age.

The likelihood of succeeding in virtual education may depend on how prepared the learners are for it (Coopasami et al., 2017; Yu & Richardson, 2015). A learner studies as he is prepared. The level of readiness describes how well-prepared a person is to do a specific task. Readiness is a state of preparedness that is supported by prior experience and characterized by an awareness of inherent capacity (Isangedighi, 2007). When knowledge and skills are provided to a person at this stage, he is capable of understanding and applying them meaningfully. In the context of this work, it refers to a point in the development of the student when he is sufficiently mature and equipped to complete learning tasks in an advanced technological setting. For many learners and educators, studying through digital channels is distinct from studying through direct mediums. For the student to engage successfully in online educational activities, numerous aids are needed. Despite the significance of assistance for students in digital education, the researchers have noticed that many Nigerian students studying business education, particularly those at the University of Calabar, do not appear to be prepared for digital schooling. This could be a result of the instructional setting not being robust enough to support preparation for web-based education.

Numerous investigations have been carried out with learners at universities (Atousa et al., 2016; Blayone et al., 2018; Bovermann, 2018; Bsaol et al., 2018); there currently are not enough investigations done particularly with learners to determine their preparedness for taking courses digitally (Coopasami et al., 2017; Adams et al., 2018; Yu & Richardson, 2015). Within the setting of higher educational institutions, a few studies have been done on how students are prepared for technology-mediated education (Subramaniam et al., 2019; Chow et al., 2007; Kaur & Abas, 2004). Additionally, studies on learner preparation for hybrid education (Adams et al., 2018) and enormously accessible virtual curricula (Subramaniam, 2019) have been conducted. But these investigations, which assess a variety of skills, do not seem particularly targeted towards learners in the university. The majority of studies have focused on Information and Communications Technology skills (Subramaniam et al., 2019; Adams et al., 2018). The views of individuals towards learning by themselves, abilities to communicate, and interpersonal abilities, including self-confidence, have all been studied (Adams et al., 2018; Subramaniam et al., 2019). Overall, the results show that learners have only been marginally prepared. In addition, whereas the majority of scholarship so far has concentrated on technological proficiency, utilization of technological devices, as well as independent study, learner aids have received less attention (Yu & Richardson, 2015).

Additionally, there is a dearth of research on undergraduates with backgrounds in business education who are prepared for e-learning and who must develop their sensorimotor and intellectual abilities. Furthermore, Ouma (2019) avers that due to poor assistance for learners, learning via the Internet has frequently been associated with poor outcomes, and unhappiness, including a lack of learner preparation (Ouma, 2019). In order to assist learners with studying electronically, there is a need to make a conscious effort towards (Brindley, 2014) knowing students' preparation in advance as this could stimulate engagement and participation, resulting in improved education (Kpolovie & Iderima, 2016). Therefore, the objective of this study was to determine the relationship between academic assistance offerings and business education undergraduates' preparedness for remote instruction at the University of Calabar.

Purpose of the study

The major goal of this study was to forecast how educational assistance offerings may influence the University of Calabar business education students' preparation for studying electronically. The study specifically aimed to predict:

1) The influence of academic support services on University of Calabar business education students' preparation for remote learning.
2) The influence of technology support services on University of Calabar business education students' preparation for web-based education.

Hypotheses

The investigation was guided by the following hypotheses:

Ho1: Academic support services do not significantly predict University of Calabar business education students' preparation for studying electronically.

Ho2: Technology support services do not significantly predict University of Calabar business education students' readiness for studying electronically.

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Methodology

A predictive correlation research design was adopted in order to forecast the link between the predictor and the criterion variables (Study.com, n.d.). This research design was chosen because the study was a predictive one. The study population was 147 400-level business education students from the University of Calabar. They were 147 students studying business education at the 400 level, according to information from the university's academic planning unit. Participants from this university were chosen for the study because it appears that the issue that served as the basis for it is more prevalent here than in private universities. Additionally, 400-level students were chosen because they have been in the university long enough to report on learner support services and students' readiness for digital education. The 400-level business education students were therefore purposively selected. The researchers, therefore, took a census of the study population.

A 40-item researchers-made questionnaire titled Learner Support Services and Readiness for Online Learning Questionnaire (LSSROLQ) was developed and used for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part one comprised 24 items that were developed to measure the independent sub-variable with each having 12 items, while part two was made of 16 items developed to measure the dependent variable. The questionnaire was developed on a four-point scale of strongly agree (SA) 4, agree (A) 3, disagree (D) 2, and strongly disagree (SD) 1, for the independent while Always (A) 4, rarely (R) 3, sometimes (ST) 2, and never (N) 1, were used as response options for the dependent variable.

The face and content validity was established by five professionals from the University of Calabar by going through the study instrument item by item. The five experts' suggestions helped to refine the instrument before the final version was created. Over the course of two weeks, the instrument was pilot-tested on 30 respondents from both inside and outside the study zone. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha statistics, which produced reliability coefficients of 0.88 and 0.85 for the two sections of the instrument respectively. These figures show that the instrument was trustworthy. The hand-delivery approach was used to administer the LSSROLQ to 147 respondents. The data generated were analyzed using simple linear regression. For the hypotheses, a null hypothesis was retained if the p-value was $\geq .05$ level of significance; however, if the p-value was $\leq .05$ level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Presentation of results

Ho1: Academic support services do not significantly predict business education students' readiness for studying electronically at the University of Calabar.

Table 1: Simple linear regression of the prediction of business education students' readiness for online learning by academic support services

Model	SS	Df	Ms	F	Sig
Regression	998.918	1	998.918	164.892	.000
Residual	872.484	144	6.058		
Total	1,871.402	145			

R = .589; Adj. R^2 = .511; SE = .976; t = 20.63; α = 23.54; B = .52; β = .63.

A simple linear regression analysis was used to predict business education students' readiness for online learning using scores of academic support services. According to the results on table 1, academic support services are responsible for 51.1 per cent of the overall variation in students' preparation for online learning in business education. This suggests that predictors other than academic assistance services may account for 48.9% of the unexplained variation. Table 1 further demonstrates that academic support service is a strong predictor of business education students' preparation for online learning, F (1,144) =164.892; P< .001. The null hypothesis is disproven by the statistical evidence. As a result, academic support services considerably predict University of Calabar business education students' preparedness for online learning. Table 1 indicates that assuming other parameters remain constant, increasing academic support services by 1% is associated with an increase in students' readiness for online learning of 0.63 %.

Ho2: Technological support services do not significantly predict business education students' readiness for studying electronically at the University of Calabar.

Table 2: Simple linear regression of the prediction of business education students' readiness for online learning by technological support services

Model	SS	Df	Ms	F	Sig
Regression	790.924	1	790.924	105.414	.000
Residual	1080.478	144	7.503		
Total	1,871.402	145			

R = .301; Adj. R^2 = .228; SE = .927; t = 22.65; B = .50; α = 25.67; = β .62

To predict business education students' preparation for online learning using scores of technical support services, a simple linear regression analysis was carried out. The results in table 2 unambiguously indicate that business education students' preparation for online learning accounts for 22.8 per cent of the variation in technological support services. This implies that the remaining 77.2 per cent of the variance in the criterion variable might be accounted for by other factors. The regression study reveals that technological support services significantly predict business education students' readiness for online learning. The null hypothesis was thus rejected. The University of Calabar business education students' readiness for online learning can thus be inferred largely from technological support services. According to table 2, it is expected that all other things being equal, a 1% increase in technical support services is related to a 0.62 % rise in business education students' preparation for online learning.

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Discussion of the findings

The results of this study show that academic support services significantly predict students majoring in business education's preparation for online instruction at the University of Calabar. The result of this study is consistent with the opinions of Gurney and Grossi (2019), and Arifin (2018) that individuals who engage in virtual education using educational assistance acquire the steps it requires to learn; they build basic literacy skills such as using the World Wide Web to conduct research, learning from a variety of easily accessible materials, and understanding the way to interact with teachers as well as peers in different educational activities. Additionally, learners receive instruction on ways to acquire knowledge independently using readily available electronic resources and are made aware of the evaluation process and the standards that are going to be applied. The results of this study corroborate Munyaradzi and Addae's (2019) argument that support services for education include training on the most efficient methods of employing the essential assets to acquire knowledge in addition to coaching, and other beneficial assistance provided by electronic bookstores. Learners who receive educational assistance have access to an institutional bookstore, guides for lectures, instructions for using a digital bookstore, electronic educational tools, organizations, job opportunities, plus interpersonal interactions. Learners will be able to profit from all of the advantages of e-learning with appropriate knowledge and some supervision. The study's findings may also be as stated here since educational aid is the offering of concrete assistance such as the guidance of an instructor in helping learners to complete certain assignments as well as content sharing among fellow learners which is directedly offered to deal with the discipline-specific challenges. Their views of how easily electronic devices can be utilized for educational purposes are improved when they receive appropriate educational assistance, thus rendering it simpler for them to handle programme challenges. Learners are also more inclined to participate in class studies and value them if they receive academic help, which makes them better able to take advantage of virtual education.

The results of this study show that technology aids significantly predict business education students' preparedness for remote instruction at the University of Calabar. The idea that assistance with technology is a factor in digital education is implied in the study's findings. The results of the present investigation support Sife et al.'s (2007) claim that learners gain through technological assistance by acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to complete their academic obligations. Technical assistance may be provided in the form of setup, use, safety, and network administration, including repair. The calibre and extent of assistance/resources to which learners are privy determine how effective they are at learning online. Regardless of whether someone employs the newest technologies, the eagerness of students and teachers to use technologies productively may be compromised without adequate support from technology (Nawaz & Khan, 2012). The result demonstrates how crucial technology is to schooling. The global context of schooling is shifting before everyone as a result of the capacity of technological advances to expand educational opportunities. Exposure to the most recent and outstanding knowledge is made possible through advanced educational tools. Analytics for education, social systems, portable instructional applications, augmented and virtual reality, as well as numerous cutting-edge devices and methodologies, are a few of these cutting-edge innovations. To learners as well as educators, education can be greatly improved with the use of the aforementioned modern instructional tools and techniques. Printed works would soon

contain out-of-date content, and updating them could require many years to complete. Technologies allow learners to use a great deal of internet knowledge including materials. This makes it possible for students to conduct personal investigations and consequently grow to be self-sufficient.

Technologies can additionally render difficult subjects easier to comprehend for learners with different learning preferences, as well as allow people to acquire knowledge online. Learning virtually makes learning increasingly available to people. Adults that are employed permanently can continue studying virtually in the privacy of their own homes, youngsters that have trouble fitting into conventional classrooms may study at home, and adults living a different lifestyle because of sickness or travels may obtain a degree. The findings of this research may be as stated because moving from a conventional classroom environment to a virtual one enables teachers to employ innovative technologies along with teaching techniques. The transition from fixed educational resources to increasingly fluid engaging multimedia tools is made possible by technologies. Whenever individuals participate in interesting educational tasks in addition to simply watching an instructor as well as studying digital instructional materials, people frequently study more quickly and with greater interest.

Conclusion

Electronic education is a process that requires self-adaptation to a constantly changing digital space. When planning educational activities, this method considers the student's situation, personality traits, and surroundings - his home and school. The teaching and other support staff have a significant impact on the environment's texture. This is because, with the aid of the teaching and non-teaching staff, students can connect with their classmates and instructors, which helps them to understand one another and facilitates the electronic exchange of ideas. Learners, technological advances, and digital learning are all still evolving. A fresh digital schooling route may be created by the rise in electronic devices, considering that studying digitally can occur at all times and in anyplace. One must consider new developments for e-learning when web and software-related technology innovation emerges. Using this knowledge, instructors must give all learners enriching and creative experiences. Teachers need to take into account several methods for developing knowledge-sharing websites. The objective is to provide an interface which is compatible with electronic devices and enables thorough viewing across various internet contexts. The results of this study make it clear that e-learning appears to be on the cusp of replacing traditional learning paradigms. Therefore, if Nigeria is to join the rest of the world in the march towards a technology-mediated education, stakeholders in the education sector must make concerted efforts.

Recommendations

The study makes the following recommendations in light of its findings:

1. Lecturers, counsellors, and academic technicians should encourage students' participation in digital education by providing them with mental, emotional, and other types of support.
2. In order to promote learning that is mediated by technology, university authorities should make reasonable quantities and quality of digital technologies available.

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