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e-Learning, Face-to-Face Learning and the Stake of Student-teacher Relations in the Post-COVID 19 Era in Nigeria

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Abstract

The global outbreak of the COVID 19 Pandemic in 2019 led to the imposition of lockdown as well as physical and social distancing policy by governments and international community. This also inadvertently triggered the revolution of E-learning which necessitated the minimal use of the traditional face-to-face classroom and resort to virtual classroom instruction during the lockdown all in the bid to ensure that school activities were not interrupted. The impact and rapid expansion of e-learning remains quite overwhelming and prominent even in the post pandemic era. It has significantly altered the nature of educational policies and pedagogical approaches in terms of class room communication and instruction as it affects student-teacher relations. While Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilitated the ascendancy of e-learning no doubt, the outbreak of the COVID 19 Pandemic has further propel its rapid expansion in the 21st century. However, the utility of E-learning was discovered out of the necessity to check the spread of the pandemic. Aside from the fact that it is disburdening compared to the traditional face-to face teaching and learning, it also saves time, energy and resources as well as convenient to manage especially in times of violence conflict and insecurity, non-Clement weather, etc. But then, E-learning gives only limited room for effective interaction, instruction and communication between students and teachers to occur. This constitutes one of its prominent pitfalls which is quite detrimental to the teaching learning process. This has further deepened the preexisting lacuna between teachers and students in Nigerian schools which poses a threat to the realization of the broad goals and objectives of teaching and learning. However, the hybridization of E-learning and face-to face learning offers a better alternative and outcome so as to break even or to strike a balance between the two as well as to meet up with the complex challenges of teaching and learning in the 21st century. This research is largely theoretical and it utilizes the theory of social interaction to explain the problem at stake.

Keywords: e-Learning, Student-Teacher Relations, Post-Covid 19

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Introduction

Since the outbreak of the COVID 19 global pandemic of 2019, education, just like other sectors of the global economy has experienced a rapid revolution in the area pedagogy through the intensive integration of ICT into teaching and learning by schools, (Gherhes& Stoian:2021). The global pandemic accompanied by the imposition of lockdown as well as physical and social distancing policy of governments and international community necessitated the a quantum shift from the use of the traditional face to face classrooms and resort to e-learning with ICT as the catalytic driving force (Hani& Hijazein, et al: 2021, Satishkumar &Radha: 2020, Patel:2016, Kumar:2018). This has not only transformed the nature of student-teacher interaction, instruction and communication alone but also the general systems, policies, and pedagogy of education. E-Learning has also improved students' digital communication and literacy skill as well as advancement in educational technology.

Aside from the fact that the outbreak of the Pandemic which necessitated the adoption of lock down and social distancing policies indirectly triggered e-learning as an alternative means of communication and teaching, other factors that have contributed to the sustainability of e-learning even after the pandemic include such socioeconomic challenges as insecurity and conflict, cost effectiveness, inflation, as well as comfortability and convenience, time, energy and resource management. Despite its role in improving classroom instruction, it is important to state the advancement of e-learning has also collaterally exposed the weaknesses embedded within it. Thus, lack of effective communication, interaction and inter-personal relationship between students and teachers constitutes one the bane of e-learning which has dire consequences for students' academic performance thus making the entire teaching-learning process seem counter-productive(Akhter & Javed: 2021). In Nigeria, research has shown that there is a preexisting gap in Student-Teacher relations but unfortunately it has not been given the necessary attention. This problem is rooted in lack of professionalism by teachers, inadequate student motivation by teachers, poor learning environment, lack of appropriate resources and instructional materials. This has also generated much polemical debates both within and outside the academia. This gap has further been exacerbated by the recent advancement in e-learning which has reduced the teaching – learning process to mere communication through the means of the internet machine, and has drastically affected not only the academic performance of students but also their success rate and social developments, (Saul: 2015, Yunus et al;2011). While the in-person learning seeks to improve classroom interaction and communication, E-learning has contributed to tremendously to the erosion of effective social interaction which is a sine qua non in teaching-learning process. It is against this background that this research seeks to critically analyze impact of e-learning and faceto-face teaching models on student-teacher relations as it affects teaching -learning outcome Thus, the physical distancing policy during the COVD 19 tremendously contributed towards controlling the pandemic no doubt, but the consequences on student teacher relations has continued to linger

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even in the post COVID. However what is the impact of COVID 19 policy on students-teacher relations? How can we strike a balance between e-learning and physical learning? These are some of the polemic questions this research seeks to provide answers to. However this research is largely theoretical in approach and utilizes mainly secondary data as well as qualitative method of analysis.

Theory of Social Interaction

This theory is multi-disciplinary used across such disciplines as anthropology, sociology, psychology and linguistics, social sciences to develop theories to describe and predict human behavior. The theory of social Interaction is best understood within the context of classroom interaction which offers an apt explanation to the question of student-teacher relations. It postulates that interaction is a critical and indispensable element of communication which determines the sustainability of teaching and learning process while building a productive relationship between teachers and students. It proposes that language exists for the purpose of communication and can only be learnt in the context of interaction by adults and other children (Slide Share: 2024). The goal of this method is to capture direct face to face interaction as it occurs and to analyze such interaction into useful feedback in which observers categorize and interpret such behaviour, (Wikipedia: 2025). It is a key in education because it influences the personal development of students in terms of their intellectual abilities. Major exponents and proponents of this theory include Vygotsky and, Jerome Bruner. Others include Herbert Blumer, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead 1934 (Nickerson:2021).

Conceptual Clarification

A. e-Learning

E-learning is a value-laden concept which comprises of online learning, virtual learning, distributed learning, networked or web based learning......it thus, refers to all educational activities carried out by groups or individuals working online or offline and synchronously or asynchronously via networked or stand-alone computer and other electronic devices,(Raj& Chitra: 2018) The use of internet for education including the use of web—sites and e-mail has come to be known as online education system(Patel:2016). It aims at diversifying teaching or learning approach and also stimulates critical thinking through self- help.

B. Face to face learning

Face to face learning is the traditional type of learning which involves classroom instructor in control of the classroom dynamics (Tufue, Taulauniu et al :2023). According to AI,(2025), Face to Face teaching and Learning refers to the traditional methods of education where teachers and students are physically present in the same location allowing for direct interaction, real time communication and immediate feedback between them through lectures, discussions, group work, hands on activities all happening in a shared classroom setting. However, face to face learning

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involves physical presence, direct interaction, real time feed back, non digital communication, immediate communication and hands on learning.

Student Teacher Relations

The concept has been variously defined by different scholars. Enyclopedia.com (2019) defines student-teacher relations as the form and content of behaviour or social interaction in the classroom. Prajapati (2001) the student-teacher relationship must be like a friendship where one person tries to understand the problems faced by the other and help him to try to solve them in which interaction and effective communication play a key role.

Goffman (1964) defines student-teacher relations as social interaction which is the process by which we act and react to those around us. It tells how the students have interaction among themselves, the teacher and even with the whole class (Hannum:2017, Mustapha & Chang et al (2024). .. It includes those acts people perform towards each other and the responses they give in return. However, teachers act in loco-parentis towards their students and can be compared to be a demi-god or a mother who is deeply concerned or worried about her children and their studies, sorrows, problems, etc. A teacher is like a mother who watches over his children's activities and helps them correct their mistakes so as to help them succeed. A teacher is described as one who provides maternal affection and care towards the students and thus, this relationship is built on effective communication and interaction. Student-teacher relations are best understood within the context of classroom interaction between learners and instructors and among learners in the teaching-learning process which perhaps could be extended even out of the classroom

Covid 19 Pandemic

According to Heath (2011), a pandemic is an epidemic occurring worldwide or over a very wide area as well as across international boundaries and usually affecting a large number of people. Shorrey (1965) sees a pandemic as an epidemic affecting a large proportion of the population distributed or occurring widely throughout a region. Madhav (2017) defines a pandemic as an epidemic occurring over a very wide area, crossing international boundaries, and usually affecting a large number of people. According to WHO (2021) COVID-19, is the infectious disease or pandemic caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus

Teaching and Learning as Social Interaction

No doubt, the discourse on student-teacher relations finds its utility in classroom interaction which is a key critical element in building an effective interpersonal relationship between teachers and students as well as among teachers in Nigeria. It also constitutes the very driving force for effective lesson delivery and comprehension and creates a favorable setting for effective engagement of both parties in the teaching and learning process. Brown (2014) states that interaction is the basis through which learners are engaged both in enhancing their own

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communicative abilities and in socially, constructing their identities. Vygotsky (1962) stated that we learn through our interactions and communications with others where our social environment is key. He further suggested that learning takes place through the interactions students have with their peers, teachers, and other experts. Research has shown that most teachers in Nigeria do not understand that one of the core values of education lies in effective classroom communication and interaction especially between students and teachers. Thus the absence of good interpersonal relationship between students and teachers constitutes a major problem for education due to inadequate interaction (Mortazani *et al.*, 2019, Saul: 2015 &Yunus *et al.*, 2011)

Consequently, it is the responsibility of the teacher to create environments conducive for such interaction whether in or out of the classroom through discussion, collaboration, and feedback. There are different levels of interactions that occur in a classroom setting which has a tremendous effect on teacher-student relations be it traditional or virtual. They are: Teacher-student, Student-teacher and Student-Student interaction

Types of Student – Teacher Relations

There exist different levels of student – teacher relations within the learning environment which facilitates effective communication as a vital catalyst for academic success. Cox and Orehovec (2007) identified four major types of student-teacher interaction which facilitates effective relations:

- **1. Functional Interaction**: This is a kind of relations involving academic-related interactions that occur outside the classroom.
- 2. **Personal Interactions**: This is a kind of relations where there is minimal interaction between students and teachers inside the classroom and little or no interpersonal exchange. This is most common in e-learning. Even though both parties may not always be aware of it, this form of interaction has a far-reaching influence on their students. Teachers have a critical role to plat in stimulating effective student-teacher relations. According to Christensen & Menzel, (1998), personal interaction is a strong motivator and indicator of learning(UK Essays 1998)
 - In particular, Decker, Dona, and Christenson (2007) note that the student-teacher relationship is more important in predicting students' social-emotional functioning than their academic performance. This indicates that a good student -teacher relations has a viable support-seeking dimension where this relationship can be nurtured to shape positive outcomes for students.
- 3. **Informal interactions**: According to Essay Expert(2018,)Student- teacher relations outside the classroom have been found to have an incremental effect on students' motivation over and above the typical predictors of academic performance such as secondary school performance or academic aptitude (Pascarella & Terinzini: 2005, Pascarella, Terenzini, & Hibel, 1978). Informal discussions with teachers about intellectual

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issues are associated with increases in students' aspirations to achieve at a higher level than would be predicted by pre-enrollment characteristics. According to Thompson,(2001) and Woodside, Wong, & Weist, (1999), although most interactions with faculty tend to occur within the formal classroom setting, students who experience informal interactions tend to be more motivated, engaged, and actively involved in the learning process (UKEssays:2018,)

4. Initial interactions; Teachers act are also very influential in increasing the value placed on high academic achievement and in compensating for the general student performance that does not typically value such achievement. Mentoring provided by faculty teachers as sponsors confidents, or protectors seem to be relatively more important than even peer support, for students who are transitioning into higher levels of education (Mann:1992; Shore; 2003).

Relevance of Student - Teacher Relations to the Teaching/Learning Process

Teaching is an anthropocentric profession that demands a large amount of time being dedicated to personal interaction within the classroom. The Student relationship largely depends on effort from both parties although the teacher plays a more pivotal role as a key facilitator responsible for initiating such positive interaction. The teacher who is practical in representation, recognition, understanding, intimacy, expectation, respect, care and cooperation towards his or her students not only works at initiating positive teacher-student relationships, but also increases the likelihood of building strong relationships that will endure over time (Barry & King, 1999).

The importance of a positive student teacher relations within the learning environment cannot be overemphasized:

- 1. **Building Student's Self-Efficacy and Skills:** Student-Teacher interactions are very important for the development of the students' academic self-identity and enhancing their motivation and achievement and accomplishments. Research has shown that schools that deliberately attempt to promote student-teacher connection are more likely to realize a host of benefits. According to Anaya & Cole(2001) and Cokley: (2000) faculty members taking an interest in their students' academic progress could potentially make significant contributions in increasing their intellectual and professional development, confidence and self esteem, (UK Essay:2017). This would likely make students t feel more satisfied with their aspirations in school and careers (Rosenthal et al., 2000).
- 2. **Facilitates Effective Mentoring**: Student teacher relations provides an avenue for building personal connections through mentoring or personal guidance of students by the teacher, (Light, 2001). According to Rosenthal, et Al(2003) teachers must demonstrate sociability, intelligence, effective leadership, support, and objectivity (Schimmelpfennig:2025). McDowell & Westman (2005), assert that teachers who

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allow students to use their first names are perceived as higher in warmth, approachability, and respect in comparison to teachers who are addressed by formal titles (UK Essay: 2021). Familiarization through such close and cordial interaction seems to enhance students learning and intellectual stimulation, as it provides the opportunity for both parties to know each other much deeper.

- 3. **Stimulates Interest of Students Towards Effective Learning**: Student teacher relations helps students improve relationship with their peers in the classroom while making learning more interesting. Not only the teacher who will be active in communication but the students will also participate in the teaching and learning process. Ellis (1990) stated that interaction is meaning-focused and carried out to facilitate the exchange of information and prevent communication breakdowns. When students engaged in a classroom activity or discussion, debates etc, it stimulates their interest to discuss further which also improves self-confidence.
- 4. **Improves Classroom Participation:** It creates environment which encourages classroom participation. A dull classroom can make the whole teaching and learning process a bore. The more students participate, the better learners they become, and this attitude can help create a pulsating scholarship.
- 5. Improve or Boost Performance: According to Arthur, Gordon, & Butterfield, (2003) positive teacher-student interaction has a very crucial role for effective teaching and learning to take place (UK Essay:2017). It also emphasized that teacher student interaction highly influences a student's skill to pursue higher education, and to relate better with their peers. Teachers who had positive and secure relationships with students reported that their students were less likely to stay away from school, appeared more independent, more supportive, and busy in learning (Klem & Connell, 2004). UK Essays further articulates that according to developmental perspective, the establishment of a positive teacher-student relationship aids a student's cognitive, social and emotional growth and enhances their mental well-being (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000).

Face to face learning vs e-learning in the post Covid era

Social interaction plays quite a pivotal role in the teaching and learning process where effective communication is the ace that paves the way for academic excellence. However, the traditional face to face learning and teaching offers maximum opportunities for interaction and communication between students and teachers in the classroom which is necessary for effective teaching and learning outcomes. With the outbreak of COVID 19 followed by the lockdown and the social distancing policies, there was a quantum leap towards e-learning which has become quite popular even in the post pandemic era although it offers a little room for effective social interaction among the students and between the teachers and students. E-learning gained relevance

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during the COVID era and affects the various sectors of society particularly, the global educational system. E-learning contributed to the sustainability of classroom activities through communication which is quite commendable. But then, it has contributed to widening the communication gap between teachers and students. When the students maintain a direct connection with the teacher, as well as other students within the learning environment as it is in the face to face learning, it gives them a great deal of inspiration and self-confidence. It creates an avenue for further discussions, exchange of ideas and information even outside the classroom as well as stimulate critical thinking about lessons taught Teachers who have constructive interaction with their students produce classroom environments that are more accommodating to learning and meet students' developmental, emotional and educational needs. Interaction is initiated through discussions, questions and answers, demonstration, role play among others.

In as much as e-learning and physical classroom have both contributed tremendously towards the improvement of classroom instruction, it is also important to state that e-learning provides only limited avenues for effective interaction and communication which could have dire consequences for the student's personal development and the entire teaching and learning process.

The World Bank (2021) asserts that the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic has taken a drastic human toll on the economic and social and political spheres including the educational sphere. Remote learning in Nigeria is quite a novel experience for both teachers and learners. At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, face to face learning was suspended while online/remote teaching and learning education became the order of the day which brought into lime-light the importance of educational technology in teaching and learning, (Yang et al:2020)

However, many schools had to take to the online or virtual approach in order to meet up with the inadequacies of the COVID 19 lock down, physical and social distance policies which halted almost every aspect of human endeavor especially the educational sector. This global quantum shift in the pattern of teaching and learning which has continued to alter the pattern of classroom instruction and instruction even in the post pandemic era

It is important to state that the outbreak of COVID 19 Pandemic and it's attendant lockdown policies have rather created and also exposed the lacuna inherent in the teaching learning process in Nigeria. With the global lock down and social distancing policies of governments, it became quite imperative to minimize the traditional approach of face-to-face interactions in teaching and learning process and the resort to online classes to ensure that school activities remained uninterrupted. The outbreak of the Pandemic ushered in a period of exponential rise in the use of virtual learning facilities taking advantage of the preexisting level of ICT, (Gherhes & Stoian: 2021). According to a University of Maryland (2025), face to face teaching offers the unique opportunity to connect with students directly, fosters meaningful interactions and create engaging learning environment.

The resort to virtual or distant learning all aimed at reducing the rapid spread of the pandemic has rather created new problems especially in Education as it seems to have further

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widened the pre-existing gap in student-teacher relations especially in Nigeria. The nature of classroom interaction is such that the teacher plays a very dominant role in stimulating the interest of students toward achieving their academic goals and interest. To this extent, classroom interaction can be a valuable tool for effective learning or useful learning experiences. Thus, the outbreak of COVID 19 pandemic which placed a restriction on interaction constitutes a major impediment towards the attainment of these goal especially where students had to attend school remotely from home or via online medium

Teacher—student interaction in online education is an important factor affecting students' learning performance (Sun & Sun et al) Online classes are a great way to continue learning and staying connected. However, student might be hesitant to engage in classroom discussions and interactions **Benefits of e-learning**

e-learning has come to stay, no doubt. The global revolution in educational pedagogy which was triggered by the COVID 19 Pandemic. However, these are some of its major benefits.

- 1. **Facilitates Time and Resource management**: The E-learning pedagogy is readily and easily accessible to the working class whose busy schedules might not allow them attend in person classes. As such, it is time saving and less expensive.
- 2. **Improvement of Students knowledge of ICT:** Deepens students' knowledge of ICT and educational technology which stimulates them towards innovation and critical thinking.
- 3. **Safety and Security:** It is the best approach to teaching and learning in times of violent conflict our the outbreak of epidemics or pandemics such as COVID . It limitations the spread of diseases.
- 4. **Management of Large Class Size**: Elearning is most effective in managing a large class size

Weaknesses of E-learning

There are also many constraints in the use of E-learning in education which can be . detrimental to the teaching learning process. Some of these are:

- 1. **Inadequate Interaction**: Lack of Physical and social contact between the students and the teachers and among students makes this approach less interactive which affects teaching and learning
- 2. **Poor Performance**: In the absence of adequate interaction, students are unable to adequately grasp the content of the lesson which will logically lead to poor performance.
- 3. **Inability of Teachers to Effectively Monitor Progress or Performance of Students**: The use of online teaching and learning places restriction on the ability of teachers to effectively evaluate or assess the performance or progress of students.
- 4. **Inability to Effectively Exercise Class Control:** The seemingly absence of teachers in remote teaching could lead to distractions and the inability of the teacher to exercise control over his class.

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However, e-learning approach does not give room to initiate important discussions and also not all teaching skills or techniques can be applied to virtual learning teaching approach

Benefits of Face to Face Learning to Stakeholders

- 1. **Social Interaction**: It facilitates better social and physical interaction which is an essential ingredient in teaching and learning. It enhances better classroom communication and instruction
- 2. More Explicit: Face to face class room instruction is more explicit
- 3. **Immediate response and feedback**: It facilitates quick response especially in terms of evaluation of lessons objectives
- 4. **Maximum use of Instructional Materials**: It is easier to use concrete models and a variety of instructional materials in the teaching learning process
- 5. Confidence Building and Motivation for students:vPhysical interaction plays a very key role in building self confidence and self efficacy in learners

Weaknesses of Face-to face Learning

- 1. **Security Risks:** Face to face learning is not ideal in the event of the outbreak of diseases and pandemics, conflicts and Insecurity
- 2. **Limitation of Students Access to ICT**: Limitating students' use of ICT no doubt limits their knowledge of ICT and educational technology which can affect their lesson comprehension and. perrformance
- 3. **High Cost of Maintenance:** It is often more expensive for the students as well as the host to manage in terms of time, money and resources commpared to online classes
- 4. **Difficulty in Managing Large Class Size**: Using face to face classroom can be quite diffult in managing a very large number of students

The Hybridization of E-learning and Physical Classrooms Instruction.

Hybridization in an evolving pedagogy teaching and learning which entails combining both elearning approach and the face to face approach for maximum benefit. In hybridization, communication and Interaction are a key building block for an effective student-teacher relations where the greater burden of this task lies on the teacher as the key actor. According to Krause, Bochner, & Duchesne (2006) there are several factors that influence positive student teacher relations in any given learning environment which include acceptance, understanding, affection, intimacy, trust, respect, care and cooperation. Effective student-teacher relations entails the maintenance of constant classroom interaction in which can be achieved in various ways. However, effective student-teacher relations entail the effective hybridization of pedagogical instruction ie a mix of both in-class or face to face and E-learning for more positive outcomes. However, the hybridization entails taking cognizance of the following factors:

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- Maintain a high and Constant Level of Classroom Interaction: This could be achieved through questions and answers, debates, role play, discussion or group activities, etc in the class room.
- 2. **Make Acquaintances with the Students**: The teacher should make or establish acquaintance with the students. For example, the teacher could make his students introduce themselves individually in the class and also learn to call each student by name so as to give them a sense of belonging, worth or emotional attachment.
- 3. **Encourage Free Discussions by Students**: Students should be allowed to freely discuss personal issues bordering on their progress with their teachers so that the teachers can advise and provide moral support to them Students should openly discuss their challenges both whether in or outside the classroom with the teacher especially as it affects their academic performance.
- 4. **Teachers Should Act as Parents/Problem Solvers to Students**: A teacher is expected to act in Loco Parentis to the student since the former is more experienced and thus able to help the students tackle whatever problems they are confronted with.
- 5. **Study the Personality of Students in the Class**: It is the responsibility of the teacher to study the personality of each student so as the teacher can connect on a personal level with each of them. For example, the teacher can ask a student a very personal question all in the bid to establish a connection.
- 6. Exhibition of a Positive Outlook on Life: The teacher should exhibit a positive outlook towards life so as to motivate students. This entails exhibiting great passion in the teaching process so as to build a positive setting in the classroom. This will make the students more comfortable and confident.
- 7. **Respect Opinion of students:** Teachers should show respect for students' views on any issue of discussion in the class. This creates fun in the classroom and while at the same time engaging the students.
- 8. **Provide Reinforcement and Motivation:** This entails making positive comments to boost the ego of students or even gifting them with some rewards when desirable.
- 9. **Avoid the Use of Obscene Language**: A student who misbehaves in the classroom should be handled accordingly rather than using dirty words by the teacher.
- 10. Encourage Students to Ask Questions and Share their Views
- 11. **Use of Democratic Approach in the Classroom**; All students should be treated equally by the teacher without showing preferential treatment. Also, decision making in the classroom is not the sole responsibility of the teacher but a collective responsibility which also includes the students (2025).

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Conclusion

Building an effective student-teacher relation constitutes a major building block for students' academic excellence in the teaching learning process which largely depends on the ability of the teacher to create an avenue for sustainable and vibrant interaction between students and teachers on the one hand and among students on the other hand. This is most effective by adopting a hybrid of e-learning or physical classroom. Despite the fact that both approaches possess their varying degrees of strengths and weaknesses, the hybridization of pedagogical instruction from both approaches will contribute significantly to the success rates of students rather than adhering to a single approach

Suggestions

Effective students – teacher or student -student interaction is key to the attainment of hybridization in the teaching – learning process for positive learning outcomes. This can be achieved based on the following suggestions

- 1. Teachers should work towards enhancing active communication and engagement in the teaching and learning process. For instance, they can utilize a variety of communication methods as well as ensure prompt feedback towards the students
- 2. Promotion of collaboration, the use of concrete examples, flipped classroom methods, using games, simulation will facilitate effective interaction
- 3. Effective assessment and evaluation to determine lesson outcomes or objectives can be achieved by adopting various assessment methods, timely and constructive feedback by the teacher
- 4. Flexible teaching and learning approaches can also be adopted. For example, students can be allowed to determine the most suitable learning or teaching approach as long as it meets the key objectives of the lesson
- 5. The teacher should provide equity and support to facilitate the attainment of teaching and learning objectives by way providing an avenue to connect remote and in class students as well as ensuring the effective utilization of modern technologies

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