EXTENT OF UTILIZATION OF INTERACTIVE LEARNING PLATFORMS FOR ENHANCED ENGAGEMENT BY ECONOMICS EDUCATION STUDENT IN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS IN ENUGU STATE

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Abstract
This study examined the extent to which interactive learning platforms are used to enhance student engagement in Economics Education in higher institutions in Enugu State. Three specific purposes and corresponding research questions guided the study. A descriptive survey design was adopted. The population comprised 24 Economics Education lecturers from two public institutions offering the programme in the state: University of Nigeria, Nsukka (13) and Federal College of Education, Ehamufu (11). Due to the small size, the entire population was studied using the census technique. Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire titled Extent of Utilization of Interactive Learning Platforms for Enhanced Economics Education Student Engagement Questionnaire (EUILPEEESEQ). The instrument was validated by experts in Economics Education and Measurement and Evaluation. Reliability was established through a pilot test, yielding an overall coefficient of 0.79, indicating acceptable internal consistency. The instrument was administered with the support of two research assistants, and data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. Findings revealed that interactive learning platforms were utilized to a low extent for enhancing student engagement. Specifically, tools such as Zoom were underutilized in facilitating active learning. The study concluded that the low level of utilization of interactive platforms limits opportunities for improved student engagement in Economics Education. It was recommended that the National Universities Commission (NUC) should implement mandatory digital pedagogy training for lecturers to improve their effective use of interactive tools for teaching and learning.
Keywords: *Economics Education, Interactive Learning Platform, Student Engagement, Utilization*

Introduction

In recent years, the educational landscape has undergone significant transformation driven by rapid technological advancement and the increasing adoption of digital learning tools. Among these innovations, interactive learning platforms have emerged as powerful instruments for enhancing teaching and learning processes. These platforms support real-time communication, collaboration, and access to diverse instructional resources, thereby shifting learning from a passive to a more active and student-centered process. Unlike traditional instructional approaches that largely depend on one-way knowledge transmission, interactive platforms enable students to participate actively, engage with content, and collaborate with peers and instructors.

Interactive learning platforms refer to digital tools that facilitate meaningful interaction between learners, instructors, and instructional materials. They include video conferencing tools, collaborative applications, and simulation-based environments that provide features such as multimedia content, discussion forums, real-time feedback, and group-based activities. These features make learning more engaging and adaptable to diverse learning styles. Studies have shown that when effectively utilized, interactive platforms enhance students' motivation, participation, and overall learning outcomes (Putra & Pratama, 2023; Rahayu et al., 2023).

In the field of Economics Education, the use of interactive learning platforms is particularly important. Economics involves abstract theories, analytical reasoning, and real-life applications that require active engagement for effective understanding. Economics Education, therefore, focuses not only on

the transmission of knowledge but also on the development of critical thinking, decision-making skills, and economic literacy (Adejumo & Ogundare, 2021). To achieve these objectives, teaching approaches must go beyond conventional lecture methods to incorporate interactive and experiential learning strategies.

The emergence of digital platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and virtual laboratories has provided educators with opportunities to enhance student engagement in Economics Education. These tools enable real-time interaction, collaborative learning, and practical application of knowledge. For instance, Mukhopadhyay and Mukhopadhyay (2020) emphasized that Zoom enhances instructional delivery through features such as screen sharing and live interaction, while Camilleri and Camilleri (2021) noted that digital platforms can significantly improve student engagement when effectively integrated into teaching. Similarly, Setyawan et al. (2020) highlighted the effectiveness of Google Meet in facilitating interactive learning, particularly in virtual classroom environments.

Despite these potentials, evidence suggests that the effective utilization of these platforms remains a challenge, particularly in developing contexts. Bawanti and Arifani (2021) reported that educators often underutilize digital platforms due to limited technological competence and infrastructural constraints. In the same vein, Roy et al. (2020) observed that low student engagement in virtual learning environments is frequently associated with passive instructional approaches and inadequate training of instructors. Kaur and Sharma (2021) further noted that although platforms like Google Meet support real-time engagement, their effectiveness is constrained in environments where there is insufficient institutional support and digital literacy.

Beyond video conferencing tools, virtual laboratories have also emerged as important interactive platforms that support experiential learning. These platforms provide opportunities for simulations and practical engagement with learning content. Greiner et al. (2020) explained that virtual laboratories enable students to explore concepts through simulated experiments, thereby enhancing conceptual understanding. Similarly, Susanti et al. (2023) noted that virtual laboratories offer flexible and cost-effective alternatives to physical labs. However, their adoption remains limited in many educational settings due to institutional resistance and resource constraints. Ahmadi et al. (2023) asserted that when effectively utilized, virtual laboratories can significantly enhance student engagement, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

Student engagement, which refers to the level of students' active involvement, interest, and participation in the learning process, is a critical determinant of academic success. Engaged students are more likely to demonstrate deeper understanding, improved retention, and better academic performance. Research has consistently shown that interactive learning environments promote higher levels of engagement by encouraging participation, collaboration, and critical thinking (Bond & Bergdahl, 2023; Goode et al., 2022). However, the presence of interactive tools alone does not guarantee engagement; rather, it is the extent to which these tools are utilized that determines their effectiveness.

In the Nigerian context, the integration of interactive learning platforms has gained increased attention, particularly following the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. While many institutions adopted digital tools to sustain teaching and learning, studies indicate that their utilization remains suboptimal. Adedoyin and Soykan (2020) observed that challenges such as poor infrastructure, limited digital competence, and inadequate training hinder effective use of online learning platforms in Nigeria. Similarly, Usoro & Udom (2025) reported that many lecturers lack the necessary skills to fully integrate digital tools into their teaching practices. Nwodoh & Offor (2024) also found that although digital platforms are available in some institutions, their use for interactive and student-centered learning is still limited.

Specifically in Economics Education, traditional lecture-based methods continue to dominate instructional practices in many Nigerian higher institutions, limiting opportunities for active student engagement and practical application of knowledge (Nwodoh & Offor, 2024). This situation raises

concerns about the effectiveness of teaching methods and the ability of students to develop the skills required in a dynamic and technology-driven economy.

In Enugu State, where this study is situated, preliminary observations suggest that although some higher institutions have access to interactive learning platforms, their use for enhancing student engagement in Economics Education may be minimal. Lecturers may rely more on these tools for basic content delivery rather than for interactive and collaborative learning activities. This indicates a possible gap between the availability of these technologies and their actual utilization in instructional practice.

Despite the growing body of literature on digital learning, most existing studies have focused on general adoption of e-learning or have been conducted outside the Nigerian context. There is limited empirical evidence specifically examining the extent of utilization of interactive learning platforms for enhancing student engagement in Economics Education within higher institutions in Enugu State. Furthermore, many studies emphasize the benefits and challenges of digital tools without adequately assessing how extensively these tools are used in actual classroom practice.

Therefore, the need for this study arises from this gap. There is a clear need to provide empirical evidence on the extent to which interactive learning platforms are utilized by Economics Education lecturers to enhance student engagement in higher institutions in Enugu State. Understanding this will help to determine whether the issue lies in lack of access, inadequate skills, or underutilization of available resources.

The findings of this study will be valuable in informing educational policymakers, institutional administrators, and lecturers on the current state of digital platform utilization in Economics Education. It will also provide a basis for targeted interventions such as training, policy development, and improved integration of interactive tools into teaching practices. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to improving student engagement and learning outcomes in Economics Education through more effective use of interactive learning platforms.

Statement of the Problem

Interactive learning platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Virtual Laboratories ought to be leveraged in the teaching of Economics Education. Such platforms has the ability to foster high student engagement, real-time interaction, hands-on learning, and collaboration. They also provide diverse tools that support active learning, enhance communication between students and teachers, and promote critical thinking and application of knowledge which are core elements for academic success and workplace readiness.

However, the current situation in higher institutions in Enugu State suggests a low extent of utilization of these interactive platforms. For instance, despite the proven benefits of tools like Zoom and Google Meet, they seem to be underutilized in engaging students in Economics Education. Similarly, Virtual Laboratories, which provide essential practical experiences in digital economics and simulations, appear to be scarcely used.

This limits student engagement, reduces interactive and collaborative learning opportunities, and ultimately affects the acquisition of practical economic skills needed in today's digital economy. Given the numerous benefits of these platforms, it becomes necessary to investigate extent of utilization of interactive learning platforms for enhanced engagement by Economics education students in higher institutions in Enugu state.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to examine extent of utilization of interactive learning platforms for enhanced engagement by Economics Education students in Enugu state. Specifically, the study sought to determine extent of utilization of:

1. Zoom for enhanced engagement by Economics Education students in Enugu state
2. Google Meet for enhanced engagement by Economics Education students in Enugu state
3. Virtual laboratory for enhanced engagement by Economics Education students in Enugu state

Research Questions

The following questions guided the study:

- What is the extent of utilization of zoom for enhanced engagement by Economics Education students in Enugu state?
- To what extent is Google Meet utilized for enhanced engagement by Economics Education students in Enugu state?
- To want extent is virtual laboratory utilized for enhanced engagement by Economics Education students in Enugu state?

Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised 24 Economics Education lecturers, 13 from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and 11 from Federal College of Education, Ehamufu, the only public institutions offering Economics Education in Enugu State. A census technique was used since the entire population was small. Data were obtained from the Heads of Department of the respective institutions. A self-developed questionnaire titled "Extent of Utilization of Interactive Learning Platforms for Enhanced Economics Education Students' Engagement Questionnaire (EUILPEEESEQ)" was used for data collection. It contained 20 items across three sections: Zoom (6 items), Google Meet (7 items), and Virtual Laboratory (7 items). Responses were measured on a 4-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The instrument was validated by three experts, two from Economics Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and one from Educational Measurement and Evaluation, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Reliability was established using Cronbach Alpha after a pilot test with 20 lecturers from UNN (excluded from the study), yielding reliability coefficients of 0.72, 0.77, and 0.89 for the clusters, with an overall coefficient of 0.79. All 24 copies of the questionnaire were administered and retrieved, giving a 100% response rate. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the extent of utilization of zoom for enhanced engagement by Economics Education students in Enugu state

Table 1: *Mean ratings of respondents on the extent of utilization of zoom for enhanced engagement by Economics Education students in Enugu state*

S/N	ITEM	MEAN	SD	REMARKS
	Zoom is utilized to:			
1	Conduct live video lectures, ensuring real-time interaction with students.	2.23	0.73	LE
2	Share screens to present business concepts using digital materials.	2.29	1.18	LE
3	Divide students into breakout rooms to collaborate on business simulations	2.19	0.81	LE
4	Organize hands-on business/technical workshops where students engage in learning activities	2.39	0.77	LE
5	Assess students' understanding of business concepts in real-time using Zoom's polling feature.	2.20	0.83	LE
6	Recorded sessions and shared with students to allow them to revisit complex topics	2.22	0.68	LE
	Cluster mean	2.19	1.17	LE

LE –Low extent

From the presentation of data in Table 1 above, all the 6 items had aggregate mean scores below the cut-off point of 2.50 which means that zoom was utilized for enhanced engagement by Economics Education students to a low extent.

Research Question Two: To what extent is Google Meet utilized for enhanced engagement by Economics Education students in Enugu state?

Table 2: *Mean ratings of respondents on the extent of utilization of Google Meet for enhanced engagement by Economics Education students in Enugu state*

S/N	ITEM	MEAN	SD	REMARKS
	Google Meet is utilized to:			
1	Conduct real-time classes making lessons more interactive	2.36	.87	LE
2	Ask questions during lessons through voice or chat to ascertain how much students has learnt	2.23	.73	LE
3	Talk and edit documents at the same	2.29	.78	LE
4	Record lessons and share them so students can watch them later	2.32	.77	LE
5	Students can practice presenting business ideas or projects in front of their classmates on Google Meet	2.39	.77	LE
6	Give feedback on how to make students' presentations better	2.23	.73	LE
7	Test students' understanding of a topic using Google Meet's poll feature.	2.29	.78	LE
	Cluster Mean	2.19	.81	LE

LE –Low extent

From the presentation of data in Table 2 above, all the 7 items had aggregate mean scores below the cut-off point of 2.50 which means that Google Meet is utilized for enhanced engagement by Economics Education students in Enugu state to a low extent.

Research Question 3: To want extent is virtual laboratory utilized for enhanced engagement by Economics Education students in Enugu state?

Table 1: *Mean ratings of respondents on the extent of utilization of virtual laboratory for enhanced engagement by Economics Education students in Enugu state*

S/N	ITEMS	MEAN	SD	REMARKS
	Virtual laboratory is utilized to:			
1	Create experiment with different macroeconomic policies to see the effects on the economy.	2.28	.94	LE
2	Enable students participate in simulated market experiments to illustrate concepts	2.27	.90	LE
3	Provide students with datasets and statistical tools to analyze economic phenomena	2.19	1.17	LE
4	Participate in game theory simulations to illustrate strategic decision-making and Nash equilibrium.	2.18	.79	LE
5	Simulate international trade scenarios to illustrate the effects of trade policies on economies.	2.32	.77	LE
6	Help students to participate in simulated financial markets to illustrate concepts like risk management etc	2.29	1.18	LE

7	Create scenario planning exercises where students can explore the potential consequences of different economic scenarios	2.19	.81	LE
	Cluster Mean	2.25	.78	LE

LE –Low extent

From the presentation of data in Table 3 above, all the 7 items had aggregate mean scores below the cut-off point of 2.50 which means that virtual laboratory is utilized for enhanced engagement by Economics Education students in Enugu state to a low extent.

Discussion

The findings revealed that Zoom is used to a low extent in enhancing student engagement in Economics Education. Specific features like live video lectures, screen sharing, breakout rooms, and polling are minimally used. This aligns with Bawanti and Arifani (2021), who found that many educators in developing contexts underutilize Zoom due to limited digital skills and infrastructural challenges. Mukhopadhyay and Mukhopadhyay (2020) emphasized the platform's effectiveness when fully adopted, particularly in real-time interactivity and screen sharing. The underuse in this study buttresses the issues raised by Roy et al. (2020), who noted that low engagement in Zoom-based learning often results from passive instructional styles and lack of training.

Google Meet was also found to be poorly utilized. Key interactive features such as document collaboration, lesson recording, and polling are rarely employed. This finding resonates with Setyawan et al. (2020), who submitted that Google Meet has great potential but noted that many educators lack the competency to maximize its interactive functions. Kaur and Sharma (2021) further support this, reporting that while Google Meet promotes real-time engagement, many institutions fail to integrate it into structured learning due to policy and training gaps. Camilleri and Camilleri (2021) also noted that adoption does not equate to effective use, especially in environments lacking digital literacy support.

Similarly, the study found that virtual laboratories are underutilized in Economics Education. Activities like market simulations, economic experiments, and data analysis exercises are seldom implemented. This supports findings by Greiner et al. (2020) as well as Susanti et al., (2023), who stressed that virtual labs can enhance conceptual understanding and practical application but remain underused due to institutional resistance and cost implications. Ahmadi et al., (2023) asserted that virtual labs, when adopted, promote creativity and deeper engagement. The low engagement observed in this study reflects a broader trend of inadequate support for technological integration in higher education.

Conclusion

This study examined the extent to which interactive learning platforms - Zoom, Google Meet, and Virtual Laboratories are utilized to enhance Economics Education student engagement in higher institutions in Enugu State. Findings across all three platforms revealed a consistently low level of utilization. Despite the pedagogical benefits of these platforms as supported by existing literature, their limited adoption suggests a gap in digital integration, training, and institutional commitment. The study concluded that interactive learning platforms are utilized to enhance Economics Education student engagement in higher institutions in Enugu State to a low extent.

Implications

The low utilization of Zoom, Google Meet, and virtual laboratories implies that Economics Education lecturers in Enugu State have not fully integrated interactive platforms into their instructional practice. This limits students' exposure to collaborative, experiential, and technology-driven learning, which are competencies increasingly demanded in a digital economy. The findings imply that institutional administrators must move beyond providing access to these tools and actively support their purposeful

deployment through structured digital pedagogy training. Curriculum planners must also treat virtual laboratory integration as a core curricular requirement rather than an optional supplement, while funding agencies must prioritise resource allocation for sustainable technology adoption in Economics Education.

Recommendations

The following are recommended based on finding:

a. The National Universities Commission (NUC) should provide mandatory digital pedagogy training for Economics Education lecturers across higher institutions to ensure optimal utilization of Zoom features such as breakout rooms, polling, and real-time engagement tools.
b. Management of Higher Institutions in Enugu state should establish institutional frameworks and ICT support centers to help faculty effectively integrate Google Meet for interactive teaching, including real-time collaboration, screen sharing, and student polling.
c. Federal Ministry of Education (FME) should fund and promote the integration of virtual laboratories in Economics Education curricula by providing licenses and infrastructure that support virtual experiments and economic simulations to build students' digital economic competencies.

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