



Journal of
Distance Learning and Open Learning

Print ISSN : 2314-8829 Online ISSN 2314-8837



**Higher Education Conclave in Nigeria
and Challenges of Virtual
Learning Environment**

Amos Oyesoji Aremu

Department of Counselling and Human Development Studies, University of
Ibadan, Nigeria

oyesojiaremu@gmail.com

Abstract:

This paper expounds the concept of virtual learning as an alternative mode of learning within the context of Nigerian University System (NUS). The paper extrapolates the beginning of higher education in Nigeria with a view to situating the developments that have taken place from the post-independence to date. The suitability or otherwise of the in-person mode in the context of the current reality (virtual learning) is critically examined with a view to identifying the challenges. The paper, while making use of some secondary data, clinically hazards the challenges militating against the thriving of Electronic Learning in the NUS arising from the challenge of corona virus in the year 2020. Gleaning from lack of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), poor attitude and policy deficit challenges, the

paper makes some recommendations which could impact on policy development in the NUS. The paper, therefore, strongly advocates the need to make NUS at par with what obtains in global virtual conclave.

Key words: Higher education, Virtual learning, Nigerian University System

Introduction

Since independence Nigeria, there are many narratives through which higher education and its pedagogies are interrogated. These have led to considerable improvement in the development of higher education in Nigeria especially the Nigerian University System (NUS) between 1970 and 2000. This period witnessed establishment of many universities in Nigeria. Between the year 2000 and date, there are 175 universities in Nigeria out of which twelve (University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, Ahamadu Bello University, Zaria, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Modibo Adamawa University of Technology, Yola, University of Abuja, University of Maiduguri, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Lagos State University, Ojo, Joseph Ayo Babalola University, University of Nigeria, Nnsukka; and Federal University of Technology, Minna), operate a dual-mode system. That is both conventional and distance learning modes. The latter

was in the past referred to as the external degree programmes in universities like Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, University of Lagos, Lagos, and University of Ibadan, Ibadan. It was not until early 2010 that the National Universities Commission (NUC) through its Directorate of Distance Education started to beam its regulatory light on universities running degree awarding centres in Nigeria. This led to a general clampdown on many of the universities and their centres in Nigeria. Consequent on this, the External Degree Programmes in Nigerian universities started to witness some revolutions.

From the foregoing, the inference is that alternate mode to Face-to-face education which is generally refers to as Distance Education Mode has contributed significantly to higher education conclave in Nigeria, especially the emerging virtual mode of education which is largely reinforced by COVID-19 in this part of the world. Thus, higher education narrative in Nigeria is not complete without significant contributions of Distance Education. While its contributions have not been given serious attention by educators and other stakeholders in the past, recent developments have shown that the future of higher education in Nigeria is tied to the revolution that is being promoted by Distance Education. While the global world especially countries in Europe, America and Asia have for long embraced this reality, Nigeria and some other African

countries have just realised this as a result of the Coronavirus disease, the wave of which shutdown activities (including education) for months. This remains one of the faux passes of modern form of education in Nigeria in spite of the avalanche number of universities we parade.

This paper, therefore, would interrogate the imperatives of higher education conclave within realities of the new normal, which is virtual mode. The paper, consequent on this, would interrogate challenges associated with such a reality in a developing country like Nigeria with a view to advocating policies through which a national framework can be developed.

Higher Education in Nigeria

The history of higher education in Nigeria is not complete without a reference to pre-colonial period. It is on record that the first acclaimed higher institution in Nigeria is Yaba Higher College established in 1934 during the time of E.R.J. Hussey who was the country's colonial Director of Education. According to Hussey (1959), he was of the opinion that it was necessary to start an institution which would be referred to as a "Higher College" and developed in due course into a University. This Hussey believed that all efforts would have to be made to nurture and pattern it after a British University. Following this, is the need to have a conventional university in Nigeria. According to Otonko (2012),

the inauguration of Elliot Commission of 1943 brought about the establishment of University College Ibadan (UCI) in 1948 as an affiliate of the University of London.

The development of higher education in Nigeria cannot also, be complete without a reference to the effort of the Federal Government of Nigeria in putting together the Ashby Commission in April, 1959. The Ashby Commission was to advise the Federal Government on higher education needs of the country for its first two decades (Otonko, 2012). The fallouts of the report of the Ashby Commission led to the establishment of University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), Ile-Ife in 1962 by the Western Regional Government under Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria by the Northern Region Government under Sir Ahmadu Bello also, in 1962; and University of Lagos by the Federal Government in the same year. Prior to this period, the Eastern Government had established University of Nigeria, Nsukka under the administration of Sir Nnamdi Azikiwe in 1960. And in 1970 following the creation of Midwestern region after the Civil War under the administration of General Yakubu Gowon, University of Benin was established. In effect, between 1960 and 1970, there were six universities in Nigeria, University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), Ile-Ife, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; and University of Benin. The six

universities are referred to as the first generation universities in Nigeria. This period of university education in Nigeria can also, be described as the golden years. Universities were not fully funded, students were also, well taken care. The pedagogies were also, not of a problem as the best of them were deployed then. This take, notwithstanding, there was not much of application of technology to teaching and learning even in their crudest forms.

Following this period, many other universities were established by the Federal Government of Nigeria between 1975 and 1980. These included, Universities of Calabar, Ilorin, Sokoto, Jos, Maiduguri, Port Harcourt; and Ado Bayero. These are the second generation universities in Nigeria. Subsequently, we have the third and the latter generation universities established 1991 and date. While the contention of this paper is not about the avalanche of universities in Nigeria (175 of them at present), it should be well orchestrated that their establishments did not factor in a major technology of delivery of pedagogies which of course, the country did not prepare for; and effects of which, were witnessed with the surge of coronavirus in February, 2020. As evident during the spike of COVID-19 pandemic, many Nigerian Universities were not only shutdown, teaching and learning were also, grounded mainly because either, there was no functional education technology structure through which seamless teaching and learning could be

deployed; or, few available technology structures were only designed for the Distance Learning Mode in few of Nigerian universities. In effect, almost all universities in Nigeria were caught with their pants down. While this, may in a way be attributed to funding, which generally has been very poor for decades as reflected in national budgetary allocations to education, it obviously also, reveal that there has not been definite policy direction and commitment in that regard both at national level and in Nigerian universities. Again, this could be attributed to poor funding. However, and beyond this, it's poor attitude to online infrastructures in many higher institutions in Nigeria.

Globally, statistics according to UNESCO Academic Impact (2020) estimated that over 1.5 billion students in 165 countries are out of school due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Justifying the essence of universities, Times Higher Education (2020) report had it that COVID-19 pandemic has rubbed off of the universities of students' bonding and proximity. And thereby switching off to online learning and maximises same. While universities in Europe, America, Asia and even in some African countries are opening up, only few of Nigerian private and state universities could key into the new normal of virtual learning. This narrative and its import on higher education in Nigeria should obviously inform the need to

interrogate the emergence of online learning midwifed by Distance Education.

Emergence of Distance Education in Nigeria

Writing on this, Aremu (2020) submits that the distance learning mode has grown and has become a viable alternative platform for the working class. The inference from this submission is that by design and context, the idea of Distance Education (DE) is to assuage the challenge of access; and it was meant for a segment of population. That is, those, who on account of work demands or age or any other reasons, could not benefit from the Face-to-face Mode (erroneously refers to as a Conventional Mode). Aremu, Ojokheta and Muibi (2019) also, alluded to this by contend that,

“People who most benefitted from such correspondence education

included those with physical disabilities, women who were not

allowed to enroll in educational institutions, open only to men.

People who had jobs during normal school hours, and those who

lived in remote regions where schools did not exist (P. 56)”.

Although initial vision of DE or Correspondence Education was to fill a gap, recent realities especially in respect of COVID-19, has shown that teaching and learning is not regimented to the four walls of the classroom. Affirming this, Aremu, Akinyemi and Adeyemo (2020) argue that technologies have penetrated education sector and thereby alter and rewrite some basic principles of teaching and learning. This is the present reality.

Globally, the idea of distance education dates back to 1728 when students were taught how to write in shorthand through lessons sent to their homes every week. It was not until 19th century that a further leap was recorded on distance education when Isaac Pitman taught shorthand by correspondence. During this period, students were instructed to copy short passages of the Holy Bible and returned them for grading. In the late 1800s, the University of Chicago introduced the first major correspondence education in the United States of America. Early efforts of educators like William Rainey Harper in 1890 to promote alternative modes of education were derided by the elites then as inferior to the popular conventional mode which was the prerogative of the elites (Education Communications and Technology, 2001).

This mindset, still impugns on the public acceptance and development of distance education programmes in Nigeria till date.

However, with the reality of COVID-19 and the quest for Virtual Learning Environment, this may pale out.

Tracing the historical origin of DE, Aremu and Oguntunde (2020) claim that it started as a Correspondence College in 1828 when University of London established External Degree Programmes. Jegede (2018) similarly submits that the External Degree Programmes of University of London was chartered in 1858 and was then popularly referred to as People's University. Other than the United Kingdom, other countries like Germany, Sweden and United States of America embraced distance education as far back as 1833. This success stories recorded in Europe and America might have informed wide acceptability of similar programmes in Nigeria which University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, and Ahmadu Bello University keyed into by establishing different external programmes to offer diploma and degrees. According to Jegede's (2018) account, the Oxford University of the United Kingdom's extramural studies was part of the University College, Ibadan (UCI) in 1947 a year before the UCI was established. This afforded many Nigerians, "to get a place in the limited admissions into the University College, Ibadan, to do so through a correspondence study (p. 15)". According to Aremu, et al (2019), the importance of radio and television created new forms of communication deployed in distance education. Aderinoye and

Ojokheta (2004) are of the opinion that the deployment of radio and television for teaching and learning to millions of learners can be best be described as opportunities beyond the walls of conventional teaching institutions.

In Nigeria, the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria was the first institution to have established distance education named, “The Correspondence and Teachers’ In-services Programmes”. This is now referred to as Distance Learning Centre. Following this, is that of University of Lagos, Correspondence Open Studies Unit (COSU) established in 1974. According to Aderinoye (1995) what informed the establishment of COSU at the University of Lagos, was the need to produce university graduates in disciplines there were national shortfall. While this sounds very logical, the philosophy of distance education is wider in scope than the reason that informed establishment of COSU at the University of Lagos. COSU was changed to Correspondence and Open Studies Institute (COSIT) in 1998. And from COSIT, University of Lagos Distance Education was renamed as Distance Learning Institute in 2001 to accommodate new development in Distance Education in Nigeria and globally.

Although University of Ibadan was as far back as 1947 had a form of Distance Education which was mainly corresponding, the

University did not start a Distance Education programme until 1988 from the Department of Adult Education, Faculty of Education. This was motivated by Faure report. Aremu, et al (2019) noted that the 1972 report of Faure submitted to UNESCO detailed the reason why DE was established. This, according to them, recognised that, “education is no longer the privilege of elites, or a matter of only one age group. Instead, it should be both universal and lifelong (page 59)”. The DE in Ibadan was then known as External Studies Programme (ESP). The Ibadan ESP has since changed its name to Centre for External Studies in 1992/1993 academic session and again to Distance Learning Centre in 2002.

Subsequently, more distance learning centres/institutes have been approved by the National Universities Commission. They are: Modibo Adamawa University of Technology, Yola, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, University of Abuja, Abuja, University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Lagos State University, Ojo, Joseph Ayo Babalola University, University of Nigeria, Nsukka; and Federal University of Technology, Minna. The twelve universities are regarded as dual-mode universities given the fact that they have programmes on face-to-face and distance learning modes. Other than the twelve universities running Distance Education as alternative modes, National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN),

Abuja established in 2002 is the only university in Nigeria which by law is designed to run Open and Distance Learning. It was the first of its kind in West Africa sub region. In what appears to be an affirmation of what is to emerge in respect of the twelve universities and NOUN, Adamu (2020) submits that for the first time in the history of higher education in Nigeria, the Federal Ministry of Education through the Minister of Education, Mallam Adamu Adamu appreciated the need to make Nigerian higher institutions of learning to be at par with the global best practices by keying into the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). According to Adamu (2020), 237 Vice-Chancellors, Provosts and Rectors were invited to an online meeting in which the possibility of opening Nigerian higher institutions was discussed. It was at the meeting that the Federal Ministry of Education appreciated the VLE being produced by 13 universities in Nigeria (NOUN and the twelve dual-mode universities). At this point in this chapter, this narrative will lead us to interrogate the revolution that took place in education through technology.

Education and Technology Revolution

Early education concepts were without some forms of technologies even at their rudimentary levels. While technology in its rudimentary form has been used in the delivery of pedagogy, its processes have not been fully realized as sine qua non in education.

The use of correspondence as early as 1947 in Nigeria is one of the tools of education in which technology was employed. Beyond this period, the advent of technology in education is dated back to over thousands of years. Writing on this and advent of technology in education, Fastiggi in Thomas (2013) submitted that the first example of technology in education, were the tools that learners and teachers used for writing. These include, clay tablets in the Middle East, strips of bark from trees in Indonesia, Tibet and America, thick palm-like trees in South East Asia; and parchment made of animal skin across the ancient world. Fastiggi noted that the first school was in ancient Greece around 4 BC. Then, schooling was the prerogative of children of elites. The word, school itself was derived from Greek's word, *schole*, which means leisure. This is understood given the fact that school then was for the aristocrats in the society.

200 years when magic lantern which was a primitive version of a slide projector through which images are projected for teaching and learning. At a point in history, the chalkboard was also introduced for teaching dissemination. This was around 1890 and subsequently in 1900, the use of pencil was also, introduced.

According to Olololube, Dudafa, Uriah and Agbor (2013), technology will continue to have unlimited and significant global

impact on higher education. According to them, the impact of technology will be in the form of creating a broader community of scholarly activities in teaching, learning, research and community engagement. This assertion made by Olololube and others some nine years ago is as valid as it was then even if not more given the contemporary technology revolution in education. Writing in the same vein, Braimoh (2018) submits that effective and appropriate use of technology in mediated learning will not only bring about a transformative change in teaching and learning, it will also, enhance active participation in learning intervention in a more constructive way based on the development of a positive enquiring mindset. The digital transformation accelerated by COVID-19 has made what is long unthinkable in education even in Nigeria a normal and the way to go. This has led to an upsurge in bandwidth users estimated to be an increase of 1 million internet users every day.

While the reality of COVID-19 has engendered the dire importance of technology enabled education using Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), there is a need to interrogate some realities with a view to appraising the future of education (especially higher education) in the new normal. Going about this would require appraisal of the country's position on the virtual conclave globally. Writing on this, Braimoh (2018), affirms that most African

countries are not ready in any form to embrace technology for education purpose. Supporting his claim with the Network Readiness Index, 2018, Braimoh notes that Nigeria ranked 119 behind many smaller African countries like Uganda, Zambia, The Gambia, Kenya and Morocco. The apprehension from this submission is that that was before the advent of coronavirus late in December, 2019 in Wuhan, China; and effect of which still ravaging the world and led to the closure of schools globally and for few months in 2020. Aremu, et al., (2020) submit that about 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries were temporarily out of schools between March and June, 2020. And with the second wave of COVID-19, it is obvious that there will be more reliance on VLE which implies that countries should be more forthcoming on Network Readiness Index (NRI). Unfortunately, Nigeria seems not to be doing well on NRI ranking as shown by the latest record. In Table 1 below, the NRI ranking shows the top ten countries of the 134 ranked globally. Of the 134 countries ranked by the Network Readiness Index in 2020, Sweden remains the top performer with 82.75 NRI score. This is followed by Denmark with 82.19.

Table 1: Top 10 Performers in NRI, 2020

Country	NRI Rank	NRI Score	Technology	People	Governance	Impact
Sweden	1	82.7	2	4	4	3

		5				
Denmark	2	82.1 9	5	1	2	5
Singapore	3	81.3 9	10	5	13	1
Netherland	4	81.3 7	3	9	3	4
Switzerland	5	80.4 1	1	13	10	2
Finland	6	80.1 6	9	3	5	9
Norway	7	79.3 9	11	8	1	6
United States	8	78.9 1	4	7	8	14
Germany	9	77.4 8	7	12	12	7
United Kingdom	10	76.2 7	8	14	14	10

Source: The Network Readiness Index, 2020

From the table above, not a single African country is rated among the top 10 on NRI. While this indicates that African countries are not faring well on index, the implications are much more on impact that countries in Africa could make on VLE. The argument may be that African countries are not at par with many of the countries in

The Journal of Distance Learning and Open Learning

Europe, America and Asia on Information Communications Technology (ICT) architecture. As plausible as this may sound, it stands to reason that education and means of deploying it (in this wise, technology) is universal; and should therefore be made to be qualitative. Another perspective of the NRI as shown below in table 2, reveals the best three countries in African region.

Table 2: Top 3 Countries by Region

Africa	Arab States	Asia & Pacific	CIS	Europe	The Americas
Mauritius (61)	UAE (30)	Singapore (3)	Russia Fed. (48)	Sweden (1)	USA (8)
South Africa (76)	Qatar (38)	Australia (12)	Armenia (55)	Denmark (2)	Canada (13)
Kenya (82)	Saudi Arabia (41)	Korea Rep (14)	Kazakhstan (56)	Netherland (4)	Uruguay (47)

Source: The Network Readiness Index, 2020

The table above indicates the top three countries by regions of the world. From Africa, Mauritius, South Africa and Kenya are in the top three.

Table 3: Top 3 Countries by Income Group

High-Income Countries	Upper-middle-Income Countries	Lower-middle-Income Countries	Low-Income Countries
Sweden (1)	Malaysia (34)	Viet Nam (62)	Rwanda (96)
Denmark (2)	China (40)	Ukraine (64)	Tajikistan (109)
Singapore (3)	Bulgaria (46)	Moldova (71)	Uganda (114)

Source: The Network Readiness Index, 2020

In table three above, which indicates top three countries by income, Uganda is ranked 114th and was listed in the ‘honour list’ ahead of Nigeria which is ranked 117th globally and 16th (30.44) in Africa coming after the following countries in order of their rankings: South Africa, Kenya, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Ghana, Botswana, Senegal, Namibia, Algeria, Tanzania, Benin, Uganda, Cote d’Ivoire and Zambia.

While we take critical cues from the NRI especially as it affects Africa and Nigeria in particular, it is instructive to further interrogate some associated indices that could account for

performance index on network readiness. These are discussed as follows:

Policy on ICT

The Nigerian government has had a number of policies on ICT from 1998 till date. In the last twenty-three years, the Country has had nine policies. The first was National Telecommunication Policy of 1998. The objective of the policy was to achieve the modernisation and rapid expansion of the telecommunications network and services and social development, and integrate Nigeria internally as well as into global telecommunications environment. Of all the policies, the 2019 National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy and 2020 National Policy on Virtual Engagements are the actual policies that either partly or mainly addressed the question of ICT on Virtual Learning. While the 2019 National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy focused on eight items (Developmental Regulation, Digital Literacy and Skills, Solid Infrastructure, Service Infrastructure, Digital Services Development and Promotion, Soft Infrastructure, Digital Society and Emerging Technologies; and Indigenous Content Development and Adoption), it is only the 2020 National Policy on Virtual Engagements that mainly addressed the question on Virtual Learning in Nigeria. The policy addresses the institutionalisation of virtual engagements in Federal public institutions with a view to addressing the challenges of COVID-19. The policy affirms and

recognises virtual engagements as forms of medium of teaching and learning.

A critical appraisal of Nigerian policies on ICT especially in respect of VLE shows that, the country had a slow start. This perhaps, accounts for the poor show of the country on NRI. This does not only call for introspection, it also, shows this may impact on the nation's quest for a seamless VLE even in the heat of the second wave of coronavirus and its associated challenges. At this point, it is instructive to interrogate our online architecture and our readiness given various conversations on it.

Online Engagement

VLE thrives seamlessly on robust online architecture. Online engagements have come under many names ranging from virtual learning, distance education and ICT-motivated learning. While it is not the schedule of this paper to interrogate various labeling that come with online engagements, it is instructive to note that facilitation of teaching and learning using technology is a subset of a very good ICT policy. The need for it in our teaching and learning conclave especially in higher institutions of learning therefore is not only imperative, it is absolute if truly the online alternative mode of delivery is the way to go in the world that is ravaged with coronavirus. The National Policy on Information and Communication and Technologies in Education (2019) aptly notes

that it is imperative to establish Management Information Systems at the federal, state and local government levels to serve as a repository of education data across the entire education sector.

Online engagements come with their challenges especially in developing countries where the questions of bandwidth and attitude of many stakeholders are not compatible to the current reality. This category of stakeholders (especially those in academia) refers to as non-netizens constitute an impediment to VLE conclave in Nigeria. The National Policy on ICT recognises inadequacy of ICT infrastructure in the country by canvassing for the promotion and encouragement of appropriate design, development, acquisition and hosting of indigenous contents on websites. In addition to this, the policy recommends,

- That all educational institutions and establishments are interconnected to create a common platform through which learning resources will be shared; and facilitate data and content sharing among educational institutions and establishments using the following five R legal permissions: to retain, reuse, revise, remix and redistribute the resources.

This is in line with the philosophy of Open Educational Resources (OER). The five OER are teaching and learning materials that are freely available online for everyone to use and download. OER have gained tremendous attention since the first congress held in

Paris, June 20 to 22, 2012. The 2012 Paris' declaration on OER states that:

“Teaching, learning and research materials in any medium, digital or otherwise, that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions. Open licensing is built within the existing framework of intellectual property rights as defined by relevant international conventions and respects the authority of the works.”

The Congress encouraged governments and higher institutions to openly license educational materials. As at the first congress of OER, Nigeria was not feasible on OER map in spite of its avalanche of educational resources in Nigerian University System and research institutes. With this policy, retinue of resources available can be made open for use under Virtual Learning Environment.

The national policy also, recommends the provision of cost effective and sustainable alternative power supply. This is obviously a challenge in the country and in many higher institutions given the problem of electricity without which online engagements can be impracticable. The cost of providing alternative power supply is not only huge; it is also, beyond what many higher institutions could afford given their lean resources. This is a great challenge that would militate against seamless

running of VLE. It is perhaps in an attempt to find a solution to this that made the national policy to recommend at least 5% of annual capital budget to ICT in education. Similarly, the national policy enjoins higher institutions to engage in public private partnership (PPP). While the PPP Model sounds plausible, often there are operational barriers which could make its realisation impossible. Beyond this, the Federal and state governments should not only ensure the implementation of 5% annual capital budget to ICT in education, appropriate funding of the entire education sector as championed by Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) should be faithfully carried out by the government.

The above, calls for concerted government's initiatives and drives if the country is to improve its rating on NRI. NRI improved rating would impact positively on Virtual Learning Environment which has become a reality in education sector.

The Future of Education and Reality of Virtual Learning

The world at large and education sector will not remain the same. While COVID-19 must have impacted the global world and its various sectors negatively, it has also, brought about new challenges and development through which various sectors can be made better. Here, education sector is not an exception. In what looks like an affirmation of this, Aremu, Akinyemi and Adeyemo

(2020) note that the use of technology in educational settings by itself serves as a catalyst for change. University education, more than ever before, will rely on technologies. It means therefore, that the future of education, more than ever before will be harped on technology. Chau (2010) argues that the deterministic view of technology allows education and society to be appropriated by the corporate world. More than this, the reality of COVID-19 drives this beyond our imaginations that technology has come to play much more significant roles in educational deliveries. Aremu, et al. (2020) then counsel that for Nigerian universities to remain globally competitive and relevant in the scheme of new normal there is a strong need to deregulate the traditional mode of delivery pedagogies. As we venture to interrogate this future, there is a need to look at other associated VLE structures. One of these is Massification of learning structure. The reality on ground has shown that, never would teaching and learning be made to be enclosed and regimented. Rather, it has to be democratised and be made available beyond the four walls of the traditional lecture rooms. Therefore, appropriate structures for massification of teaching and learning should be put in place to enhance local and global access. This would require full digitisation of courseware and learning management systems. It should also, be stressed that full realisation of this can be achieved if it is accompanied by the requisite attitudinal change on the part of the stakeholders

(lecturers and administrators). Akin to this, is the appropriate corresponding policy. Here and beyond what is stipulated in the 2019 National Policy on ICT in Education, higher institutions should be made to develop ICT Policy in Education and same be made to be peculiar to their respective challenges without compromising minimum standards. Aremu, et al. (2020) have recommended that such a policy should, among other things, direct at full digitisation of the entire universities structures. The trio of Aremu, Akinyemi and Adeyemo are not only raising the obvious, there assertion has also, provoked some questions in respect of ICT's proficiencies of many of the stakeholders and students.

The takeaway from the above is the need to be somewhat circumventional. The truth is that many higher institutions are limited in capacity and ICTs infrastructures and as well as other logistics including power supply and funding. Given these challenges, it will not be out of place to advance a blended approach to Virtual Learning in our higher institutions.

Policy Advocacy, Implications and Recommendations

Given the strong reality of the need to move teaching and learning online, it becomes imperative for all hands to be on deck. This will require some institutional framework within which sustainable policies should be developed to drive VLE. The rationale behind this is hinged on the fact that online engagement would drive

almost all facets of teaching and learning and it has come to be a learning model that will go beyond COVID-19. Thinking along this line, Aremu (2021) submits that concerted efforts should therefore, be made by all to institutionalise a solid policy framework for online engagement in Nigeria as we have in other climes. Here, the Federal Ministries of Education and Science and Technology in conjunction with the National Universities Commission (NUC) and Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) should stake hold policy meetings that will comprise players in education and technology with a view to giving the Nigerian University System (NUS) a robust policy on virtual learning. While one is not oblivious of the fact that there currently exists a national policy on ICT, same can be made to be more dynamic by factoring some peculiarities of NUS. This should be driven nationally using relevant government machineries to make it work. Following this, is to encourage each university to domesticate same taking into cognisance environmental peculiarities. While some Nigerian universities boast of Learning Management Systems, it is still strange that most of these are just on the websites without serious engagements of same by those expected to interact with them. Thus, reinforcing the question of attitude earlier discussed in this paper.

The question of attitude could have a long way to give way to a change in behaviour, provided ICT self-efficacy of lecturers are

worked upon. This would require some psychological and technological interventions which the NUC and TETFund can champion. Such attitudinal change interventions would also; smooth sail provided the enabling environment is provided. On this, appropriate funding is also, required. Akin to this is the need to develop homegrown software which will be affordable and accessible. In our clime, this is a challenge that should be addressed. eLearning not only thrives on robust ICT technology, it also, requires softwares that are affordable and accessible. Affirming this, Aremu and Oguntunde (2020) submit that the success of an eLearning ecosystem is heavily dependent on the ability of the internet network to handle an increase in network traffic to key systems such as the Learning Management System (LMS), audio and video conference call, Zoom systems, etc. As part of the policy framework, therefore, NUS requires solid online architecture support. Here, it is instructive to factor the services of telecommunication giants like MTN, GLOBACOM and AIRTEL into the policy framework strategies.

Conclusion

Teaching and learning including assessment will obviously not remain the same in the present dispensation. And as expected, the realities of these are seriously impacting on higher education in Nigeria. Many higher institutions of learning are not only grappling with the challenges, in many as well, the structures are either not

there, they are also, poorly laid with faulty policies and poor management. While this may not seem to be too important prior to early 2020, the reality and challenge of COVID-19 is a wakeup call for the higher education in Nigeria. In sum, this paper, does not only interrogate the wherewithal of virtual learning, it also, traces the evolution of higher education with a particular reference to Nigeria. It also, within the context of the discussion, unravels the advent of technology into education delivery. With all these, the paper identifies some challenges which includes but not limited to poor online infrastructure and the question of attitude.

References

- Adamu, A.U. (2020). Back to the Future: Zooming Higher to the Next Level. In S. Akinrinade, S. Oyeweso, S. Odewumi & A. Kola-Olusanya (Eds.), *Pivotal Issues in Higher Education Development in Nigeria*, (276 - 295). Ibadan: University Press Plc. (Nigeria).
- Adrinoye, R.A., & Ojokheta, K.O. (2004). Open-Distance Education as a Mechanism for Sustainable Development: Reflections on the Nigerian Experience. *International Review of Research in Open Distance Learning*. Athabasca University, Canada, 5 (1), 174 – 187.
- Aremu, A.O. (2021). The Ibadan Distance Learning Centre and its Transformational Leadership. In Press.
- Aremu, A.O. and Oguntunde, S.A. (2020). eLearning Ecosystem and Unbundling of Higher Education Institutions in Post COVID-19 Nigeria. In S. Akinrinade, S. Oyeweso, S. Odewumi & A. Kola-Olusanya (Eds.), *Pivotal Issues in Higher Education Development in Nigeria*, (262 – 275). Ibadan: University Press Plc. (Nigeria).
- Aremu, A.O., Akinyemi, O.Y., & Adeyemo, F. O. (2020). *University without Walls: Rethinking Higher Education Conclave in the New Normal World*.

- Education Communications and Technology (2001). The Handbook of Research for Education Communications and Technology. AECT. History of Distance Education.
- Aremu, A.O., Ojokheta, K.O., & Muibi, T.G. (2019). Ibadan Distance Learning Centre: Imperatives of Developmental Strides and Challenges. In R. Aderinoye, D. Egunyomi & Sarumi (Eds.), 70 Years of Adult Education at Ibadan (1949 -2019). Department of Adult Education, University of Ibadan (Pp. 54 – 73).
- Braimoh, D. (2018). Education and the Emmerging Issues of Globalisation, Knowledge Creation, Access and Improvement in Developing African Countries: Let’s Conclude the Struggle! In O. Aremu, A. Kehinde and F. Ayoola (Eds.), Evaluation, Growth and Contempoaray Trends in Open Distance Education: The Ibadan Experience. Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Publishers Ltd. (49 – 81).
- Chau, P. (2010). Online higher education commodity, Journal for Computer and Higher Education 22, 177–191. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12528-010-9039-y>
- Hussey, E.R.J. (1959). Tropical Africa 1908 – 1944. London: St. Catherine Press.
- National Policy on Information and Communication Technologies in Education (2019). Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria.
- Open Educational Resources (2012)

- Otonko, J. (2012). University Education in Nigeria: History, Successes, Failures and the Way Forward. *International Journal of Technology and Inclusive Education*, 1, 2, 44 – 48.
- Jegede, O. (2018). Open and Distance Learning Practices in Nigerian Higher Institutions of Learning”. In O. Aremu, A. Kehinde and F. Ayoola (Eds.), *Evaluation, Growth and Contemporary Trends in Open Distance Education*, Pp. 1 – 47.
- Olololube, N.P., Dudafa, U.J., Uriah, O.A & Agbor, C.N. (2013). Education for Development: Impediments to the Globalisation of Higher Education in Nigeria. *International Journal of Educational Foundations and Management*, 1 (2), 109 – 130.
- Thomas, G. (2013). *Education: A Very Short Introduction*.
- Times Higher Education (2020). The Impact of Coronavirus on Higher Education. Retrieved on December 11, 2020 from www.timeshighereducation.com
- UNESCO Academic Impact (2020). COVID-19 and Higher Education: Education and Science as a Vaccine for the Pandemic. Academic Impact. Retrieved on December 11, 2020 from www.un.org academic –impact