

PLANNING AND RESTRUCTURING TEACHING AND LEARNING FOR NIGERIAN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE NEW NORMAL

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic led the entire global world into an uncontrollable uncertainty with the educational institution not left out. The modern world is now changing quickly in many unanticipated ways and stability has given way to uncertainty, panic, and chaos. Such a time calls for unprecedented response to an unseen enemy with the capacity to render higher education useless. Higher education institutions function as the sum of independent parts that work together to achieve a common purpose, it is therefore important to critically plan towards this achievement. There is the need to putting the teaching and learning in order in term of proper planning of higher education in the new normal in other to achieve a better manpower development for economic advancement. A rational and systematic planning process will assist higher education leaders and stakeholders to determine where the institution is heading, why the institutions should go there, and the directions for getting there, including an evaluation plan.

Keywords: Planning, Restructuring, Teaching, Learning; Pandemic and Online learning

Introduction

All through the ages, education has been seen as a big arsenal to individual, national and global growth and development. The provision of quality education allows an individual to better fulfil his or her own potential and fully contribute to the growth, strength and stability of the society. However, the modern world is changing quickly in many unanticipated ways; stability has given way to uncertainty, panic, and chaos and the educational sector is not left behind (Bosire, 2017). In the current environment, educational manager now look for ways to manage in an imbalanced world where the focus is on leading for survival, where the current and future are unpredictable, capacity is uncertain and unknown, and teaching and learning is an issue of social and economic security (Beerrens, 2018). Such a time calls for unprecedented response to an unseen enemy with the capacity to render higher education useless. There is therefore the need to put the educational system in order in term of proper planning of higher education in the new normal in achieve a better manpower development for economic advancement. Moving forward, Marginson (2020) opined that to combat with such an enemy like this is an obvious necessity and institutions need to plan and restructure teaching and learning for an undetermined outcome.

Teaching and Learning before the outbreak of Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria Education System

Prior to the now/twenty-first century, the mode of teaching and learning in Nigerian educational system in has been the traditional ways of impacting knowledge between lecturers and students within the four wall of classroom and face to face across all level of educational system. It is important to state that teaching and learning in tertiary education has gone beyond rhetoric's. One of the greatest challenges that have affected the tertiary education before the advent of covid-19 was lack of planning for any uncertainty that stricken the educational system. There was no school that could proudly boast of virtual learning or teaching outside the classroom but rather conventional or traditional ways of teaching within the classroom was the order of the day.

The Present Situation

Undeniably, the higher education in Nigeria and other sub-Saharan Africa is back to normalcy, opening doors to the freshmen and returning students while higher education in some other parts of the world is limping back to normalcy. The universities are opening doors to the freshmen and returning students in a staggered manner, adopting blended teaching and learning approaches and following strict protocols to ensure safety and wellbeing of all. However, this is not pre-COVID-19 normalcy but a new normal that was hardly imagined nor was prepared for. This new educational reality, nevertheless, has given the educational leaders a lifetime opportunity to embrace and invest in the change to restructure teaching and learning. But not all universities understood the gravity of the situation. The problems faced by the universities have been more or less identical, but the responses to these problems have been quite eclectic. Globally, the reactions by the institutions of higher education to the COVID-19 crisis can be summarized into three categories:

- i. The universities which embedded their heads in the sand and behaved as if, ‘nothing was wrong’
- ii. The universities which waited for ‘God’ who never arrived to take them out of the trouble
- iii. The universities that proactively engaged with the new reality

Meanwhile, it’s now painfully clear that schools ought to have had more robust disaster-preparedness plans in place in the event of interruptions in their campus operations. Higher education should be known and prepared for innovative approach, engaging all stakeholders from day one to develop strategies to provide an uninterrupted learning experience to the students. For instance, Fazal (2020) stated that, the last eight months of grueling experience of developing, delivering and assessing learning in an awe-inspiring situation gave UAE the confidence not only to provide seamless learning online but an assurance to open campus for the new academic year.

Concept of Planning

It is imperative to define planning as it relates to tertiary education globally because every successful activity of an institution must have had some elements of planning or must have been planned earlier before execution with the available resources at their disposal. In essence, all plans made are future oriented with judicious use of available scarce resources. Aligning with this, Dror (1963) defines planning as the process of preparing a set of decision for action in the future directed at achieving goal by optimal means. While and Ozbehkan (1968) perceives the term planning as a future oriented decision process. From these definitions, planning can thus be seen as a process of preparing set goals within space of time towards achieving a future oriented goal. Furthermore, OECD (1980) sees planning as a systematic process of making rational/technical decision. Whereas Olaniyonu and Gbenu(2016) see planning as a technique, a means to an end being the realization of certain pre-determined and well defined aims and objective laid down by a central authority. Planning can therefore be said to be the systematic and scientific coordination of other peoples’ activities with a well pre-determined, defined goal achievement through a rational decision taken against seen or unforeseen eventuality and possibilities.

Planning for Higher Education in the New Normal

Studies have shown that planning is an integral aspect of any surviving organization, including higher education. The need and purpose of planning can therefore not be over emphasised. According to Taylor and de Lourdes Machado (2006), the purpose of planning in higher education is to enhance institutional effectiveness and improve management capability. Waller, Lemoine, Mense and Richardson(2019) are of the opinion that the planning process can help an institution cope with an uncertain future. Planning’s dual purpose is therefore to connect an institution to its environment and to provide unity and direction. It requires that an institution becomes active rather than passive. Planning is a resource and potential supplier of competitive advantage that portends a dramatic shift away from the assumption of a “one size-fits-all” model (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). However, according to Seymour (2011) and Akinyele and Fasogbon, (2010), the planning processes should be adapted to the specific conditions facing the institution and each institution must assess its own environment and make the best decisions possible. A rational and systematic planning process will assist higher education leaders and stakeholders to determine where the institution is

heading, why the institutions should go there, and the directions for getting there, including an evaluation plan.

Higher education institutions function as the sum of independent parts that work together to achieve a common purpose, it is therefore important to critically plan towards this achievement. However, since higher education and the world are not stable and are sometimes chaotic, creating the need for revision and adaptation of plans to meet evolving issues, the planning process should not be rigid as being written on stone but rather flexible to be updated and revised as the need arises to meeting the evolving issues (Bynander and Nohrstedt, 2020). Adding their voice to the discuss, Jalal and Murray (2019) stated that higher education planning entails both formulation and implementation of strategy. Through planning, higher education institutions can determine their major goals and objectives and then develop policies and procedures geared to meet them in the new normal. Changes in the higher education landscape due to unforeseen external influences have triggered a realization that institutions need to use planning techniques to shape and re-think strategy in order to survive. There is need to become more flexible, creative, innovative, and inventive for a new normal higher education owing to the recent pandemic that has affected teaching and learning globally. Another aspect of planning is the need to identify ends before means. Where to go should guide the means for getting there (Snyder, 2015). Hence, if a goal or end is imperative for the institution, decisions must be made about the allocation of resources to get there according to Mensah (2020). These resources according to Haines (2016) include time, money, people, facilities, and technology. Without a plan the institution will miss defining and justifying where it is headed before defining how to get there.

Another importance of planning is that it provides the structure needed to identify and focus on problems, issues and concerns for the institution (Moran, 2020) and permits the institution to set the stage for change for the institution and most importantly for students (Carver, 2020). It helps to organize and engage personnel in the pursuit of common goals. With planning, the channel of communication is increased among all the parties with each person understanding his or her own responsibilities while focusing on the top priority: students' educational achievement. According to Albrahim (2020), the greatest responsibility is to provide students with the knowledge, skills, learning experiences, and support so they may be prepared to survive and thrive in a world full of uncertainty, changes, and challenges.

In line with proper planning of higher education for the new normal is the necessity to restructure teaching and learning for tertiary institution survival globally. Higher education need to be properly planned beyond the four walls of classroom where teaching and learning takes place face to face which is the traditional ways of teaching and learning between teachers and students. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused widespread disruptions to schools and universities. According to UNESCO, as of April 10, 2020, more than 188 countries had implemented nationwide school and university closures, impacting over 91% of the world's student population (UNESCO, n.d).

During these school closures, all face-to-face lessons were cancelled, compelling many institutions, including African tertiary institution, to immediately transits from face-to-face in-person learning to completely online lessons which is beginning to be and has been accepted to be the new normal in higher education. Hence, the need to restructure teaching and learning beyond the wall of classroom becomes a necessity for all higher education if they must keep surviving in the face of unforeseen pandemic of unplanned possibilities. The question at heart now is this: How do we restructure teaching and learning of higher education to the new normal?

Restructuring Teaching and Learning in the New Normal for Higher Education: The Way Forward

Looking back at the recent past, there has been a dramatic change and a new phase has evolved where new pedagogies are finding a way to replace age-old methods of teaching and learning. Student-centric learning

approaches, increased use of technology and integration of eclectic delivery platforms have created a new ecosystem of education. The physical embodiment of classroom like a proscenium arch of a theatre is giving way to a wall-less, omnipresent space where the students engage in learning anytime and anywhere thus removing the Spatiotemporal constraints that held back learning. It was not an easy task as there were many bottlenecks: both institutional and human. Hodges et al. (2020) are of the opinion that online learning has been particularly stressful for many instructors and students who prefer in-person instruction while a large EDUCAUSE survey (Pomerantz and Brooks, 2017) revealed that Online learning has often been stigmatized as a weaker option that provides a lower quality education than in-person face-to-face learning. While the technology-savvy students quickly embraced the new way of learning, many faculty members and students do not see the value of fully online learning, despite the fact that online learning has been around for many decades.

At the onset of the current health crisis, there was chaos as many universities were shopping for platforms without realizing the importance of the content to be delivered in the confusion of delivering online learning. People were trying everything to find the best platform for teaching and learning and many instructors have had to improvise quick online learning solutions. Bates and Galloway (2012) discussed that there are anecdotal reports of a myriad of emergency online methods. Some instructors, for example, merely uploaded their PowerPoint slides or papers onto a learning management system such as Moodle and asked students to read them on their own. Any questions were asked asynchronously on the Moodle forum. Other instructors recorded their own lectures (usually at least one hour long) and asked students to asynchronously watch the video lectures and then ask individual questions later. Still others talked for more than two hours via synchronous video platforms watched by students in their own homes. Although these online methods may be an efficient method of delivering content, they are not particularly effective in promoting active learning and interest. As one student remarked, "Sitting in front of my computer to watch a 2-h live lecture without any active learning activities such as group work is pretty boring!" Indeed, without any active learning activities such as peer interaction, a fully online course will feel more like an interactive book than a classroom (Sutterlin 2018).

As education has always been a continuous life-long process, the duration of education again should not be confined to the period one spends with an educational institute or within the physical boundaries of academic institute. In the present information age, with generation of knowledge accelerating in each year, and being equivalent to decades or centuries of knowledge created in the past, the objectives of higher education are getting redefined, and it's no longer time or location bound (Mensah, 2020). There are tell-tale signs that campus-based full-time enrollment in higher education has already hit if not hitting its glass-ceilings. Therefore, higher education needs to take a new shape of teaching and learning in admitting student off campuses and accommodating for online program, running both simultaneously and ensuring a universal mode of teaching and learning through various technological way where each student can learn from his/her institution anywhere in the world (Fazal, 2020).

It is worthy to note that a well-planned active online learning lesson will be markedly different from the emergency online teaching offered in response to crisis. Hence teaching and learning should be restructured to avoid disruptions in higher education to fit the new normal (Fazal, 2020; Mensah, 2020; Moran, 2020). According to the authors, this can be achieved through the following ways:

1. Online Backup Programs

With the advent of schools returning back to full on-campus, it important that tertiary institutions need an online backup plan in case of similarly unexpected conditions in the future. Many schools learnt the hard way this year what it takes to switch urgently to an online learning environment without adequate preparations, and they won't want to take that chance again. That won't necessarily mean more schools will exist online, or more online programs will pop up that didn't exist before, but it certainly spells out better preparation in case they need to adapt quickly in the future owing to the past experience of uncertainty.

Robust online programs should be properly planned; the existing ones should be restructured in-line with the needs of the society to become core components of many institution's academic portfolios. Hence, moving teaching and learning/academic repertoire online, quickly and completely will help to prepare for uncertainty where teaching and learning will not be disrupted as institution begins to take higher education in the new normal.

2. Mobile Apps to the Rescue

The inkling of the "distributed campus" is no longer just an impression; COVID-19 has forced it into reality. Now, with the help of mobile apps, students can take the campus with them, at home or on the go anywhere they are. Scholars have said this trend won't go away. In fact, it will become part of the new normal and remain an option even when some schools choose to open up their campuses completely if they have not. Schools in the developing and under-developed world should begin to develop and integrate apps that aids teaching and learning into higher education with the required skills beyond on campus face to face interaction in classroom. Many of these apps will support students who are learning remotely in ways that have become increasingly essential since the pandemic began. For example, providing a student check-in function; tips about how fellow students are doing; push notifications and alerts with school updates; and secure communications options for students, teachers, and staff.

3. Digital Competencies

The entire world is going digital. More so, soft skills will still be needed and a strong emphasis placed on "human" competencies like the ability to connect and work with others in an online environment. Thus, students and teachers are expected to develop digital competencies perhaps more swiftly than before COVID-19 began. Having the know-how to invent or initiate technology, adapt to new technologies and learn to use new platforms and software quickly will enhance teaching and learning in higher education which is gradually becoming the new normal.

4. Better Online Course Quality

The pandemic has forced higher institutions around the world, to examine what makes a great online learning experience, and to strive to deliver that to students. For example, in Pakistan, United Arab Emirate, India and sub-Saharan African countries including Nigeria, when schools closed in March 2020, instructors/teachers/lecturers didn't have the tools to teach online and many students lacked reliable Internet access at home (Toquero, 2020).The experience disrupted so many school related activities. This alone has call for restructuring of teaching and learning in such a way that telecommunication companies can be partner with offer students' cheaper mobile-broadband packages and internet facilities which can be factored into the school fees of students. Through these better online programmes, courses in Engineering, Sciences, Business, Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and Education can be offered online without any disruptions where the pandemic does not allow the proctored face to face exams on university campuses.

5. Adoption of the 5E Conceptual Framework for Teaching and Learning.

The application of the 5E framework to better online courses, online backup programs, mobile Apps to the Rescue, and digital competencies will enhance higher education in the new normal. The 5E framework consists of Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate (Bybee et al., 2006) and are in 5 phases:

- i. **Engage:** The first phase is to engage students in the learning process. A real-world scenario or problem, and asking student's questions are methods to engage students with. This allows them to brainstorm or think critically. It also helps them to create connections to their past experiences.
- ii. **Explore:** in the exploration phase, the teacher works as a facilitator or coach while giving the students time and opportunity to explore the content and construct their own understanding of the topic at hand.
- iii. **Explain:** this phase starts with students attempting to explain specific aspects of the engagement and exploration experiences. Based on these explanations, the teacher introduces terminology in a direct and explicit manner to facilitate concept building.
- iv. **Elaborate:** here, the teacher provides more detailed information about the subject content through the use of mini lectures and/or whole class discussions. Students are also given the opportunity to apply what they have learnt and receive feedback from the teacher and their peers.

- v. **Evaluate:** formative assessments (e.g., quizzes) can be used to evaluate students' mastery of the subject material at the beginning and throughout the 5E phases, and teachers can complete a summative assessment after the elaboration phase (e.g., final exams).

The adoption of this 5E framework is based on various educational theories and models. For example, the Herbart's instructional model, Dewey's instructional model, Atkin-Karplus Learning Cycle as identified by Bybee et al. (2006) which provides a sound instructional sequence for designing a course and planning activities. The 5E framework was premise of the use of zoom video conferencing to communicate online with individuals in real time via computer, tablet, or mobile device. According to Lo (2017) this 5E framework helped instructors organise and integrate both the in-class and online class learning activities. Mullins (2017)for example, found that undergraduate students in a 5E-supported online class outperformed their peers in a traditional lecture setting. Also, Hew et al. (2018) designed two postgraduate courses based on the 5E model in order to foster students' active learning. Ninety-two percent of the participants agreed that the 5E supported online courses were more engaging than traditional classroom instruction.

Though from the African setting, there has been series of complain about zoom app for teaching. This could be attributed to state of technology advancement within the continent, poor communication facility or network to using these apps. But taking a clue from the western world on how online classes are run will help in reshaping higher education in the new normal. However, the following measure must be taking into consideration to make the most optimal use of some of this app for effective and efficient teaching and learning at higher education for the new normal. (1) Keeponline meetings secure for teaching and learning. (2) Activate only authenticated users to join. (3) Specifically, university's email domain should be created to allow participants to join the online classes through the university domain. (4) In addition, *waiting room* should be created to screen all of participants in admitting only students officially enrolled into online classes. After all of the participants had entered, then the classes can be locked using the "*Lock the meeting*" feature. Once meeting/class had been locked, no new participants could join,and then online meetings can be conducted on the Zoom videoconferencing app.

Implications of Planning and Restructuring Higher Education for the New Normal for the Future

1. Prior to COVID-19 lock-down, all higher education institutions had initiatives and plans. Therefore, plans need to be regularly reviewed against the known uncertainties and risks of the present and restructure for the future.
2. Planning and restructuring will also be useful to ascertain the change in the thinking of funders, especially governments for public colleges and universities. Are they likely to use the precariousness of the current moment to change the systems, structures, funding and roles within the higher education eco-system over which they have leverage? Will they use the power of agency to reshape and reconfigure the system and its work? Hence, university decision-makers need to make both skillful and strategic decisions.
3. The need to revisit the institutional mission statement is imperative thereby asking these questions: what does it mean right now and for the foreseeable future to be the institution we are? What does the world expect of the academic world?
4. Planning and restructuring is key to success. Scenario-planning exercises need to consider decisions that might be needed in the short-term, medium-term, and long-term to ensure differing responses from the tertiary institution to a crisis that keeps changing in the midst of uncertainty.
5. Flexibility in planning and structuring teaching and learning for student needs is critical. More emphasis should be placed on meeting actual student needs rather than prescriptive programs. Again, there is a need to plan with all stakeholders having technological and innovative input.
6. To be successful in the post-pandemic world, higher education institutions have to plan and restructure media of communication to be much more flexible and adaptable
7. Actively planning for a second pandemic if it will ever happen or uncertainty is paramount.

8. Traditional universities have to offer something more than just online learning because institutions doing online learning for years were much better at online learning for students who only wanted an online approach to learning.

Conclusion

The global pandemic has demonstrated that the education system in Nigeria, and in general is unprepared and vulnerable to external threats. Higher education institutions therefore need to grasp this opportunity to strengthen their evidence-based practices, including planning. Higher education institutions can expedite their response for continuous learning for faculty bringing up an opportunity for higher education institutions to scale up the training of faculty for online learning instruction which improves student learning. While not all experiences of remote teaching were positive, many faculty and students will have better understand online learning. Higher education institutions in Nigeria need to plan for refocusing of programs based on need and demand. Moreso, the pandemic has demonstrated that the internet, including social media, provides powerful communication channels for global higher education institutions. Technology and globalisation are sweeping higher education leaders towards a future dependent upon knowing 'how' more than knowing 'what'. Hence, the pandemic has once again illustrated the strategic importance of planning and restructuring teaching and learning through advance technology for higher education institutions as the new normal.

Suggestions

The following suggestions were made;

1. It is recommended that leaders and stakeholder of higher education in Nigeria and across the globe should go back to the drawing board to make strategic plans and begin to structure teaching and learning beyond the four walls of face to face classroom interaction and campus based programme.
2. Programmes and courses should be design in such a way that a student can learn, hold classes anywhere in the world with appropriate and adequate provision of technological facilities.
3. The Nigeria Ministry of Education at all levels should partner with both local and foreign telecommunication companies of tablets phone, durable computers set, online facilities in such a way that teaching and learning will continue to take place in the face of uncertainty, crisis and uncontrollable possibilities like the COVID-19 pandemic that shook the world.

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