*Review*

# E-learning and Nigerian University Education: Realities and Ways to the Fore

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**Abstract**

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University education has been connecting bridges to sophisticated life aimed at propelling the machine of the sustainable economy of any country of the world. This stage of education is characterized by equipping an individual to become a useful and acceptable member of the society, thereby contributing to the continuous existence of the human race on the surface of the earth. It has been observed lately that technological innovations around the world are now creeping into university education in Nigeria; e-learning is now becoming a necessity rather than a choice. Unfortunately, the reality of e-learning in Nigerian University education seems to be hampered by some identified factors ranging from shortage of funds for university education, poor ICT literacy among academic staff, and shortage of relevant ICT for e-learning. It is to these observed realities that this paper is aimed at examining the challenges confronting the actualization of e-learning in Nigerian Universities. Recommendations were made as ways to the fore.

**Keywords:** E-learning, ICT, Nigerian University Education, Teaching-Learning, Ways to the Fore

## INTRODUCTION

The evolution of university education in Nigeria can be linked to the Elliot Commission in 1943, the said commission led to the establishment of University College Ibadan (UCI) in 1948 which was affiliated to the University of London. The institution faced a lot of challenges at the establishment stage. In an account of Ibukun (1997), University College Ibadan faced the challenges of rigid constitutional provisions, poor staffing, low enrolment, and high dropout rates. Ashby Commission was inaugurated in April 1959 by the Federal Government to render advice on the proper management of higher education and sensitized the public on the need for university education. The commission made a report and before the submission, the Eastern Region government of the country established its first university at Nsukka (University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1960). The submission of the report led to the implementation that gave birth to the establishment of University of Ife (Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife) in 1962 by the then Western Region, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1962 by the then Northern Region and University of Lagos (1962) by the then Federal Government respectively. The then newly created Midwestern region established University of Benin in 1970, the period of 1960-1970 was charac-terized by the establishment of six universities referred to as first-generation universities in Nigeria which were under close inspection by the government (Babalola et al 2007). In an account of Ekundayo and Adelakun (2022), the Third National Development Plan took place in 1975-1980 when the government of Nigeria established seven universities as against the proposed four in the then four regional universities in the year 1975; Universities of Calabar, Ilorin, Jos, Sokoto, Maiduguri, Port Harcourt and Bayero University, Kano were products of this period (all tagged as second generation universities). Again,

between 1980 and early 1990 the third generation universities were established; the likes of Federal Universities of Technology in Owerri, Makurdi, Yola, Akure, and Bauchi were targeted to enhance the development of technology, of the country. The creation of states led to the establishment of state-owned universities in Imo, Ondo, Lagos, Akwaibom, Oyo, and Cross-River states respectively. Between 1991 to the current time, fourth-generation universities were established in different regions, Nigerian open universities and many private universities are currently the current trends in the propagation of university education in Nigeria, and of which many of them are technological-oriented universities aimed at grooming individuals that will be able to fit into the sustenance of the economy of the nation at large. According to Sasu (2022), there are about 170 Universities in Nigeria out of which 79 are Private Universities, 45 Federal Universities, and 48 State-owned Universities. The largest Nigerian University is the National Open University of Nigeria with over half a million students' enrolment.

Over the years, the development of university education in Nigeria gave way to the introduction of technological advancement which led to the use of ICT in teaching-learning activities. Alternatives to the physical teaching-learning process consist of using interactive technology (Yekini et al., 2020). The likes of stationary electronic gadgets such as computers and related educational ICT tools can be viewed as e-learning tools. In an account of Anene, Imam, and Odumoh (2014), e-learning ranges from the way students make use of e-mail and access coursework online and involvement in some online basic academic activities. E-learning allows the transfer of knowledge any day, anywhere and anytime. The adoption of E-learning in the university is aimed at easing the stress of physical teaching and learning. Academic staff can now teach a large student class without necessarily being there in person. According to Adelakun (2021), the place of E-Learning can-not be ignored in the world of today which is characterized by the gradual switch from the old ways of physical teaching-learning to highly digitalized ones. The days of sitting physically with the students is now drifting to the world of extinction. According to Nwabufo et al. (2022), the development recorded in the worlds of communication, computer, and technologies have allowed the supplementation and gradual phase-out of traditional ways of educational delivery.

E-learning in this context focuses on the use of relevant ICT in teaching-learning activities in universities in Nigeria which serves as an alternative to physical meetings between the academic staff and the student. The advantages of e-learning are enormous, one of them is access to education anywhere, anytime, and any day. E-learning gives people access to education which enables them to have control over educational contents and activities. E-learning can help to create a mutual and interactive learning environment where students can give their feedback almost immediately, ask questions without being afraid of the physical presence of the teacher, and learn captivatingly. An interesting thing about e-learning in the university is its usage anywhere-anytime which makes learning more interesting at this level.

## Evolution of E-Learning in University Education in Nigeria

Generally, the fruition of e-learning in Nigerian education can be traced to the development and introduction of the telecommunication system into the administration of the country in 1886; e-cable connections were launched by the then colonial masters in Lagos which were connected to the colonial office in London, information were transmitted and feedback were received on what is going on in Nigeria. Years after, there was introduction of the use of fax machines to update the London colonial office on developments carried out by the colonial masters here in Nigeria, and by 1893, all government offices in Lagos already has telephone services for easy communication, feedback, and easy access which later was extended to all other parts of the country (Adelakun, 2021). The introduction of GSM gave birth to private telephone service providers whose part of their services is to provide data services which are now available to some academic staff in accessing several teaching concepts on the internet and allowing them to communicate thereof to the students. According to Folayan and Folayan (2016), e-learning applications and processes in university education comprise web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual classrooms, and digital collaboration. Eze et al. (2018) also saw e-learning as the using modern telecommunication equipment and ICT resources in the education system. E-learning in the university means the electronic method of teaching-learning associated with computerized learning in the form of interaction platforms at any place and anytime depending on the comfort of the student and the lecturer (Obododike and Okekeokosisi, 2020)

## Challenges of e-learning in Nigerian Universities

The use of e-learning in Nigerian universities has been confronted with a lot of challenges hindering the attainment of the aims of e-learning in the sector. A developing country such as Nigeria seems to still be trying to meet up with the required standards of advanced countries to be able to fit into the dynamic world. It is so bad that e-learning seems not to be fulfilling the purpose of creation even when more attention has been given, and resources allocated to this are very substantial. Challenges ranging from inadequate e-books to enhance university education and some other socio-economic

**Table 1.** 2009-2018 Share of Education from the Nigerian National Budgets

| Year | Budget (# Trillion) | Educational Allocation (# Billion) | Percentage of Budget (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2009 | 3.049 | 221.19 | 7.25 |
| 2010 | 5.160 | 249.09 | 4.83 |
| 2011 | 4.972 | 306.30 | 6.16 |
| 2012 | 4.877 | 400.15 | 8.20 |
| 2013 | 4.987 | 426.53 | 8.55 |
| 2014 | 4.962 | 493.00 | 9.94 |
| 2015 | 5.068 | 392.20 | 7.74 |
| 2016 | 6.061 | 369.60 | 6.10 |
| 2017 | 7.444 | 550.00 | 7.38 |
| 2018 | 8.612 | 605.80 | 7.03 |
| Total | 55.192 | 4013.86 | 70.76 |

**Source:** Gambo and Fasanmi (2019)

**Table 2.** 2010-2019 Shear of Education from the Nigerian National Budgets

| Year | Budget (# Trillion) | Educational Allocation (# Billion) | Percentage of Budget (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2010 | 5.160 | 249.09 | 4.83 |
| 2011 | 4.972 | 306.30 | 6.16 |
| 2012 | 4.877 | 400.15 | 8.20 |
| 2013 | 4.987 | 426.53 | 8.55 |
| 2014 | 4.962 | 493.00 | 9.94 |
| 2015 | 5.068 | 392.20 | 7.74 |
| 2016 | 6.061 | 369.60 | 6.10 |
| 2017 | 7.444 | 550.00 | 7.38 |
| 2018 | 8.612 | 605.80 | 7.03 |
| 2019 | 8.830 | 620.50 | 7.03 |
| Total | 60.973 | 4413.17 | 72.96 |

**Source:** Ndujihe (2019) - Vanguard Newspaper; Ameh and Aluko (2019) – Punch Newspaper

challenges are now becoming the order of the day in Nigerian universities (Nwabufo et al., 2022). According to Adebayo and Oke (2016), lecturer factors (Inadequately trained personnel), inadequate internet connectivity, inadequate funding to acquire the needed resources (personnel, equipment), energy-related problems, and political instability which has led to poor development plan among others were identified as challenges of e-learning in Nigerian universities.

The actualization of e-learning in Nigerian universities seems to still be unachievable because of some perceived socio-economic reasons. The ICT facilities in Nigerian Universities are in a poor state as a result of the world economy which affects the exchange rate of currencies. This has led to a daily decrease in the purchase of ICT facilities to further sustain university education in Nigeria. Also, there is a perceived misappropriation of funds allocated to the development of e-learning in Nigerian universities. Some universities appear not to have enough computers in their ICT centres and laboratories. Nwabufo et al. (2022) noted that some universities in Nigeria have not incorporated television conferencing being used in countries like the USA, Europe, and Asia, where lectures and examinations are conducted online and in fact, Examination results are released almost immediately.

It has also been observed that government budget allocation for the education sector in recent times is becoming low and not allocated as expected (Awe, 2021). According to Panshak (2021), the education sector generally is been under-funded in which the available fund for education are in many cases used for more urgent needs of the educational sector; payment of staff, and provision of security for the educational sector seem to be more urgent than the purchase of facilities needed for the sustenance of e-learning in the university education. Table 1 and Table 2 below show how the government has constantly failed to meet the minimum standard of 26% of the yearly budget as stipulated by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

Technophobia seems to be prevailing among university students in Nigeria. It appears most of them have little or no computer literacy as expected of them before being admitted into the university. As corroborated by Effah and Mbuk (2019), students' socio-economic back-

ground does affect them in getting exposed to the expected level of the use of ICT, some are even afraid of operating one when they have access to it, some go to the extent of hiring computer literates at a cost to fill their admission, registration and other university documents online. The interpretation of some related educational software seems to be difficult and usually put off some university students' interest. The implication of this is that many students in the university will not be able to participate actively in the use of ICT to support teaching-learning activities in the university. The continuous existence of this over time has led to a serious challenge confronting the use of e-learning in some universities in Nigeria.

It has also been observed that the phobia of accepting the paradigm shift embedded in the introduction of e-learning as an alternative to the old physical method of teaching-learning is ravaging universities in Nigeria. According to Makhija and Bharad (2020), the introduction of the use of technology in teaching-learning gave rise to academic staff experiencing difficulties while trying to switch from offline mode to online mode; challenges of changing their teaching methodologies, and effective management of their time. The transition forced teachers to develop e-learning content to cover the curriculum and also engage the student. Adelakun (2021) also noted that the introduction of e-learning into the education sector has been hard for both the academic staff and the students in the university because they have been addicted to the crude way of teaching-learning. Some academic staff in the university appear not to be inclined with the use of technology support tools in enhancing their teaching methodology. The resultant effect of this is that university education will be deprived of the needed technology development leading to setbacks in the advancement of e-learning in university education and the standard of the educational sector will as well be reduced.

The regular increase in the cost of purchase of internet data, software, and license to access relevant educational materials to brace up teaching-learning activities has discouraged some academic staff from inclining themselves with the use of ICT to teach their students. Some academic software is very expensive to get because they are developed in foreign countries. According to Obododike and Okekeokosisi (2020), in Nigeria, the cost of purchasing the data is so high making it uneasy for both students and lecturers to have easy access to e-learning. They further noted that in cases where there is even data, there might be poor internet connections from the network providers especially when there is a need for video communication between the lecturer and the student. Privatization of most of the network providers in Nigeria gave rise to the independent nature of the allocation of data costs to customers. In the face of a depressed economy, few students and university lecturers cannot afford the purchase of data to

stay connected and active online. A developing country like Nigeria may continue to experience this unfortunate development if the indigenous software developers are not incorporated to design relevant educational software to enhance e-learning in Nigerian universities and this in the long run may lead to a shortage of needed educational software in the system.

Inadequate power supply in Nigeria over the years has led to a decrease in the use of e-learning in the universities in the country; some universities are even located in an area with less low supply of electricity. In the personal experiences of the researchers, Federal University, Oye-Ekiti Nigeria is located in a locality where there is an irregular power supply; the institution has been running diesel-powered generating sets to ensure there is continuous running of the teaching-learning activities of the school. Unfortunately with the sudden and recent increase in the price of diesel, the university could no longer sustain the use of generating sets. Sometimes the given current is not even enough to power a laptop talk less to powering other powerful ICT tools to enhance e-learning. In an account of Gillwald et al. (2018), some students residing in school areas are faced with the problem of epileptic electricity which affects their usage of ICT facilities to enhance their learning. This perceived problem has crippled the sustenance of e-learning in most of the universities in Nigeria.

The shortage of qualified manpower needed in managing the available ICT facilities enhancing e-learning in Nigerian universities is another challenge that should not be overlooked. In a research conducted by Ajadi et al. (2008), few technical staffs are available to maintain available ICT facilities needed for e-learning which has led to a retrogressive state of the use of e-learning in Nigerian universities. There is an observed shortage of trained personnel to run educational software applications that can help in the sustainability of e-learning in the educational sector of the country (Anene, Imam, and Odumuh, 2014). The continuous existence of this will lead to a setback in the use of e-learning in Nigerian universities.

According to Murgatroyd (2020), accessibility, affordability, flexibility, learning pedagogy, life-long learning, and educational policy were characterized as challenges facing the progressive existence of e-learning in Nigerian Universities. Unreliable internet connections have become the order of the day in some Nigerian universities while some Nigerian university students have little or no access to the needed digital devices to get actively involved in e-learning. The unfortunate development may be hinged to the backward movement of the economy of Nigeria where an average family finds it difficult to fully support a child with the necessary facilities in the university. According to Oyelade et al. (2022), children from poor economic homes cannot afford needed online learning devices which affect their easy adaptability to the e-learning activities during their

university education. Sintema (2020) opined that a complete switch to e-learning may affect some university students who are from poor economic backgrounds because they may not be able to access or afford e-learning tools which may lead to reduction in their performance level in both internal and external examinations. The implication of this is that there may be a reduction in the quality of graduates from Nigerian universities in the near future.

There were records of population explosions in university education in Nigeria owing to the increase in the demand for university education by Nigerian citizens. In the early years of the oil boom in Nigeria, records have shown that the Nigerian Government embarked on ambitious education programs; these laudable prog-rammes caused a dramatic expansion in the demand for educational services at various educational levels. Unfortunately, there was a collapse of oil prices in the world's market which Nigeria as a country has not recovered from till now, thus resources became inadequate. Ajadi et al. (2008) noted that the commonest type of e-learning used in most Nigerian universities was in the form of lecture notes on CD-ROM, and other gadgets to transfer files; these were being played in class, displayed on a projector screen and can be used when learners desire. They further noted that the challenge according to this method is that the class population of students per computer will be very high due to overpopulation recorded in classes. This unfortunate development implies that university students will learn in a highly condensed classroom.

The use of e-learning to assess students in Nigerian universities is being affected by trial and error syndromes, which seems to lead to confusion among the teachers, students, and even parents (Oyelade et al., 2022). This challenge can be a result of the shortage of qualified academic staff in the universities, shortage of ICT personnel in the university, shortage of funds on the part of the parents and the government, and many more as identified above. The rate of continuous use of outdated management strategies in the Nigerian educational sector is alarming. Some of the managerial strategies in some universities in Nigeria seem not to be useful to the modern-day education of the world. The operational system, facilities, methods, funding, staffing, and other adopted strategies involved in the management of Nigerian universities seem not to be more relevant to the dynamicity of the world and it appears university education in Nigeria is behind in competing with its counterparts in the world.

Distractions from other unproductive/un-educative sites, feeling isolated or missing social interactions, and lack of parental guidance in the use of ICT are some other challenges confronting the effectiveness of e-learning in university education in Nigeria. While making use of e-learning channels with internet connections, there are possibilities of students being distracted by contents that are not educative pulping up the screen; the likes of porn sites and gambling sites can display on the screen while the students are busy with their online studies which can lead to distractions. Unfortunately, many parents may not be there to monitor the activities of their children online. The feeling of missing physical social interactive class may set in while the students are busy using the online learning platforms. These identified challenges imply that students may not be able to make good use of e-learning platforms accordingly.

## CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it is to be noted that e-learning is a vital innovation needed for the sustainability of university education in Nigeria for the system to be able to compete with developed nations of the world. Drawing an inference from the above challenges confronting e-learning in Nigerian universities, the conclusion can then be reached that Nigeria as a nation is yet to be there. University education is still lagging in the area of e-learning which is characterized by poor funding, shortage of needed ICT staff, the poor economy of the nation, and technophobia among academic staff and students in the university. etc. The reality of the stated challenges is that if such should continue, the achievement of e-learning in universities in Nigeria will be jeopardized. The era of producing graduates who are suffering from Diploma Disease (unskilled graduates who cannot defend their certificates) may never be a thing of the past.

### Ways to the Fore

In light of the above-mentioned challenges and conclusion, the following are recommended as way forward:
1. Government should ensure a complete 26% allocation of the national budget per annum for the educational sector for the system to be able to procure the needed ICT facilities and employ experts to sustain the use of e-learning in university education in Nigeria.
2. Adequate training should be given to the academic staff in Nigerian universities on the use of ICT tools in enhancing e-learning. In-service training and referral courses should be offered to academic staff in the Nigerian university to develop their expected digital skills.
3. The national grid should be properly maintained to further supply electricity that will be able to enhance the use of ICT and e-learning in Nigerian universities without unnecessary interruption.
4. Government should mediate in the cost of selling internet facilities, regulations should be made that will make the purchase of data and related ICT affordable to an average Nigerian in Nigerian Universities.

5. Certificates of completion of computer literacy courses should be enlisted as one of the requirements for the students to graduate. Also, computer certificates should be part of the requirements for university lecturers' promotion.

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