

Chapter 30

University Without Walls: Rethinking Higher Education Conclave in the New Normal World

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Introduction

Education is the bedrock of development upon which growth of any country rests. It goes without saying therefore, that the importance of education in the light of national development cannot be overemphasised. Given the import of education, stakeholders and policy makers continue not only to interrogate associated narratives that could influence its quality; they also continually assess its relevance in the light of global and technological challenges. Thus, there are increasing challenges contending with education and its delivery. Recently, one of such challenges, which was hitherto, not imagined, is the global epidemic, novel coronavirus disease, otherwise refers to COVID-19. COVID-19 is a global epidemic, which emanated from Wuhan in China in December 2019. This epidemic, has not only halted the pedagogy of education delivery globally, it also, led to temporary closure of schools in an attempt to contain the spread of COVID-19 pandemic, whereby about 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries in all continents of the world were temporarily out of schools between March and June, 2020. This has exposed some limitations of traditional pedagogy delivery in education sector. According to UNESCO (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has created the largest disruption of education systems in history in which closures of schools and other learning spaces have affected, negatively 94 percent of the world's student population.

In this narrative, Nigeria as a country is not exempted. The COVID-19 pandemic-forced school closure caught the country and players in education industry unawares. While in other climes, players in education seem to have made proactive measures to facilitate teaching and learning on a very reasonable scale by adjusting to the *new normal*, the same cannot be said of the industry in Nigeria, most especially, in Nigerian University System. The University System in Nigeria could be said to be worst hit; perhaps, because of some fundamental deficits in policies, lack of adequate structural framework and poor resilience of her education system. This underscores the state of Nigerian University System especially in relation to seamless approach to delivering pedagogies. Amplifying this, Aremu (2020), notes that educational system in Nigeria till date remains not too challenging, not entirely in contents, but substantially in the mode of delivery. He submits further that a negligible percentage of schools (including higher institutions) leverage on technology to deliver pedagogies; and lag behind in modern form of pedagogies delivery. This contention in the context of the reality facing higher education underscores

the importance of Information Communication and Technology. While education is considered as a process of acquiring knowledge, skills, attitude, interest, abilities, competence; and the cultural norms of a society by people and transmission of it to the overall benefit of the society, the methodology through which the pedagogies are delivered are changing given the technology revolution globally. With the continuous breakthroughs in technology, state of learning especially in higher institutions is being challenged to accommodate new skills and tools. In effect, in-person traditional mode of teaching and learning is fast becoming obsolete and given rise to personalised mode of teaching and learning which is aided by technology. This is otherwise, referred to as e-Learning (electronic Learning) or online learning. In other narratives, it is called virtual learning. The current global reality of COVID-19 has also motivated the need to embrace this mode of learning. Grand-Clement (2017) submits that the conventional method no longer surface as individuals now develop and refresh their skills and knowledge in order to keep abreast with the constant innovation and new development in the digital world. In effect, technology has given education the need to take into account the shift and trend that are transforming the way people work, learn, train and makes sense of their world. It also drives innovation and transforms learning and skills development into a lifelong process.

Thus, this paper examines the place of education before the advent of technology, evolution of technology and its importance, in-person teaching and learning; and emergence of technology enabled form of teaching and learning. All these are interrogated within the context of university system in Nigeria. The paper therefore, identifies the challenges this could pose in the wake of *new normal*, which promotes virtual approach to pedagogies delivery. In this wise, the paper, articulates some policy frameworks within which this can be achieved.

Education Before the Advent of Technology

The advent of education especially Western education is dated to the period of colonialism. It is instructive to note that early missionaries used education as a tool of evangelism especially in the Western part of Nigeria. These missionaries established western education with the introduction of early mission schools between 1515 and 1580 (Ogbondah, 2002). This was temporarily truncated and later resuscitated in the 19th century. These mission schools were: the Church Missionary of Nigeria, 1843; The United Presbyterian and the Wesleyan Methodist Mission in 1842. The contributions of these mission schools made an impact as they make beneficiaries not only to write in their languages, they also, helped beneficiaries of Western education to acquire sound education, which, impacted on their lives and career. Mainly, education at this period was only to acquire western education for the purpose of evangelism and functional society.

Although, this later transformed to more developments in the civil and teaching services. Fafunwa (1991) contends that the goals of educational system, which were focused towards functionalism, could be summarised as follows:

- (1) To develop the child's latent physical skills;
- (2) To develop character;
- (3) To inculcate respect for elders and those in position of authority;
- (4) To develop intellectual skills;

- (5) To acquire specific vocational training and to develop a healthy attitude towards honest labour;
- (6) To develop a sense of belonging and to participate actively in family and community affairs; and
- (7) To understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the community at large.

The above contentions by Fafunwa do not only promote functionalism in education, they are also about making education as a tool through which, the totality of man is promoted. The modern concept of education has not only integrated these, it has also, made education to be all-inclusive using modern technology.

The introduction of technology in the late 20th century gave rise to some forms of ease especially in administration with the introduction of typewriters and other technologies. This did not only enhance the scope of education; it also, helped in the facilitation of school administration. This was followed by further breakthroughs in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). As described by Bandele (2006), the Information Technology revolution involves the use of computers, the Internet and other telecommunication technologies in every aspect of human endeavor. This, Tinio (2002) remarks that it is capable of transcending time and space. These include virtual access, electronic mailing, file transfer and online databases (Nwosu and Ugboho, 2012) and the most recent, the Big Data phenomenon.

The Big Data concept is an offshoot of the growing information management aspect of the ICTs world with articulated emphasis on volume, velocity and variety of information hoisted in a specific domain. Regarding the importance of information sourcing, usage, manipulation, sharing, preservation and storage in the daily activities of man, one can clearly attest that information management, indeed, is synonymous with national development. According to United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2002), Information and Communication Technology is regarded as the combination of Informatics technology with other related technologies, specifically communication technology. The various element of ICTs such as teleconferencing, email, audio conferencing, television lessons, radio broadcasts, interactive radio counselling, interactive voice response system, audiocassettes and CD ROMs and others, are relevant to the advancement of knowledge (Sharma, 2003; Bhattacharya and Sharma, 2007).

For education to operate in a social environment, the digitalisation process should come to play. Many nations have agenda through the invention of digitalised technology in education. For instance, the 2018 Agenda of German Government describes the potentials and challenges in the society, which is increasingly interconnected through the Internet. The agenda describes a bundle of activities that have the aim of making digitisation actively useful for the improvement of citizens living environments. The Digital Agenda by 2025 is to develop a 5G Strategy for Germany (German Digital Agenda, 2018). This underscores the importance of technology in development.

With the invention of technology, it has improved capacity and work force development within the learning environment. Learning modules, which contain specified content, has been enhanced with the aid of digitalisation. For instance, if a teacher wants to re-module its course content or curriculum the use of World Wide Web (www) can aid teachers in the designing of course contents into modules and dissemination of it. The basic tenet of technology has equipped teachers and students

through Expanded Learning Environments. In the context of discussion about the digitisation of education, terms like digital learning, online learning, or eLearning are used interchangeably, because they suggest that learning can actually work digitally or virtually. However, for teachers and students to know and learn more, physical environment and socio- spatial environment are needed. Writing on dynamics of eLearning, Aremu and Oguntunde (2020) contend that an eLearning ecosystem is an e-learning environment wherein educational technologies, authoring tools, and resources are all present, for the sole purpose of instilling knowledge and developing skills for all learners within the e-learning setting, which may not necessarily be physical. They further note that the objective of an ideal eLearning system is to impart quality education using different learning tools. This, according to Aremu and Oguntunde (2020), can be achieved by creating an eLearning ecosystem, with effective communication between members of the ecosystem (students, instructors/facilitators, and technologists). At this point, it is instructive to interrogate the structure, framework and state of learning technologies in Nigerian University System with a view to appraising its prevailing trends.

Prevailing Trends and Technology Evolution in Nigerian Universities System

The prevailing trends on the state of learning technologies in Nigerian universities especially in public universities (federal and state-owned) could be said to be precarious. The reason why the COVID-19 pandemic caught many universities unprepared. According to Aremu (2020), educational sector like other sectors, has suffered a reversal of fortune during the corona virus epidemic. He then contends that in an attempt to strategise and reposition educational sector, policy makers, stakeholders and educationists should call for new strategies one of which is, virtual interventions. This, obviously, is a great structural and architectural lapse in Nigerian universities system. Aremu (2020) then laments that while the virtual intervention seems not to be a challenge in Europe, America and even Asia; it is in a way in Nigeria where many universities have not embraced virtual learning coupled with lack of policy framework on it. This has shown the prevailing situation in the Nigerian University System (NUS). Recent developments have also revealed the unpreparedness of the NUS especially among the public universities. Aremu (2020) again contends that while schools are opening up in many countries because of strong policy framework and online architecture, many higher institutions including first generation universities in Nigeria are still grappling with basic rudiments of online engagements. This perhaps, account for the strong disaffection of the leadership of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) that Nigerian public universities are not ready for opening in order to avert further spread of COVID-19 virus among students and lecturers. In what looks like a damning verdict on the state of public universities in Nigeria, Chief Afe Babalola urges the Federal Government to open private universities because public universities are not ready. He avers, COVID-19 has exposed the unpreparedness of public universities in the areas of poor infrastructures, underfunding inefficiency and corruption (*Punch*, September 6, 2020). It is instructive to then assert that Nigerian universities (public) lack what it takes to continue education business using conventional mode of delivering pedagogies. In this wise, it becomes expedient to interrogate the policies, the structure and architecture of teaching and learning. Conventional approaches to teaching and learning such as use of internet,

computers, projectors, simulators are not available in many public universities. These inhibit modern approaches to teaching and learning. According to Maduewesi (2005), the delivery content in the education system is paramount. While Maduewesi (2005) did not highlight this, it is obvious that public universities cannot afford to continue with the present orthodox template when universities in Europe, America and some parts of Africa are unbundling using technologies. Obanya (2002) expresses a concern that higher education should develop certain number of generic skills to a level that will ensure continued creative productivity of the individual.

Aremu (2013) has consistently argued that online learning is growing in popularity with advances in technology especially ICTs. The obvious is that technologies have penetrated education sector and thereby alter and rewrite some basic principles of teaching and learning. Globally, the deployment of ICTs has revolutionised access to higher education.

This is in tandem with the Education 2030 Framework for Action (FFA) adopted at Incheon, Republic of Korea in May 2015 (UNESCO, 2015). The Action Framework pushes for recognition of lifelong learning for all. The FFA promotes inclusive education, which is in line with the new Sustainable Development Goal 4 Education Agenda. The 2015 Incheon Declaration and Framework made this clear and it is in line with making education accessible to all. This is what University without Walls will achieve. Unfortunately, Nigeria has not keyed into Education 2030 Framework for Action on democratisation of education. The reason why, many universities (especially public owned) could not continue teaching and learning during COVID-19 pandemic, ASUU-Federal Government faceoff, notwithstanding. Obviously, university education is no longer sole repository of lecturers and the class is no longer enclosed within the walls of lecture rooms (UNESCO, 2007). Against this backdrop, Aremu (2013) contends that it is imperative that borderless education becomes the new norm as against traditional in-person or in-student university education. More than what used to be, contemporary students are not only ICTs savvy, they are upwardly mobile and flexible. Here, traditional approach in many universities should gradually give way to virtual form of learning in which the lecturer(s) many of who are digital migrants engage students who are digital natives. Digital natives according to Prensky (2002) are individuals for whom the digital world is native from the first days of life. They are generations born in the era of technology and that they are native speakers of the language of digital technology. The generation of digital natives requires new methods, ways of learning and an appropriate level of awareness of their teachers (digital migrants). For institutions of higher learning to understand this holistic view of information technology among generation, the diagram below shows the relationship. The diagram in Figure 30.1 does not only shows the interactions between the digital migrants and natives, it reveals that as from 2005, the world has moved beyond the traditional mode of teaching and learning. The reality here is that, many public universities are still in arrears.

University without Walls: Digitalisation, Massification and Democratisation of University System

Globally, the essence of university education is to provide knowledge and give access to as many qualified candidates who desire higher education. Thus, university education is supposed to be accessible and democratised. In Nigeria, according to the information on the Website of National Universities Commissions, there are 174 universities. The breakdown is as follows: 43 Federal Universities, 52 State Universities, and 79 private universities. This

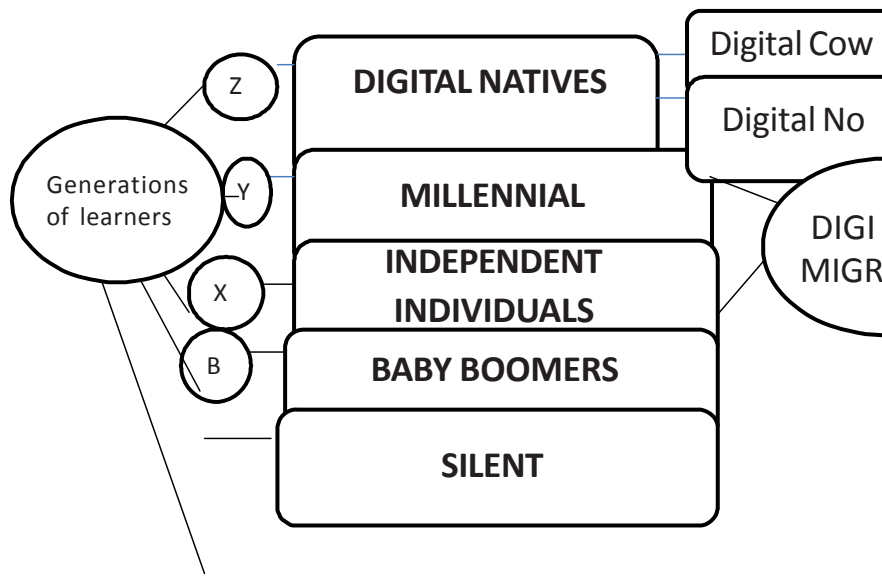


Fig. 30.1: Evolution of the 21st Century Generation of Learners: Adapted by Bazylevych *et al* (2019)

is against 1.9 million candidates that sought university education under the regulation of Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB). According to the information on JAMB's Website (2020), this was the highest figure in the history of the board. Of this figure, which increases year in and year out, it shows that more candidates will seek access for university education. The phenomenal rising enrolment, in spite of the number of approved universities, calls for some reflections and interrogations. In what looks like a damning verdict on this, Jegede (2018) submits that it is an open secret that the formal classroom-bound higher education provisions in Nigeria have failed to cope with the tremendous need for higher education. He affirms further that statistics in the last ten years indicate that only about 17 percent of candidates seeking admissions to universities and polytechnics would gain access. Although, Jegede's (2018) argument is in favour of widening access through establishment of Distance Learning Centres, it goes without objection that opening up of access is in tandem with University without Walls' philosophy. In effect, dual mode universities running Distance Education in Nigeria (twelve of them) are much more in line with the philosophy of University without Walls if only their programmes are further democratised and deregulated. Advancement in technology has shown that learning can take place anywhere and not in traditional classroom and university buildings.

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. According to Yusuf (2005), ICTs have undoubtedly affected teaching, learning and research. For many years, teaching courses were written around textbooks. Teachers have taught through lectures and presentations interspersed with tutorials and learning activities designed to consolidate and rehearse the course content in a conventional style. However, studies have shown that most teachers do not make use of the potential of ICTs to contribute to

the quality of learning environments, although they value this potential quite significantly (Smeets, 2005). In the 21st century, digitalised university should show the efficacy of technology in teaching, learning and research for teachers and learners. One of it is that it can help revitalise learning environment. The use of ICTs in education can help to improve and develop the skills and quality of teachers by providing support in difficult courses. Nel (2008) describes the changing role of the student as a customer and a client in a context where learning and knowledge are increasingly commodified. He further describes this process as reducing learning and knowledge to fit the market's needs and priorities. In the same vein, Chau (2010) argues that the deterministic view of technology allows education and society to be appropriated by the corporate world. 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. Furthermore, in order to ensure that our universities are not close-bordered and their teaching methodologies not in-person, concerted efforts should be made to make all hands to be on deck.

Here, the policy makers (that is, the regulators), university administrators and faculties would have to embrace the change and the revival in education that is propelled by technologies; and in tandem with the principles and philosophies of University without Walls.

Given the global challenges occasioned by COVID-19, in which education especially at higher institutions of learning are seriously affected, education policies in respect of higher institutions should be redefined to accommodate recent technological peculiarities. Almost sixty years after independence, Nigerian universities and their mode of pedagogies delivery have not seriously shown development that is in tandem with global best practices. This would therefore, require a new policy framework that should be driven by the Ministry of Education, National Universities Commission and other stakeholders. The policy should, among other things, direct at full digitisation of the entire universities structures. Globally, good universities are rated through their automation and not hands-on form of pedagogies. Through full automation, coursewares would be massified through open educational resources. To achieve the philosophy of University without Walls, the entire teaching and learning have to be democratised and not traditionally rigid. The democratisation of knowledge would require structured and seamless learning environment and ICTs savvy facilitators (lecturers) and students.

Conclusion

This paper, has made contributions to higher education with particular reference to university education with emphasis on some emerging narratives like evolution of technology, new normal occasioned by COVID-19 and virtual form of pedagogy driven. In this light, the paper interrogated the orthodox mode of delivery, which is largely in-person, and the reality of this in the global revival in education industry in which technologies now drive teaching and learning. The overall theme of the paper, arising from these narratives is the emerging need for University without Walls given the virtual mode of learning that now gradually dominating pedagogy delivery in Europe, America, Asia and some parts of Africa (including some privately owned universities in Nigeria). While the wave of University without Walls is on the increase globally, this has not been so in Nigeria, where many universities (especially public owned) still contend with orthodox mode of pedagogy delivery in 21st century in which learning is not only mobile,

but also, largely technologised.

Engagingly, the quest to make Nigerian University System adapt to the global best practice in the educational industry would require informed policy drive at the national level. Here, the policy framework should be well-articulated and back up with ministerial approval in which Nigerian universities would inject appropriate digital architecture and framework. This would require total overhaul of the entire structure in which culture of seamless approach to service would be entrenched. The latter would require the need for attitudinal change especially on the part of those who are digital migrants and referred to as Born before Computer'. The new normal revival has made incursion into education conclave of which university system is not immune. In this wise, all efforts should be made to democratise university education by widening access. This is in line with the philosophy of University without Walls, which is a hub for e-Learning with cloud campuses. The survival of university education in the post COVID-19 era will be motivated by technologies. It will be more of personalised learning and the use of Virtual and Augmented Reality.

In sum, this chapter, takes a holistic view of education before technology, the evolution of technology and its impact on education, teaching and learning in a digitalised university, the prevailing trends in Nigerian University; and the conundrum of digital natives and migrants, which, more often, limits the processes of pedagogies within the context of digitalisation of education. The paper, therefore, make advocacy for a University without walls given the reality of the new normal occasion by COVID-19 challenges.

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