

DEVELOPING ALTERNATIVE TEACHING CONTINUITY PLANS TO MOVE CLASSROOMS ONLINE AT COVID-19 ERA IN NIGERIA

CHAPTER TEN

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP ON MANAGING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Abstract

The higher education institution needs leadership, solidarity and collaboration to defeat the coronavirus negative impact on education. This paper gave an overview of the long-term negative impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on higher education teaching and learning, and its consequent impact on National development. The paper presented transformational leadership as a veritable tool to effectively manage the needed transformation in higher education delivery. Suggestions made include among others, that seminars, conferences and trainings be organized to equip higher education managers on the effective use of transformational leadership characteristics, and train lecturers on use of technology in designing and delivering online live lectures.

Keywords: Transformational leadership, management of higher education, COVID-19 Pandemic.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is one of the great health crises and challenge our generation has witnessed. Cases are rising daily in Africa and around the world and has resulted in the closure of educational institutions all over the world. Countries are trying to slow down the spread of the virus by testing and treating patients carrying out constant distancing, limiting travels, quarantine citizens and cancelling large gathering such as schools, sporting events, churches and concerts. This pandemic has the potential of creating devastating social, economic and political crises that will take a long time to ameliorate. Many people have lost their jobs and income with no way of knowing when everything will return to normalcy. Nations are devising ways that could prepare them to respond to it and recover from it especially in the field of education.

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Some simple actions have been highlighted by World Health Organization (WHO) that can keep one safe, such as frequent handwashing with soap, staying at home when sick, distancing when out and not touching your face. The use of face mask when talking to people has also become a regular practice. A cursory examination of the simple preventive actions would not be easy to practice in schools, and no wonder schools are closed. The educational sector generally is the wheel of development of nations, with its closure and consequent negative effect on students' learning and educational achievement, one cannot help but imagine the possible long-term effect this might have on higher education and its impact on national development. Obviously, the landscape of higher education teaching and learning must undergo some transformation to keep safe and still be fully engaged in active and productive education. The sudden outbreak of Covid-19 has led to scholars and education stakeholders to devise ways of moving instruction from physical campuses to online instruction. This sudden shift in content delivery will require a lot of resources to be designed, provision of infrastructure, equipment and manpower training to help students and instructors adjust to the new online study (Farahami, 2003; Salmon, 2001). Existing and experienced online faculty would have to share materials and their experience with other faculty members not accustomed to online instructions. Consequently, the higher education sector will need leadership, solidarity and collaboration to defeat the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on students' learning and to make the new phase of higher education in Nigeria to be effective and efficient.

This paper therefore seeks to examine and attempt to discuss the management of the impact of Covid-19 on higher education system in Nigeria through transformational leadership. This will be discussed under the following sub-headings:- Issues in higher education before Covid-19, impact of Covid-19 on higher education, challenges of Covid-19 on higher education, managing the consequences of Covid-19 through transformational leadership, conclusion will be drawn, and suggestions made.

Issues in Higher Education before COVID-19

Higher education or tertiary education refers to education given after secondary education in Polytechnics, Monotechnic, Colleges of Education and Universities as well as other institutions that offer Correspondence and Professional courses. (FRN, 2014). Education generally is an instrument for socio-economic and political development in any country. For education to enhance national development it must be relevant and adaptable to the needs of the society. However, there is apparent disenchantment among students, parents, government and the populace about the quality and relevance of higher education in Nigeria. Dabalén and Oni (Ojeje, 2016) revealed in their study that university graduates are poorly trained and unproductive on the job and that graduate skills have steadily degenerated over the past two decades.

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There is therefore a need for greater accountability on the way higher education is managed to deliver quality education to become more efficient and effective. The aims of higher education stipulated in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) include:

- 1) To contribute to national development through high-level relevant manpower.
- 2) To develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society.
- 3) To develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment.
- 4) To acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society.
- 5) To promote and encourage scholarship and community services.
- 6) To forge and cement national unity; and
- 7) To promote national and international understanding and interaction (FRN, 2014).
These goals are to be achieved through;
 - 1) Teaching;
 - 2) Research and development;
 - 3) Knowledge generation and dissemination, and international cooperation;
 - 4) Dedicated services to the communities through extra-mural and consultancy services (FRN, 2014).

The achievement of these goals has remained a mirage as research evidence reveals that higher education in Nigeria is plagued with many factors (Gatawa, 2019; Ojeje, 2016; Asiyai, 2013). Some of these factors include:

- 1) **Inadequate Funding for Academic Programmes and Infrastructure:** This is a critical and persistent issue that has threatened the attainment of quality higher education in Nigeria. The effect of poor funding has led to;
 - a. Inadequate and outdated library books.
 - b. Inadequate scientific materials.
 - c. Limited funds for conferences and exchange programme.
 - d. Inadequate capital resources resulting in overcrowded and dilapidated facilities, lecture halls and hostels.
 - e. Inadequate staffing and training, poor motivation and poor staff morale inadequate research capacity among others.
- 2) **Declining Academic Standards:** Okonjo-Iweala, (2012) observed that universities produced graduates that lack the skills needed to perform tasks required in their chosen fields making them unemployable. And this problem has continued unabated.
- 3) **Enrolment Pressures into the Universities:** Limited access to higher education and the lack of the capacity of the system to absorb the numbers of students seeking

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admission has led to admission explosion and decline of quality and increased examination malpractice (McGowan, 2020).

- 4) **Frequent Labour disputes and Closure of Universities:** Continual disputes between the Academic Staff Union of Nigeria University (ASUU), Non-Academic Staff Union of Nigeria University (NASUU), Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP) etc. and the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) lead to closures of institutions which obstruct academic work. The variables that induce dispute include poor conditions of service of staff, non-implementation of ASUU/FGN agreements etc. These closures affect staff productivity and realization of educational aims.
- 5) **Poor Leadership at the Government and Institution Levels:** Poor leadership at the government affects quality of higher education. Asiyai, (2013) stated that one way of assessing government commitment to educational development in any country is budgetary allocation to education which has remained very poor in Nigeria; less than 10% of Nigeria's GDP in 2012 was allocated to education sector, as against UNESCO's recommendation of 26%. In addition, some of the higher institutions' administrators had poor leadership qualities that create communication problems and unhealthy relationships with staff. This has a negative effect on the attainment of quality higher education programmes as revealed in their inability to handle the difficulties in the curriculum and its delivery. The above discussion has demonstrated that higher education has plethora of issues that has lowered its impact on national development and bringing transformation to the citizens and society. And now another grave issue attends the higher education sector – COVID–19 Pandemic.

Impact of COVID – 19 on the Management of Higher Education

The spread of the coronavirus led to the temporary closure of all schools (primary to tertiary) in Nigeria by the Federal Ministry of Education on March 23, 2020 in a bid to contain its spread. However, school closures impact students, teachers, families as well as have grave economic and societal consequences. These social and economic issues include student debt (Jamerson & Mitchell, 2020) digital learning, food, security, health care and internet among others. (Karp & McGowan, 2020). In response to school closures UNESCO recommended the use of distance learning programmes and open educational applications and platforms that schools can use to reach learners remotely and limit disruption of education (UNESCO, 2020).

The Nigeria Federal Ministry of Education came up with the idea of e-learning, but they did not come out with any clear – cut policy measures on how to mitigate the effects of keeping students out of school for a long time. This is probably because the Nigeria's educational sector especially tertiary education lacks the needed technology to cater for her

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students. There is also the issue of teachers' lack of skills, capability and resources to deliver live lectures online. To limit the impact of Covid-19 on higher education, education managers, educators, and policy makers must re-think the way higher education is delivered and accessed by students, and some scholars have come up with the most valuable and effective means of limiting the impact of Covid-19 on education, this is known as distance learning, since one of the safe measures on preventing the spread of Covid-19 is social distancing.

Distance Learning as Measure for Reducing the Impact of COVID 19 in Higher Education

Distance education or distance learning is the education of students who may not always be physically present at a school. Traditionally, it only involved correspondence courses where students corresponded with the school through post. But today, it involves online education. According to Jordan, (2020) and Karp and McGowan, (2020), distance learning programme can be completely distance learning, or a combination of distance learning and traditional classroom instruction. This is reflected in Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), offering large-scale interactive participation and open access through the world wide web or other network technologies. Other terms used to describe distance education are distributed learning, e-learning, m-learning, online learning and virtual classroom.

The writers believe that a combination of online learning and the traditional classroom instruction have to be adequately planned and implemented, not just to limit the negative impact of Covid-19 on higher education, but to present this combination of online learning and traditional classroom instruction as a paradigm shift, which is believed will bring the needed transformation into higher education sector for more productivity. This transformation in teaching and learning has its attendant challenges which higher education managers must brace up to handle for effective and efficient quality higher education delivery for the country. Before discussing the challenges, the advantages of online and traditional classroom instruction will be highlighted.

Online learning is electronic mode of knowledge sharing and transmission that may not incline physical contact between teacher and student (Jordan, (2020). Instruction is easily accessed through the internet, it is flexible, ensures broad feasibility and availability of educational opportunities. It has the power to transform education. It is therefore essential to bring it into the classroom to empower learning. Online education enables students to become thinkers, learners who take risk in sheltered environment. It improves lecturers' digital literacy and allows a mobile learning environment. Online education also helps to equip students with employable skills in the digital world. It is the process in which

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students learn and are educated using electronic means and mainly through personal computers. (Almeida, 2016; Oroke, 2019).

There is no doubt that online learning will complement the traditional classroom instruction which will provide productive teaching and learning. This will increase students' creative and intellectual resources especially in today's information society. In addition, students will develop capacities for high quality learning which will increase their ability to innovate. Although online education has great potentials to provide best standards and approaches that ensure effective education delivery in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria, it has major challenges.

Challenges of Distance Learning Education in Nigeria

Some of the challenges of effective implementation of distance education in Nigeria include funding, weak and inadequate infrastructure, lack of skills, lack of relevant software, limited access to internet, school curriculum among others.

- (1) **Funding:** In developing countries like Nigeria the cost of computers is very high. It will take government strong commitment to higher education to provide adequate number of computers to institutions of higher learning. In addition to the cost of the computers are the costs of associated printers, monitors, modern, disks etc. There are also the exorbitant internet connection fees.
- (2) **Weak and Inadequate Infrastructure:** Computers are designed to function with electricity under controlled conditions. Nigeria has not been able to provide stable and reliable electricity supply for her citizens; this can lead to damage of computers because of the inconsistent power supply (Oroke, 2013).
- (3) **Lack of Skills:** Nigeria lacks the human skills and knowledge to fully integrate online education into higher education learning process. There is need for trained workers to install and maintain the systems. Again, most lecturers lack the skills to utilize technology in curriculum implementation, hence the great reliance on the traditional/transmissive classroom teaching. Lecturers need effective tools, techniques and assistance that can help them develop computer-based projects and activities designed to raise the level of teaching that will improve students' learning.
- (4) **Lack of Relevant Software:** There is evidence that in developing countries like Nigeria, the supply of relevant and appropriate software is a major problem obstructing the wider application of the computer, and lack of qualified computer software designers (Oroke, 2019).
- (5) **School Curriculum:** Most of the students have no computer education background from their elementary and secondary schools.

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- (6) **Poor Leadership:** This is occasioned by corruption, mal-administration, poor supervisory mechanism and inadequate protection and maintenance of school facilities.

The Role of Management on the Consequences of Covid-19 on Higher Education

The sudden shift in content delivery in higher education necessitated by the outbreak of Covid-19 has placed great responsibility on tertiary education managers, and stakeholders to design education resources to help students and lecturers adjust to the new online study combined with the traditional physical classroom environment. The management of tertiary institutions in Nigeria is in two levels: The external and internal levels. At the external levels the federal government controls the institutions through the National Universities Commission (NUC), the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) charged with the co-ordination of the various higher education institutions. At the internal level, the governing council, chaired by the Pro Chancellor in Universities, Chairman of Governing Council for Polytechnics and Colleges of Education. These people work with the tertiary institutions' team made up of Vice Chancellor for universities, Rector for Polytechnics, Provost for Colleges of Education and their team members who are Principal Officers: The Registrar (secretary), the Bursar (Chief Accounting Officer), the Librarian, and the Director of Works as applicable to various tertiary institutions.

The management of higher education at these two levels must be committed to carrying out their responsibilities effectively. The internal management level has the burden of effectively managing the transformation in content delivery occasioned by Covid-19 impact. Managing tertiary education is a teamwork. There are several faculties, departments, units, and centres that operate as subsystems that have different patterns of putting forward views, positions and decisions on crucial issues. This is why Walker and Lawler (cited in Okubotimibi, Nosakare & Ejeromedoghene, 2017) posited that managing tertiary institutions is done on committee basis.

However, the internal management team chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, Rector or Provost for Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education respectively approves every decision and so are held accountable for the success or failure of the system. It, therefore, implies that the manager of higher institution (Vice-Chancellor, Rector, Provost) as the case maybe must have a good leadership style/approach that would help him effect the new shift in content delivery in higher education.

There are various leadership styles and models which could be narrowed down to two broad models – transactional and transformational leadership (Ojeje, 2017; Rich, 2013;

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Riggio & Murphy, 2003). The transactional leadership style is described by Bass and Riggio, (2006) as involving an exchange process that results on followers' compliance with leader request but not likely to generate enthusiasm and commitment to a task objective. Transactional leadership starts with the idea that employees agree to obey their leader totally when they accept a job. It implies that the organization pays the team members in return for their effort and compliance. And the leader has the right to punish employees if their work does not meet the pre-determined standards.

Transformational leadership on the other hand is a theory where a leader works with team members to identify needed change, creating a vision to guide the change through inspiration, and executing the change in alliance with committed members of a group (Towler, 2019). Transformational leadership serves to enhance the motivation, morale, and job performance of followers through a variety of mechanisms which include: connecting the followers' senses of identity and self to a project and to the collective identity of the organization; being a role model for followers to inspire them and to raise their interest in the project; challenging followers to take greater ownership for their work, and understanding the strength and weaknesses of followers; and allowing the leader to align followers with tasks that enhance their performance.

Bass and Riggio, (2006) identified three ways in which leaders transform followers (i) increasing their awareness of the value and importance of tasks (ii) Getting them to focus first on team/organizational goals before their own interests (iii) Activating their higher order needs. He also asserted that transformational leaders transform their followers to higher levels of performances and other positive work-related outcomes through four dimensions: (i) Charisma/Idealized Influence (ii) Inspirational Motivation (iii) Intellectual Stimulation and (iv) Individualized Consideration.

One way of pursuing this new agenda for online education in Nigeria with its attendant challenges would be through the acceleration of the development and application of the transformational leadership behaviours in managers of tertiary institutions. This implies that tertiary education managers that can drive this change must have strong vision for change, be creative, motivate and inspire lecturers and students and all staff to break away from the old way of doing things to embrace a new, more enthusiastic and effective approach. Pursuing the agenda of online education in higher institutions will require leaders who will inspire and motivate staff and students towards the achievement of the goals of higher education. The transactional leadership approach that is prevalent in tertiary education management would not achieve the goals of online education, because to effectively implement online learning requires commitment and hard work, perseverance and collaboration with staff in the same school community and other institutions. The

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lecturers and students must understand and appreciate the values expected from online education. The managers/leaders and lecturers must put the interest of the students and that of society above their personal interests. The transformational manager does not just run the activities of the institution but seeks to make things better through genuine collaboration between team members and stakeholders. The transformational manager empowers members of the learning community to improve from within. (Oroke, 2013).

Transformational Leadership on Effective Management of Higher Education and Consequences of COVID - 19

It has been highlighted that the way forward for higher education progress in Nigeria will require a new agenda of transformation from the old traditional/transmissive classroom instructions in a physical classroom to online education that would incorporate occasional physical classroom interactions. It appears that the managers of higher education using the transformational leadership behaviours would be more effective in achieving the goals of tertiary education. Though online courses have been going on in very skeletal level in some universities, it must be on a full-blown scale because of the experience from Covid-19 pandemic, though, in addition to the physical classroom interaction experience which should be designed on a minimal meeting schedule. This should be designed and be based on the instructions from WHO on Covid-19 preventive measures in the campuses.

There is evidence (Farahami, 2003; Salmon, 2001) that online instruction was becoming increasing popular among students. The enrollment growth projection for online courses has consistently increased. The Department of Education, (2000) reported that the internet is changing the landscape of education in the United States and the world and calls upon “an e-learning agenda” as a centerpiece of the nation’s federal education policy. This e-learning has become reasonable in Nigerian tertiary institutions occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic. This has thrown a challenge to faculty and the tertiary education administrators on how to manage e-learning to achieve the goals of higher education in Nigeria. Instructors will have to develop new skills to design course contents, learn the technology to create a course online community and distribute the information to students, creating a virtual class community and to bring all students and their ideas together. This digital transformation of higher education institutions in Nigeria will require managers (Vice-Chancellor, Rector, Provost) who will first of all understand the need for the new agenda and become transformational leaders, so that they can influence their staff, academic and non-academic including students to buy into online course delivery and learning.

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Online instructional delivery will require rethinking many aspects of educational delivery to help students succeed. The frame of mind and certain behavioural patterns and norms already cultivated by instructors and students on physical classroom learning will have to be changed and new ones developed. It is assumed that with the commitment of Federal government to provide the needed infrastructure and technological materials and equipment for online-learning in our tertiary institutions, other vital aspect of its effectiveness will be the assessment activities which is the responsibility of the faculty, and supervision by the management team. This is where a transformational leader as the institution's manager will have to use the dimensions of transformational leadership discussed above to get things done effectively and efficiently.

The basic elements that should be carried out and monitored closely by the institutions' managers include: (1) the educational materials to be taught by the instructors (2) the teaching and learning activities that should take place in the virtual classroom (3) the assessment activity to measure students' learning and (4) report of the score results given by instructors to the students. These will be influenced by factors such as students' learning styles, the technical implications, the adaptive educative content, the learning and knowledge management, feedbacks and motivation (Salmon, 2001).

Salmon, (2001) further suggested five – step model that could improve quality of interaction in online education: access and motivation, online socialization, information exchange, knowledge construction and development.

- (1) **Access and Motivation:** Students will have to be given information about the availability and assess of the course web site. The course syllabus could be posted to provide information about the course requirements, the assessments, grading criteria, time management skills, the instructor's contact information as well as some encouragement.
- (2) **Online Socialization:** Social interaction is the initial step of creating an online learning community. This is important due to the importance of socialization and networking by participants to create interactivity (Salmon, 2001). This stage is unfamiliar to new online students, the course design therefore should foster the opportunity for participants to learn how to interact and communicate informally. This social interaction will help students feel comfortable and free from the feeling of isolation or solitude, thereby fostering a welcoming learning community that cultivates live discussions.
- (3) **Information Exchange:** This stage serves as an orientation to the course and provides the opportunity for information exchange that afford the instruction the ability to provide direction to the students in using information about the course.

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This also helps students to learn where to find or access relevant information to the course.

- (4) **Knowledge Construction:** The interaction through written communication helps students to connect with course materials and the synergy of this interaction fosters deep learning. Interactivity is built into the course design to allow students to freely discuss their issues and their points of view. The instructor serves as a guide and an equal partner (Collison et.al, 2000).
- (5) **Development:** At this stage the participants use the information provided to them and construct their own meaning based on their interpretation and past experience and knowledge. They employ critical thinking techniques to construct their own meaning of materials given to them to complete their assignments, projects or commenting on each other's writing.

From the above presentation, it is evident that faculty will have to be trained in on-line course design and assessment in order to make online education in higher education in Nigeria achieve its educational aims, and the manager must be prepared to effect such transformation by exhibiting the characteristics of transformational leadership.

Conclusion

Covid-19 has brought tremendous challenges which have changed the landscape of higher education in Nigeria. Like most private Universities, the management team of higher education at various levels, in collaboration with Federal Government must work together to provide necessary infrastructure and equipment needed for effective online education. And to effectively manage change, the change agents – managers of higher education must be transformed in their approach. Change is not easy to effect, that is why the transformational leadership style that motivates team members to work together to identify needed change and pursue it with a clear vision is presented as a veritable tool for managers of higher education for the effective implementation of online education to combat the impact of Covid-19 on Nigeria higher education sector.

Suggestions

The following suggestions are made:

- (1) The Federal Government of Nigeria in collaboration with Management of Universities should organize orientation programmes/conferences for the managers of higher education on the magnitude of the new online agenda for higher education and what is required of them.
- (2) The Federal Government of Nigeria in collaboration with experts in transformational leadership should organize trainings and seminars on the dimensions and characteristics of transformational leadership for managers of

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higher education, so that it can be applied effectively in their management activities.

- (3) Faculty must be trained by experts in online education on the use of technology in online courses, designing and assessing online courses and developing reports that can be used to assess the progress of the programme, in order to make necessary adjustments where and when necessary.
- (4) Students must also be well informed on what is expected from them and properly guided to respond enthusiastically. They will be greatly encouraged if materials and equipment are available and adequate.

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