

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

## CHAPTER TWENTY

### MANAGEMENT OF COVID-19 IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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#### **Abstract**

The corona virus pandemic has brought about a lot of changes to our society and the fact that the virus can affect anyone despite differences in race, sex, and social status has encouraged cooperation by nations of the world to find a cure for it. The virus has led to people's regular lives being reorganized as they have little or no idea on what is going to happen next as regards to the decision of their government. This paper focuses on the effects of the COVID 19 pandemic on the university system which includes all its staff, students, and environment. Social Distancing in University Education and Strengthening of Campus Network Infrastructure, some options that the university could use to reshape the university system after the COVID 19 pandemics, COVID 19: A threat to university education in Nigeria, negative effects of COVID-19 on the university system in Nigeria, COVID 19 and functionality of online university education system, challenges of online learning, The Nigerian public universities and the aftermath of COVID 19 pandemic were discussed among others. It was suggested that National University Commission should strengthen campus network infrastructure for continued student lecturer interaction as well as staff-university interaction.

**Keywords:** Social Distancing, Covid-19 Pandemic, Nigerian Universities, Strengthening

#### **Introduction**

The term COVID 19 is the name of a contagious disease that is caused by a new virus: corona virus. The term COVID 19 must be discussed to unravel its intensity and how it has affected the Nigerian society "On Dec. 31, 2019, Chinese authorities alerted the World Health Organization of pneumonia cases in Wuhan City, Hubei province, China, with an unknown cause. What started as a mystery disease was first referred to as 2019-nCoV and

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then named COVID-19”. ‘COVID-19—a timeline of the coronavirus outbreak’). This disease is highly infectious, and its symptoms include mild to moderate respiratory illness which has proven to be fatal since its spread. The COVID-19 virus spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes, so it’s important that you also practice respiratory etiquette (for example, by coughing into a flexed elbow). (World Health Organization, 2020) The elderly and people with underlying health issues are more likely to contract the disease. Scientists around the world are working at an accelerated pace to test different types of vaccines that could help to stop the spread of COVID-19. (Gavi: the vaccine alliance, 2020). The effects of COVID 19 on the society are very glaring. COVID 19 has affected the economic and social aspects of human life. COVID 19 has destroyed people’s jobs, taken the lives of loved ones and distorted people's regular way of life due to government ordered lockdowns limiting movement and conducting of business activities and halting schooling activities.

### **Social Distancing in University Education and Strengthening of Campus Network Infrastructure**

COVID 19 has impacted greatly on the education of students globally. Due to the pandemic, closure of schools was taken as a measure to prevent the virus from spreading rapidly. This preventive measure though effective has caused some disadvantage to students all over the world.

#### **Social Distancing**

Social distancing refers to the practice applied to prevent the gathering of people in such a way that they could contact the infectious diseases. The social distancing measures are most advisable for environments where the COVID 19 carriers are not known. The general distance for preventing the spread of COVID 19 is at least 6 feet between every person. Increasing the physical distance between individuals can reduce transmission of the virus, and everyone returning to campus must consistently follow social distancing practices. In all shared spaces, the University will establish protocols and reminders to keep at least six feet of space between individuals. (Northwestern, 2020)

Social distancing was applied in countries to curb the virus. To be on the safe side, students and staff of universities must always engage in social distancing to avoid further contamination and spread of COVID 19.

Some activities the university need to enforce to curtail the spread of COVID 19 are:

1. Checking students for symptoms of COVID 19 before they enter the campus and when they leave

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2. Educate students on COVID 19 and the means to protect themselves from contamination.
3. Encourage the use of face masks and hand sanitizers among students and staff
4. Making physical distancing mandatory.
5. Disinfect the campus environment. (Ogunyemi, 2020).

### **Strengthening of Campus Network Infrastructure**

The internet has proven to be very necessary in the times we are facing. It is therefore essential that the Nigerian university campuses adopt and apply e-learning (which is teaching and learning through the use of the internet and internet facilities) to cope with the changes that the COVID 19 pandemic has caused to the education system. As COVID-19 spread rapidly, the university community in an effort to protect the health of students and staff had to be shut down. Despite this, universities have to meet up with their plans which meant they had to find an alternative to carry out their activities. Some universities have now maintained an online presence to continue student lecturer interaction as well as staff-university interaction. Below are some issues that limit the campus network in Nigeria:

The tertiary level, regulatory issues have complicated efforts to develop full-blown online learning for years. National University Commission (NUC), Nigeria's university regulatory body, does not recognise "online universities" and has no regulatory cover for such institutions. There is no regulation that allows you to establish a private online university," says Kola Aina, an investor who owns EduPlatforms, an Edtech company that operates the Edu iLearn platform for universities. NUC regulation does not allow universities to fully provide learning remotely. (Idris, 2020). Without online learning platforms, a few Nigerian universities have switched to WhatsApp.)

The price of internet access is not affordable. Last year, the Nigerian Communications Commission announced a removal of a data floor price, thus allowing phone networks to set data prices as low as possible. The result: price of data is now cheaper than ever before. (Kazeem, 2016). Online degrees are "unacceptable" in Nigeria even though they could plug an education gap). Although the Nigerian Communications Commission announced reduction in the price of data still the data cost is proving a challenge to students and staff of universities that want to engage in e-learning. Now more than ever, the importance of the internet and communication technology has been proven. With all sorts of businesses ordered to avoid physical access to clients and customers, the Nigerian universities had to

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find a way to carry out business and not attract sanctions and criticisms from government and the public as well as avoid the scandal of a deceased student or faculty member while on campus. As a result of the universities use of the internet and internet-based technology, they have been able to support the delivery of their services to students, this has not been done without limitations of course. Not all students can afford the constant internet access, the inconsistent power supply and some do not have devices that are internet compatible. To be able to implement e-learning, universities would have to take into consideration the needs of their students and staff to ensure they can have a means to keep the university stable and in continuous operation. The Nigerian universities will definitely come out stronger after the pandemic clears because they would have improved themselves in the process.

### **Nigerian Universities Beyond the Corona Virus Crisis**

As the effects of COVID 19 are reducing in some countries, these countries would have to look to the future and think of what comes next. They cannot run things the same way because a lot has changed. In Nigeria, universities administrators must come up with new strategies on how to run the institutions to stay on top and maintain stability. The government is now reducing restrictions on curfews and public gatherings, university administrators should have planned on how they can adjust to the changes arising from COVID 19 pandemic.

### **Some Options the University can use to Reshape the University System after the COVID 19 Pandemics:**

1. Enlighten the student and staff on the new rules enforced to prevent the spread of COVID 19
2. Restructuring the budget for new necessities that may arise due to effects of the pandemic.
3. Creating more means of revenue for the university such as restaurants, farms, production of beauty products etc.

Universities are vital to every society because they are necessary for developing and encouraging skills knowledge and attitudes an individual will need to face the society and be successful. Universities are also the grounds on which discoveries that impact heavily in the society are made. Therefore, the need for a properly planned reopening of schools is necessary. Assessments should be made of the old facilities such as healthcare centres, toilets, auditoriums where there are large gatherings, places where food is served and systems of running the university that could encourage the further spread of COVID 19. It

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should also be taken into consideration that due to the economic impacts of COVID 19 on the families, it would not be easy for students depending on their parents to pay their fees (Banjo, 28 May 2020). Universities would have to decide if they should reduce fees, cancel fees entirely, grant student loans or face a large number of dropouts. Many decisions and actions need to be planned out before universities resume fully. Although the process might be strenuous at first, early planning will make things easier.

There is also the issue that affects the masses and that is the inequality in the distribution of wealth in Nigeria. Many Nigerians even feel that COVID 19 is targeting the rich of the country because they are corrupt. Several of Nigeria's elite class contracted the virus and some even perished. (BBC News, 2020). *Coronavirus: Why some Nigerians are gloating about COVID-19*. A report from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), from 2018 to 2019 said 40% of the population in Nigeria is living below its poverty line of 137,430 naira (\$381.75) a year. (Aljazeera, 04 May 2020). *Forty percent of Nigerians live below the poverty line: Report, more than 82 million Nigerians live on less than \$1 a day, according to the National Bureau of Statistics*. One can imagine that if the country has remained the same since then, the poverty rate would have increased tremendously. Nigeria though privileged in its abundance of mineral and natural resources has nothing to show for it. The education sector, according to NAPS this year has an allocation of only N48bn (6.9 per cent) out of the total sum N10.33tn budgeted for 2020 by the federal government. (Tauna, 2020) Budget 2020: NAPS Slams Poor Allocation to Education). This amount is not sufficient enough for the needs that the education sector deserves to adequately provide for the needs of the students of all ages in Nigeria, especially the university students that require state of the art resources in every faculty. It is of the author's opinion that if the federal government prioritises the education sector and its great importance to the future of our nation, there would be an even greater development of the country as the future leaders of the nation will rise from those quality universities.

### COVID 19: A Threat to University Education in Nigeria

Africa has taken the coronavirus pandemic seriously only in the last few weeks, following the confirmation of its first cases. Initial responses included the closure of schools and universities beginning in mid-March (Tamrat, & Teferra, 2020). COVID-19 poses a serious threat to higher education. University World News). Due to the wide spread of COVID 19 and its high rate of contamination and spread, universities worldwide as well as those in Nigeria were shut down. The impact of the deadly coronavirus Sars-CoV-2 is likely to reverberate across global higher education long after the outbreak is eventually brought

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under control, experts have warned (Lau & Ross 2020). Universities brace for lasting impact of coronavirus outbreak). Corona virus' impact will have long lasting effects on the university system even after it is controlled. Even with the state-of-the-art facilities some universities possess, they still could not manage the disastrous effects of COVID 19 which led to full evacuation of universities.

### **Negative Effects of COVID-19 on the University System in Nigeria**

Negative effects of covid-19 on the university system include but not limited to:

1. The rate of unemployment increased as those self-employed such as some self-dependent students and parents or guardians of dependent students were not allowed to conduct their business for fear of the spread of COVID 19. Those who worked under people such as university staff and parents of students were disengaged.
2. Universities risk losing an entire year of learning which affects students and staff respectively.
3. Students have been delayed from graduating or writing exams which is a setback for them and the plans they had for their future.
4. Students who can't afford online classes would have missed out a lot and would be behind their peers who can afford online classes thereby widening the already existing inequality in the Nigerian educational system
5. Students are facing difficulty studying at home due to various distractions and issues that arise from being there. Some students could even be facing physical and emotional abuse with no one to turn to for help as there is a lockdown of states. These students will have difficulty resuming due to traumatic events they faced during the pandemic.
6. Some students have been appointed as the breadwinner of their family, so they must do one form of work or another to care for their family. Such students will not have a chance to study properly
7. Students are not able to interact properly with their lecturers and ask questions that could benefit their other classmates.
8. Students and staff would lose out on the knowledge from conferences, seminars, tutorials that usually do not occur online.
9. Universities that do not carry out online courses would be behind other institutions when schools fully resume.
10. Universities that try to pay their staff will have difficulty making any profit due to students not paying fees.

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11. Students who are poor might choose to resort to criminal or immoral means to obtain money to survive.
12. Students who conducted business in the university have lost their means of livelihood meaning some students are not even living properly during the lockdown period. These students would most likely dropout from the university due to exhausting all their funds to survive the stay at home order.
13. Universities would not be able to obtain loans or donations from many beneficiaries due to the economic impact of COVID 19 on many businesses.
14. The pandemic has brought about a limitation in the quality education that students should receive.
15. Border restrictions and travel bans prevent foreign exchange students from coming to the university as well as Nigerian students from going abroad for study.
16. Foreign students and lecturers may not have interests in coming to Nigeria if the response of Nigerian universities to the pandemic is not improved.

### **COVID 19 and Functionality of Online University Education System**

A few weeks after the first cases of COVID 19 in Nigeria were confirmed, the federal government opted to order closure of schools and universities pushing university administrators to find an alternative form of teaching and learning. With the pandemic moving instruction exclusively online, universities must accept that the game has changed and look for new ways to move forward with virtual learning. With efforts being made to move all educational instruction online and at home, educators are now having to evaluate their teaching models, moving their curriculum away from the sanctity of a lecture hall to one that is done behind a webcam (Brightbill, 2020). Online learning is already used worldwide but has not been embraced with such fervour as the countries abroad. Online education is a flexible instructional delivery system that encompasses any kind of learning that takes place via the Internet. Online learning gives educators an opportunity to reach students who may not be able to enroll in a traditional classroom course and supports students who need to work on their own schedule and at their own pace. (Jones 2020). Online education is educating students with the use of the internet and Information Communication Technology (ICT) to foster/ support the teaching and learning process from different locations. The COVID-19 pandemic forced universities to switch their entire instructional apparatus to one of online delivery overnight. Thus, it is no longer a question of whether online education can deliver the promise of a quality higher education and rather one of how universities can immediately and effectively and embrace mass adoption of online learning. (Liguria & Winkler, 2020).

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### Challenges of Online Learning

1. Increased rate of unemployment has left people without the means to afford online learning.
2. Poor infrastructure, lack of power are some problems of Online learning as seen in Okocha
3. , (2020). Internet brings academic work to a virtual standstill. University World News, Africa Education, Nigeria.)
4. Insufficient funding of universities to maintain online activities.
5. Internet connectivity is inconsistent and has poor quality which affects student learning with applications they use for online learning like WhatsApp, Zoom act (Idris, 2020). Without online learning platforms, a few Nigerian universities have switched to WhatsApp.)
6. Some students and staff of university are not used to online lectures and may not act in their best capacity while using it.
7. Nigeria's National University Commission (NUC) does not have regulations supporting online education which poses a big problem to universities that have already started using it and those that plan to. (Idris, 2020).
8. Due to these issues, only the upper class to average class will be able to afford online classes. Soyombo in Okocha 2020. "Once you cannot guarantee equal access for all the students – some in Lagos, some outside Lagos, some in their villages – then really it will not be ideal to have anything like that. Unfortunately, we cannot guarantee internet access in Nigeria. "This will mean students from rural communities will be behind their peers. After the closure of schools was approved by the federal ministry of education on 19th March 2020, private universities began online classes through social media platforms or meeting applications. Some private schools have even written exams and are prepared for students to resume as soon as restrictions are lifted. This leaves a huge inequality in the education system in Nigeria.
9. Children in rural and underserved communities in Nigeria are being left behind as they are not equipped to adapt or transition to new methods of learning.

Governmental reforms in the national curriculum would help bridge the gap in inequality, as would PPPs. (Amorighoye, 2020). COVID-19 has exposed the education divide in Nigeria. This is how we can close it.) One must wonder how the students from poor homes will manage to resume school when this pandemic has not been in their favour at all

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(Ladipo & Adebayo 2020). COVID-19 is exacerbating some challenges on the educational inequity in Nigeria.

Some solutions to online education inaccessibility are:

- a. The government of states can distribute ICT devices to students without any so they can have participated in online learning
- b. The government and the university boards can make arrangements with data suppliers to provide free data on streets or public areas so students can access it from their homes
- c. The government and university boards can also plan with data suppliers to give students data discounts, for those who can afford data at all.
- d. Lecturers can recommend videos or websites for students to access lectures similar to what they would have been taught in their universities.
- e. Broadcasting lectures on the radio or on television so all students can easily access it.

### **Rebuilding Efforts in the University Education at COVID-19**

Amidst the crisis, governments all over the world are thinking, what next? What can be done after the crisis and will the effects make us stronger. Will we be able to overcome the effects of the crisis? Due to these insecurities, plans are already in motion for the future of the university system and that of the nation as well. The economic strain, massive loss of life, increased unemployment rate, education inequality is among the problems COVID 19 has caused to the nation. The author suggests that to be able to come out of this stronger would take effective planning and cooperation of all members of the society.

The nation will have to focus firstly on restoration of the economy, creation of more jobs to reduce unemployment rate, distribution of welfare services for the needy and investment in sectors of the economy that would boost the economy more. The government in corporation with the university should encourage the practice of vocational courses so students can have means to build their future.

The importance of university education has tripled now more than ever. The need for more medical staff knowledge of sciences and other fields of knowledge that are thriving such as computer science will be increased. Therefore, universities need to improve the state of their campus before a new student's intake. There is even a chance that universities will be online only, if the risk of contamination is excessive in the university campuses.

Students and staff that have been affected greatly by the virus such as recovered patients, those who lost a loved one to the virus should receive support and counselling if necessary.

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It is therefore necessary to find new sustainable means to generate income that can support the university. Universities will need to identify the factors that will worsen the effects of COVID 19 and how best to remove those situations that threaten the security of people in the university (Lau & Ross, February 17, 2020).

### **The Nigerian Public Universities and the Aftermath of COVID 19 Pandemic**

In the aftermath of COVID 19, universities must pull together resources and advocate for government support and benefactors in order to restructure the university to reverse the effects of COVID 19 on the university system. This might be a challenge due to the economic decline that is occurring during the pandemic. As a result, universities would have to rely solely on their businesses and expand same if possible. With the scenario in mind that there may not be enough funding from the government or benefactors, public universities will probably not resume or will be on strike. The private universities will have to reduce staff or other expenses and may lose a lot if students' tuition is not paid on time. If the economy does not improve quickly, there will be long lasting negative effects on the students of the country as well as the staff who rely on universities for work and wages (Okocha, 09 April 2020). Nigerian students will have to source for new means of learning if their universities cannot come through. Those that can afford electronic devices for online learning may continue with online classes, which leaves those that cannot afford it no choice but to wait for Nigerian universities to become stable again. Some lecturers might even decide to hold private paid lectures for students so they can earn a living if the university pays them insufficiently or dismisses them from work. Although the federal government released guidelines for the containment of COVID 19, plans for the future are still pending.

### **Federal Government Guidelines for Academic Institutions**

1. Academic institutions and Social engagements
2. All schools to remain closed till further evaluation
3. Schools are encouraged to continue with e-learning and visual teaching

These guidelines aren't enough to ease the anxiety and fear the students of public universities are having at this time. More needs to be done to ensure that schools resume as soon as there is no threat of contracting COVID 19. Despite the difficulties Nigerian universities might face on the road to reopening schools, they could pick up some practices from universities abroad and how they managed to open despite their own obstacles. If the issue of finances is resolved,

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Nigerian universities may decide to emulate foreign countries. Countries like China, Japan, Denmark and Norway employed some strategies to reopen schools while keeping in mind the safety of students and staff. Some of those strategies includes:

- a. Disinfecting schools before and after classes before allowing people in the next day.
- b. Not allowing outsiders to enter the school including parents of students
- c. Enforcement of the use of face masks and hand sanitizers
- d. Checking student's temperature for fever
- e. Holding classes outdoors
- f. Spacing desks 6 feet apart
- g. Halting any activities or gatherings that require body contact or share spaces.
- h. Closing libraries, cafeterias and enclosed classrooms.
- i. Students are required to wash their hands frequently.
- j. Division of students into smaller groups and separate classes.
- k. Staff with risky health conditions and those over the age of 65 are informed to remain home
- l. House to house testing to find out those who have symptoms of COVID 19. (Cavanagh, 2020). How 6 countries are opening up schools again, with temperature checks, outdoor classes, and spaced out desks.)

Even with the issue of reopening universities that the public universities face, it seems private universities have it under control. Universities like Babcock and Lead City University are ready to resume as they have safety measures in place to ensure students are well protected from the risk of contracting COVID 19. (Banjo, 2020).

As soon as the restrictions for university's operating are removed, they would resume and allow students to return to the campus. Some private universities have already conducted classes and exams online leaving students anticipating resumption. Some students cannot to resume studies because they are tired of staying at home with nothing significant to do daily. Some students have even started online businesses such as tutorials, blogs, YouTube channels, Instagram business pages etc., to ensure they can afford to pay their fees when school resumes or simply try to provider for themselves and their families. Other students fear the resumption of schools because they worry, they could contact COVID 19. Most students cannot pay their fees on time, the added issue of being terminally ill if they happen to contact COVID 19 weigh heavy on them. This means there might be a chance many students would not resume school, and some will go abroad to continue learning if there are continuous delays in reopening. There is a lot of consideration that must be taken to curb COVID 19 in the effort to reopen the universities but with careful planning, safe

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implementation and keeping in mind the situation of the students and staff of the university, there will be a good chance that the Nigerian universities will have no issues in starting up again in full swing.

### Conclusion

Despite all the situations Nigeria faces in the effort to reopen schools, the occurrence of COVID 19 has brought about realisations and eye-openers that should have been realised since. The government will now realise the importance of strengthening the nation's healthcare system, its education system and internet quality and accessibility. The universities should also learn to plan for any contingencies that could disrupt the systems normal procedures. An outright and total reformation and focus on the sectors that are the most crucial to the Nigerian citizens as well as the economy will bring Nigeria to the next level.

### Suggestions

The following suggestions were given:

1. Parents/guardians should educate students on COVID-19 pandemic and the means to protect themselves from contamination.
2. National University Commission should strengthen campus network infrastructure for continued student lecturer interaction as well as staff-university interaction.
3. Universities administrators should come up with new strategies on how to run the institutions to stay on top and maintain stability amidst the pandemic.
4. Universities administrators need to improve the state of art facilities in their campuses before resumption after COVID-19 pandemic.
5. The federal government should ensure that schools are encouraged to continue with e-learning and visual teaching by providing the necessary funds.

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