



Classroom Crisis in Higher Institutions of Learning under the New Normal: Administrative Coping Strategies

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Abstract: Educational institutions globally have suffered setback as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic which led to closure of schools for almost a year. This paper examined classroom crisis in higher institutions of learning under the new normal: administrative coping strategies. Secondary data were used to support the points raised in the paper. The data were sourced from print materials and online publications by recognized institutions and individual authors. The paper identified difficulty in the coverage of syllabus, poor knowledge of information and communication technology (ICT), cancelations of conferences, poor network service, inadequate ICT facilities, expensive data coupled with economic hardship, difficulty in social distance observation, pressure from school management, high rate of drop out and increased in workload as challenges facing higher educational institutions under the new normal. It was also identified that online academic activities, blended learning approach, arrangement of extra classes, running of parallel session and adjustment of academic calendar are some of the administrative strategies employed by schools. It was suggested that schools should provide ICT training for both staff and students, provide adequate ICT facilities, ensure stable electricity supply, amongst others.

Keywords: Challenges, Higher Education, New Normal, COVID-19, Administrative Strategies, Nigeria

1. INTRODUCTION

The nationwide lockdown in Nigeria for nearly a year due to the Coronavirus (COVID 19) has resulted in the closure of schools. As a result, an academic session has been lost, necessitating



administrative coping strategies to compensate for the loss session under the new normal. “New normal is a current situation, social custom, etc., that is different from what has been experienced or done before but is expected to become usual or typical” (dictionary.com, 2021, para. 1). According to Eze et al. (2021) who submit that as schools reopened following the lockdown, educators must rethink education in terms of what, where, how, and when students should learn. Furthermore, information and communication technology is gradually changing the way people learn and teach at all levels. As a result, IT-enhanced learning approaches such as blended learning, computer-assisted learning, and technology should be taught to students in primary and secondary schools. Consequently, there is a growing need to revalidate and modify teaching and learning approaches for all students at all educational levels. They further argued that this will help to overcome access and poor learning during emergency situations in the future and ensure that distance barriers do not hinder education and academic sessions will not be threatened. As such, it is necessary that primary and secondary schools be provided with online infrastructure, learning resources, learning tools.

Higher educational institutions include all tertiary educational institutions such as Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, etc. Ogunode and Musa (2020) cited Obanya (1999) who put forward that higher Education includes all forms of professional institutions drawing from the available pool of persons who have completed a various forms of secondary school education such as Institution of the military, the police, nurses, agriculture, forestry, veterinary workers, catering services, tourism, secretarial services and other possible combinations of programmes.

Tertiary Education is the education given after Post Basic Education in institutions such as Universities and Inter-University Centres such as the Nigeria French Language Village, Nigeria Arabic Language Village, National Institute of Nigerian Languages, institutions such as Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs), and Colleges of Education, Monotechnics, Polytechnics, and other specialized institutions such as Colleges of Agriculture, Schools of Health and Technology and the National Teachers' Institutes (NTI) (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013, P. 26).

International Effort in Managing the Impact of the COVID 19 on Education

Many countries have responded to the impact of the COVID 19 on education in different ways by implementing various forms of strategies as identified by Azzi-huck and Shmis (2021) as follows:

1. Enhancing preparedness while keeping schools open: Countries across the globe enforce different measures such as supporting preventive actions in schools (Afghanistan); limiting physical contact by reducing social and extra-curricular activities (Singapore, Russia); using the education system’s infrastructure and human resources to address the spread of infections in communities (Liberia and Sierra Leone).

2. Selective closing of schools: Some governments have opted for localized school closures as an interim measure (for example India), while others have chosen to close schools entirely due to health concerns.



3. National closing of schools (the most used option globally): As the virus has spread, many countries are announcing national school closures. Many are concerned that children and youth may become carriers of the virus. This could put at risk older family members in communities where multi-generational households are the norm.

4. Using remote learning and education resources to mitigate loss of learning: Countries such as China, Italy, France, Germany and Saudi Arabia have fully implemented online learning in order to reduce the impact of lockdown on education. Vietnam and Mongolia utilized mobile phones or television in teaching and learning. Other countries send kids home with lessons as homework (Lebanon).

Nigeria's Effort in Managing the Impact of the COVID 19 on Education

The Nigerian government adopted the national closing of schools and restricted public gathering and observation of social distance and use of face mask to mitigate the spread of the COVID 19 Pandemic in the country. According to Eze et al. (2021) who posit that following the COVID-19 pandemic, all schools in Nigeria were closed from March 27, 2020. This translated to a contextualized state-wide school closure across the 36 states. Different states' Ministries of Education have been releasing modalities for radio and TV schooling and internet-based learning.

Classroom Crisis in Higher Educational Institutions under the New Normal

Higher educational institutions in Nigeria are bedeviled with numerous challenges and the coming of the COVID 19 Pandemic has necessitated the adoption of new strategies in teaching and learning process which came with their peculiar challenges, though, not new ones per say which are as follows:

1. Poor knowledge of information and communication technology (ICT): Poor knowledge of computer operation amongst staff and students in higher educational institutions is a serious challenge to online teaching and learning process under the new normal. Eze et al. (2021) posit that if the learners and the teachers are well skilled and equipped with ICT gadgets, learning can occur irrespective of time and distance, otherwise, lack of it could hinder the effective utilization of the online lectures, meeting, dissertations and thesis supervision and defense as well as online conferences attendance.

2. Poor network service and inadequate power supply: The new normal strategy of teaching and learning requires stable network service and power supply. Some higher educational institutions are not having adequate network coverage of their campuses coupled with poor power supply which make it difficult for online classes and conferences to hold. According to Ogunode et al. (2020) unstable power supply is another factor preventing effective administration of ICT facilities in Nigerian schools. Many schools do not use ICT facilities today in their teaching and learning because of the poor power supply. In Nigeria, there are problems with internet service provision. They further put forward that administration of ICT infrastructural facilities in schools across Nigeria is also being frustrated due to poor network services.



3. Inadequate ICT facilities: Higher educational institutions are suffering from lack of adequate ICT facilities such computer system, printers, etc. United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2005) as cited in Ogunode et al. (2021) sees ICT as the combination of all the computers, telecommunication, and media technologies. ICT facilities which include a computer system, laptops, printers, photocopy machines, are essential to smooth running of the administration and management of services in the offices. These facilities are grossly inadequate in higher educational institutions in Nigeria especially with the proliferation of public and private universities coupled with the economic hardship in the country which made available fund allocated to education inadequate to provide adequate ICT facilities in schools. They further stressed that it is unfortunate that many offices and departments in the universities across the country do not have adequate ICT facilities for the academic and administrative staff that need the ICT facilities to carry out their official duties.

4. Increase in workload: This is a situation where lecturers are allocated work beyond the maximum workload officially assigned to them. As a result of running parallel sessions the workload of staff in educational institutions has been increased. Ogunode and Adamu (2021) in their study, shortage of Academic Staff in the Higher Institution of Learning in Nigeria, stated that there are acute shortages of manpower in Nigerian higher educational institutions and therefore, with the running of the parallel sessions, the few available manpower on ground are likely to have increase in their workload.

5. Expensive data coupled with economic hardship: The need to use online arrangement during the new normal requires data and ICT facilities which are very expensive and unaffordable by many students. According to Buckler et al. (2020) teachers' favorite means of delivery has been recognized as WhatsApp, although we understand that purchasing more data packages may not be possible for the students. Students need support to get access to internet and technology as most they cannot afford them due to economic hardship.

6. Difficulty in Social distance observation: Amongst the post lockdown school resumption policies of the federal government, staff and students are expected to strictly observed social distance in their offices and lecture halls but with the over enrolment of students in Nigerian public higher educational institutions coupled with limited school facilities, it is difficult to strictly observe the social distance policy.

7. Pressure from school management: In an attempt to catch up with what has been lost as a result of the lockdown, educational institutions have shorten their academic calendar and enrolled students running parallel sessions which has increased the workloads of the staff and at the same time school management are giving deadlines for all academic activities that the staff must meet and as such, staff are working under pressure to meet up with the deadlines of various academic activities which may likely lead to avoidable errors in record keeping amongst other things. Buckler et al. (2020) in their study minimising 'distance' in distance learning programmes during a global health crisis: framing an international education response to COVID-19, rightly point out, schools and teachers will be under immense pressure to catch up with what has been lost during the lockdown and then the focus will be on what teachers



need to do. Consequently, there might be a danger that a priority is placed only on covering the courses rather than on developing skills in students and preparing them for a better future.

8. High rate of drop out: The COVID 19 pandemic can likely lead to increase in the rate of drop out from the higher educational institutions due to the economic hardship imposed on some parents by the national lockdown which has led to loss of jobs. This is buttressed by Buckler et al. (2020) who posit that students are likely to drop out of school permanently as a result of school closures, and that the longer schools are closed, the higher the number of dropouts. People are less likely to regard themselves as learners when they halt a learning program for an extended period of time. Re-enrollment and re-engagement become considerably more difficult (both logistically and psychologically).

9. Difficulty in coverage of syllabus: lecturers are finding it difficult to cover their syllabus conveniently due to shorter academic calendar and over workload resulting from running parallel sessions coupled with shortage of manpower. Dawadi et al. (2020) state that teachers will have limited time to cover several topics in their curriculum and students might feel pressured to learn so much within a short time.

10. Cancellations of Conferences: The COVID 19 Pandemic has led to cancellation of many national and international conferences and this has really affected academic activities across the globe. In her study, perception of undergraduate students on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on higher education development in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria, Jegede (2020) found that 100% of the respondents agreed that Covid-19 pandemic has relationship with the cancellation of academic conferences in higher institutions.

The New Normal Administrative Coping Strategies in Higher Educational Institutions

In order to cope with the challenges imposed by the COVID 19 Pandemic in higher educational institutions, the following coping strategies can be employed:

1. Online academic interactions: The online academic interactions can be a substitutes or supplement to the conventional teaching and learning process in the higher educational institutions in Nigeria. Jegede (2020) posits that online education is the alternative measures for conventional classroom teaching and learning due to the COVID 19 pandemic. These academic activities include online lectures, Virtual conferences, Virtual meetings, e-supervision of dissertations and theses and Virtual dissertation and theses defense, etc.

2. Blended learning approach: This involves both online and conventional face to face approach to academic activities. The online aspect of the blended learning can be categorized into synchronous and asynchronous approach. According to Finol (2020) in Ancheta, R. F. and Ancheta, H. B. (2020) synchronous learning approach is a real time online learning with live interaction between teacher and students using specific online platforms. The learners and teachers are online at the same time for learning to take place, while asynchronous does not require learners and teachers to be online at the same time. It includes video conferencing, live-streaming lectures and chatting using Google classroom, Google meet, Zoom, and other platforms (The Best School, 2018 in Ancheta, R. F. & Ancheta, H. B., 2020).



3. Arrangement of extra classes: One of the administrative coping strategies under the new normal in higher educational institutions especially universities is to arrange for extra classes to create more opportunities to increase the contacts in order to cover more syllabus within the limited time possible as pointed out by Dawadi et al. (2020) that concerned authority may need to devise measures such as running extra classes, additional materials, etc. in order to mitigate the effects of the pandemic.

4. Running of parallel Session: This is the enrolment of students of two sessions, such as 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 within single academic session. The two sessions are run concurrently. The COVID 19 has led to shut down of schools in Nigeria for almost a year which has in turn led to loss of an academic session which requires running of parallel session to catch up with what has been lost due to the lockdown. According to Aondofa (2021), Nigerian higher educational institutions are conducting two parallel students' streams for the 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 academic sessions.

5. Adjustment of academic calendar: This is one of the new normal coping strategies in higher educational institutions that involves adjustment of the academic calendar by running semesters without a break or with a short semester break in order to enable institutions to make up for the lost session during the national lockdown. In order to catch up with what has been lost during the lockdown, Dawadi et al. (2020) suggested that one of the coping approaches may include adjustments of the academic calendar by reducing holidays to create more time for lectures.

2. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the use of online academic interaction has come to stay in the teaching and learning process, thus, there is need for government, school managers and all other educational stakeholders to focus on the improvement of teaching and learning process in the higher educational institutions to be in line with the new normal. This would require proactive measures rather than reactive ones in order to cope with the current trend in the teaching and learning process.

Suggestions

This paper has the following suggestions

1. Higher Educational institutions in collaboration with other educational agencies such as TETFund should provide ICT training for both staff and students to enable them to acquire ICT skills for effective performance.
2. School administrators of the higher educational institutions should also provide adequate ICT facilities for both staff and students in partnership with other relevant agencies.
3. Institutions should ensure the provision of strong, cheap network services and stable electricity supply by providing standby generators.
4. Government should employ full time or visiting lecturers so as to reduce the workload of staff.



5. Generally, government and school administrators should be proactive rather than reactive in approach to the management of school crisis.

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