

COVID-19 Pandemic and its Attendant “New Normal” in Nigeria: A Case Study of ICT Training in Akwapoly – Akwa Ibom State

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to examine the usefulness of e-learning technologies arising from COVID-19 pandemic and its attendant “new normal” in Nigeria as applicable to the Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic vis-à-vis its recently mounted ICT Training Programme in the institution’s ICT Centre. The research is based on oral interviews, observation and doctrinal research methods. The research found that the desired ICT training programme and/or any training programme for that matter requires well-coordinated and effective planning and control. The staff of AkwaPoly were made to participate in institutional academic work and at the same time attend the lectures on the ICT training programme with the attendant dearth of commitment to the latter. As a result, the staff appeared not to have benefitted much from the training programme. The paper suggests that in future the authorities of the AkwaPoly should either organise such an ICT programme on weekends or when the students are not writing examinations. This will free the lecturers from examination supervision and marking of examination scripts. The authorities should consider the need to upgrade facilities in the ICT Centre to an optimal level to enable the staff to derive maximum benefit from the programme.

Keywords: ICT, Lecturers, New Normal, AkwaPoly and COVID-19.

INTRODUCTION

Education could be described both as a means and as an end by its nature, contents, objects and limitless in its capacity to procreate or remake willing and focused natural persons for societal and individual growth and development. The systematic, traditional and modern teaching methods and channels of imparting on or equipping an individual or group of individuals with education in its formal, non-formal and informal¹ and or vocational forms depend on the types of societies – which may be dynamic or static, mechanical, knowledge-based learning² or artificial intelligence (AI)³ driven.

¹Informal, non-formal and formal education – a brief overview of some different approaches. infed.org. Retrieved on 15/11/2020.

²Knowledge Based Learning – Theclassroom.com. Retrieved on 14/11/2020. See also Why is a Knowledge based curriculum no longer fit for purpose? The half-baked Education blog. Halfbakededucation.com>knowledge-b. Retrieved on 15/11/2020.

³Artificial Intelligence (AI) Definition, Examples and Applications/Britannica. www.britannica.com>technology. Retrieved on 14-11-2020.

COVID-19 pandemic – is a dreaded virus which broke out in Wuhan, China in late 2019 and spread to Nigeria on 29 March, 2020. Following the first index case on 29 March 2020 involving an Italian national visitor, Nigeria has recorded the death of many prominent Nigerians in and out of public offices.⁴ Also, the impacts of COVID-19 are felt in all sectors of the Nigerian economy. Across the world, the devastating effects of COVID-19 pandemic have brought big and small businesses to their knees due to lockdown, intermittently. Workers in public and private sectors have been negatively impacted in various and diverse ways. International trades and travels have equally been put on hold and/or shattered with attendant loss of revenues and jobs. Agricultural production, healthcare and pharmaceutical products have become exorbitant and scarce or beyond the reach of the common man with attendant increase in the number of avoidable deaths of persons with terminal illnesses, who usually depend on certain drugs, which supplies have now been cut off.⁵ The impacts of COVID-19 have also increased the rate of maternal mortality in Nigeria and across the world.⁶

In Nigeria in particular, and the world in general, educational activities in the classrooms setting, workshops, seminars and conferences hitherto carried out in the traditional form are constrained to and subsumed under the dictate of social or physical distancing phenomenon, which has been code-named the “new normal” – is a way of preventing the transmission and spread of coronavirus that has come to enthrone e-learning education in the academic environment, conferences, workshops and seminars and teaching generally.

E-learning in its present form allows for communication and collaboration between instructors and learners.⁷ This learning technology came to focus in the 1990s and it seeks to supplement or contribute to the traditional⁸ face to face classroom teaching contact in certain practical teaching and clinical training such as in the legal clinic and moot court practices by law students.

The e-learning had been in use side by side with the traditional teaching method and practice in the developed countries and in a few developing countries in Africa – in respect of the educational system in those countries. The Nigerian public tertiary institutions have barely utilized the e-learning teaching technology and the late embrace of such a system is obviously understandable.

To be able to implement e-learning system in the Nigerian schools system, there must be an irreducible minimum provision of infrastructure such as relatively stable electricity supply, effective

⁴McClellan, R. (2020). Abba Kyari, Nigerian President’s Right-Hand Man, Dies. www.nytimes.com>obituaries. Retrieved 16th October, 2020.

⁵Ozili, P. K. and Arun, T. G. (2020). Spillover of COVID-19: Impact on the Global Economy. researchgate.net. See also Impact of COVID-19 on People’s Livelihoods, their Health and our Food Systems. www.who.int>item. Retrieved on 15/11/2020.

⁶Maira L. S. Takemoto *et al.* (2020). Maternal Mortality and COVID-19. *Journal of Maternal-Fetal & Neonatal Medicine*. www.tandfonline.com. Retrieved on 16/11/2020.

⁷The e-learning evolution. www.educationworld-in. Retrieved on 15/11/2020.

⁸Zoroja, J., Skok, M. M. & Bach, M. P. (2014). E-learning Implementation in Developing Countries: Perspective and Obstacles. researchgate.net. Retrieved on 15/11/2020.

telecommunication system and trained personnel both as lecturers and non-teaching staff, who provide support services to the lecturers as line managers. The students who are the direct beneficiaries of the e-learning deliverables are expected to be able to acquire devices like computer sets and/or smart phones of their own and regularly subscribe for data and/or modem as when due, to be able to access and participate in designated learning sessions. Also, the institutions may build and run radio stations of their own for the conduct and dissemination of lectures by lecturers, while the students tune-in with their phones devices. The aim is to supplement the traditional method and thereby ensure that both the lecturers and students concerned observe physical contact in line with the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC’s) protocol.

METHODOLOGY

The research is based on oral interview, observation and doctrinal research methods.

A Case Study of ICT Training Programme Recently Conducted in Akwapoly, Akwa Ibom State

The researcher notes that the Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua alias “AkwaPoly”, is a state-owned tertiary institution belonging to Akwa Ibom State Government. The institution was established on 6th December, 1991 by Edict No. 2, promulgated by the then Military Government in the State. AkwaPoly runs both National and Higher National Diplomas in Sciences, Engineering, Business Management Studies and Environmental Studies programmes respectively – both on regular and part time basis. The Polytechnic is one of the most sought-after tertiary institutions in the South-South geopolitical zone, in particular, and Nigeria in general.

The institution has highly qualified lecturers with array of Ph.D. holders and they belong to different professional bodies in their fields. The students’ population is relatively high and this has placed enormous academic responsibilities on the lecturers in terms of imparting knowledge and other academic activities relating to the teeming population of students.

In the exercise of its mandates or functions, the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) prior to COVID-19, selected the AkwaPoly amongst other tertiary institutions in the country to undergo TETFUND sponsored ICT Training programme which will lead to the award of International Computer Driving License (ICDL). The programme objectives include: to equip the learners with skills and knowledge in basic computer’s application and e-learning among others. However, the programme did not start early in 2020 due to COVID-19 pandemic.

The programme kick-started in earnest in about September, 2020 and lasted for initial one week and is billed to continue. The ICT Centre in the Polytechnic is the venue for the training. The centre has a reasonable level of ICT equipment to enable the TETFUND approved course lecturers to conduct the training fora selected number of staff for a start, made up of teaching and non-teaching staff.

The research is based on oral interview, observation and doctrinal research methods.

DISCUSSION

From the aforementioned, the staff do not object to the ICT training programme but they only object to the timing of the training. The authorities of the institution and the organizers of the training programme are commended for being foresighted in approving the ICT training prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 in Nigeria. This is a proactive rather than a reactive system of governance. The research is limited by funding.

CONCLUSIONS

The New Normal as it affects the educational system therefore demands that the government and authorities in the various levels of education in the country should begin to do things differently in order to expect different results mutually beneficial to all the stakeholders' health courtesy of COVID-19 protocol.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a need for the AkwaPoly authorities to create an auspicious learning environment for this important ICT training programme.

There is a need for the ICT centre infrastructure to be updated to meet the new demands under COVID-19 New Normal.

There is the urgent need to diversify the energy sources in the institution.

There is a need to mobilize and bring students up to speed with prior knowledge in ICT and e-learning as a course of study.

CONFLICTS

The researcher does not and has no untoward interest in the subject matter of this write-up.

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