

CRISIS IN CLASSROOM DELIVERY AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL OF EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Education has been one of the worst-hit sectors of the economy in Nigeria, even though the government has been taking several necessary precautions to curtail the dilapidating state of the education system and ensure an appropriate standard for classroom delivery. However, studies have shown that factors such as poor infrastructure, insecurity and covid-19 pandemic which require social distancing and led to the suspension of class activities and learning processes are contributing in a crisis in classroom delivery in our institutions. Thus, the paper covers the following sub headings; Introduction, Infrastructure and quality of classroom delivery, COVID-19 pandemic and crisis in classroom delivery, security challenges and crisis in classroom delivery, evidence of security challenges in educational institutions, and conclusion. The paper offers some recommendations among others that government should increase funding towards the development of the infrastructure that will benefit students and staff alike in tertiary institutions and the security unit should be well funded and equipped in order to address the crisis rocking the Nigerian educational system for effective classroom management.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A good higher education system is required for the overall prosperity of a nation. However, in Nigeria, tremendous growth in the higher education sector has made the administration of higher education institutions complex. From east to west, north to south of Nigeria, the case of the declining state of the education system is very devastating. Just like other sectors, the nation's education system has been on a steady decline. Both the quality of teaching and infrastructure has been severely impacted by the comatose state of the education system. School closures due to strike action have been the norm of the day. In fact, it will be considered unusual not to have schools shut down in any given academic session in the country. Also, most of the classrooms in Nigerian institutions are dilapidated, sub-standard, and unfit for human habitation. The crises we are experiencing now may well be more dramatic than any of the preceding ones, because the rate of change in our age is faster than ever before, because the crises are more extensive, involving the entire country, and because several major transitions are coinciding.

Secondly, since the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic and its first index case in Nigeria on February 27, 2020, education has been one of the worst-hit sectors of the economy. Like many affected countries of the world, the Federal government of Nigeria has taken several

necessary precautionary measures to curtail the spread of the disease. This has led to the suspension of all educational activities especially in-class teaching and learning processes.

Thirdly, security challenges across the country is one of the main crisis hindering the delivery of education, the security challenges in universities constitute a serious threat to the safe academic environment and hinders academic activities. The elimination of these threats from the universities should be paramount for meaningful academic work to thrive. The university management must be proactive in creating and sustaining a peaceful, threat-free environment.

1.1 Infrastructure and Quality of Classroom Delivery

Infrastructural factors such as classrooms, libraries, laboratories, instructional gadgets, and office space are significant in the quality assurance of university education. Unfortunately, lecture rooms and office places are grossly inadequate and not convenient for the proper positioning of modern electronic gadgets that will accommodate the current curriculum and the globally acceptable mode of teaching and learning. If there is anything that the learners expect of universities, it is high-quality teaching and learning characterized by factors such as quality teachers, quality learning materials, and adequate infrastructure.

Studies have reported that infrastructural resources required for the production of an effective education process are in short supply in Nigerian universities. Lecture halls, laboratories, student hostels, and library spaces are grossly inadequate. The available few are fast dilapidating. National Universities Commission (2004) in the communiqué of the presidential visitation panel that looked into the operations of federal universities between 1999 and 2003 reported that physical facilities at the universities were in deplorable condition. It is saddening to note that the equipment for research, teaching, and learning is either lacking or very inadequate and in a bad shape to permit the universities the freedom of embarking on the basic functions of academics. There are no facilities for effective practical learning for the students in most courses, especially in the universities of Technology, which require a lot of intensive training in terms of students' usage of their psychomotor skills and hi-tech equipment. In fact, when universities face the NUC accreditation exercise, it is shameful to observe that in order to scale through the hurdles of the exercise; some departments will have to borrow equipment from neighboring institutions, present them and claim their ownership. With the remarkable increase in the number of universities and university enrolments, it becomes worrisome that the tremendous increase in placement may not correspond to the state of available physical infrastructure. (Ajayi and Akindutire, 2007)

Adegbesan(2011) viewed educational quality as what could be judged by both its ability to enable students to perform well in standard examinations and its relevance to the needs of students, the community, and society as a whole. He concluded that educational quality serves as the determination of graduation based on the standard of excellence beneath which a mark of inferiority is imposed and above which grades of superiority are defined. Similarly, quality assurance in the university system implies the institutions' ability to meet the users' expectations of manpower in relation to the skills acquired by their outputs (Ajayi and Akindutire, 2007). Therefore, quality education can be an improvement in all aspects of learning and ensure excellence so that recognizable learning outcomes are achieved by all learners, especially in literacy, numeracy, and essential life skills. In other words, quality

education should provide learners with essential skills necessary for wholesome development and responsible living.

Assuring the quality of education provision is a fundamental aspect of gaining and maintaining the credibility of higher education programs, institutions, and systems worldwide. Quality assurance is designed to prove and improve the quality of an institution's educational methods; and outcomes. The need for infrastructural support was highlighted by Benya (2001) and Subair (2008) who said, high-quality university education and training require that appropriate infrastructure be provided by the institution. All students deserve safe, technology-ready facilities designed for learning and adequate decent facilities, structured around their learning needs. More importantly, completion rate and satisfaction with the university programs are closely related to the infrastructure that can be provided. School buildings that can adequately provide a good learning environment are essential for students' success. The bridge between good infrastructure and effective student learning is of great importance. Looking closely at a university system, there is no doubt that infrastructure plays a great role in the welfare of students and the result is motivation to learn.

The quality of buildings may be related to other institutional quality issues, such as the presence of adequate instructional materials and textbooks, learning-teaching conditions for students and teachers, and the ability of teachers to undertake certain instructional approaches. Such factors as on-site availability of lavatories and a clean water supply, classroom maintenance, and availability of space and furniture, all have an impact on meaningful learning. Quality assurance of the institutional facilities can only be guaranteed if basic conditions and guidelines are followed from the onset. Basically, this means that infrastructural development must make provision for adaptability or alteration probability, flexibility in user demands, accessibility to students, staff, and society, and due regard for an aesthetic and clean environment. Salis (2002) developed a quality indicator checklist that shows what the physical environment and facilities in higher educational institutions must require both in qualitative and quantitative terms. These include the availability of infrastructural development programs (facility provision), adequacy of the facilities in terms of currency and relevance to purpose; students' friendliness and centeredness of the facilities (attractive to students and suitable for their needs); regular maintenance and renewal of the dilapidated ones; the infrastructural development must be of international standard (globally acceptable) to attract foreign students, staff and recognition; and must be environmentally safe and of high sanitary standard.

1.2 COVID-19 Pandemic and Crisis in Classroom Delivery

The advent of coronavirus in Nigeria has left both the Federal and State government in a state of high uncertainty, struggling with economic, political, and educational challenges. Since the detection of the first case of COVID-19 on 27th February 2020 in Nigeria, the Federal government has taken precautionary measures to encourage social distancing thereby limiting the spread of the virus. These measures are similar to the ones the country had taken during the outbreak of the Ebola virus disease in 2014, even though the outbreak was limited both in terms of the number of infected cases, geographical scope, and deaths (Otu et al., 2017). The Federal government of Nigeria through the minister of education has on 23rd March 2020 announced the immediate suspension of all educational activities. Schools (including

elementary, secondary, and tertiary institutions) in the country have suspended all classroom activities and other academic events such as conferences and seminars among others, as a way of promoting the stay-at-home principle which is the only ray of hope for safety pending when a vaccine or cure to the disease will be discovered. This measure forced over 46 million students across all levels of education to abandon their schools following the closure notice given by the government (The Nigeria Education in Emergency Working Group: EIEWG, 2020).

Unlike the other affected countries, the closure of schools in Nigeria did not come with any backup policy to address the learning disruptions for students (Oyeniran et al., 2020). Thereby creating new forms of challenges for teaching and learning processes in the country. Based on the observed education practices during the Covid-19 crisis in other countries, the researchers were poised to ask questions like: Are schools prepared for such a sudden change? Do schools have the needed technologies to engage students in remote learning? Do teachers and students have the experiences and resources to prepare, deliver and receive online lessons? Do parents or guardians have the funds, technology, skills, and time to enroll their children in online lessons?

Although this sudden closure of schools brings about uncomfortable and unprecedented complications and challenges; on the other hand, these measures succeeded in bringing to the spotlight the weakness of the general education system in the country. The Nigerian education system is highly based on traditional classroom education that requires the students to attend school and classes every day. The main educational delivery methodologies are equally traditional face-to-face systems, where the teacher uses textbooks, chalkboards, or whiteboards as instructional materials. These do not sufficiently ensure continuous learning during crises such as the coronavirus pandemic when students are compulsorily kept out of school for safety. Extended closure of schools in the country may come with high social and economic costs and with severe impact on students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds (EIEWG, 2020). This is an issue of serious concern that can only be addressed through online forms of education. However, findings of previous research on technology integration in teaching and learning enterprises in Nigeria's schools revealed that very few public institutions adopted some of the online learning systems and are not using them to their full advantage. On a large scale, the technological literacy of teachers and students is extensively limited to the effective integration of these educational technologies in schools (Chukwumeka et al., 2019; Toquero, 2020). Therefore, these challenges have necessitated the need to explore other avenues in order to help students who have been impacted by school closures stay on course with their educational programs.

To effectively and efficiently respond to the threat of the Covid-19 pandemic on education in the country, schools need to move to online learning using modern flexible teaching and learning modes such as distance learning, mobile learning, virtual classroom, and flipped classroom. The justification for the adoption of these online education delivery modes as veritable tools to catalyze continuity in education in the face of the imminent closure of schools does not require any long argument from the government and all stakeholders involved.

1.3 Security Challenges and Crisis in Classroom Delivery

Every university has a responsibility to protect itself, the students, staff, and other customers who visit the University One Form of transaction or the other, from all forms of danger. The National School Board Association (2013) identified the responsibility of all schools to include, giving adequate safety and security against disasters, accidents, and injuries, as well as, preparing proactive plans that investigate perceived threats and disasters. It is in this regard that every university has a well-established security unit, whereby security personnel is employed to handle the school security and ensure that lives and properties are protected and secured. The duties of these security officers include the protection of lives/property, surveillance, and gathering and dissemination of security intelligence, among others. University campuses as observed by Schneider Electric (as cited in Abdullahi and Orukpe, 2016) are dynamic environments with constant activity, which require an effective security unit that would address the protection and safeguarding of students, staff, visitors, faculty, property, and facilities on campus. Good security services not only help to prevent crimes but also contribute to a positive image of the institution by creating a safe and welcoming environment for students, staff, and visitors.

Safeguarding the academic environment for educational activities is very important. It is for this reason that Okebukola (as cited in Youdeowei and Iruoma, 2015) said that “no safe school, no future for the world”. The author gave three reasons to justify this assertion as follows;

1. The dream of harnessing the power of education for achieving goals in health, food, employment, enrolment, energy, and security will come to naught.
2. Without safe schools, education for all will remain a pipe dream
3. Quality education yearned by all countries of the world will be hindered.

Xaba (2014) describes a safe school environment as one that is not dangerous and possess no threats to the physical, emotional, psychosocial or psychological well-being of the occupants. In other words, it is an environment that is secure and free from threat and danger. The need to re-position the security personnel in the universities to effectively discharge their duties in relation to emerging security issues and challenges cannot be overemphasized. The rising students and staff population, together with new crime types bring about more responsibilities on the security personnel, which calls for new strategies to tackle them. This is needful because as cautioned by Gomme and Micucci (1997), the perception of campus as a dangerous place may erode the quality of academic and social life for students, and faculty, as well as, undermine a school’s ability to attract and retain both clientele and personnel.

1.4 Evidence of Security Challenges in Educational Institutions

Below are some records of insecurity in educational institutions (Uduak et al., 2020):

1. In 2012, about 40 students of Federal Polytechnic Mubi were massacred by the BokoHarram terrorist group.
2. In 2013, students of the University of Uyo rioted against school authorities due to an increase in intra-campus transport fares, as well as, insufficient lecture halls. This led to the destruction of school properties on campus and also the loss of a student's life.
3. On 3rd April 2015, Mrs. Awala George, a lecturer in the University of Port Harcourt was kidnapped but later freed by police operatives eight days later (Oni, 2016).

4. On 16th January 2017, two suicide bombers attacked the University of Maiduguri, killing three people including a professor.
5. On 21 April 2021, gunmen attacked Greenfield University, Kaduna state, killing one staff member and kidnapping some students, and later killing them.
6. On 2nd November 2021, gunmen attacked the University of Abuja, abducting a professor, and six other people.
7. On 23 November 2021, gunmen invaded Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, and abducted a lecturer's wife and daughter.

With these numbers of incidents and many that are not listed, it is an indication that school environments are under siege of security-threatening incidents. In most of these attacks, the school security personnel are never well prepared to prevent or intervene in the security threats. There are many other incidents and some were never reported, hence the true extent of the situation may never be known.

2.0 CONCLUSION

Classroom delivery in Nigeria is affected by many crises. These crises are responsible for the poor standard of education in the country. Among many crises, poor infrastructure, insecurity, and covid-19 pandemic have been identified and discussed in detail. The ability of Nigerians especially the academia to handle the issues raised in this lecture will go a long way in making the education sector a crisis-free sector.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Government should adequately fund education and provide the infrastructure that will benefit students and staff alike in tertiary institutions.
2. The quality of tertiary education must not be compromised by enrolment, overcrowdedness, and the multi-campus system.
3. Development of a high level of maintenance practice on the available facilities should be institutionalized. However, there is a need for the implementation of a direct quality assurance program to ensure that maintenance standards are met.
4. It is recommended that the Federal and State government should expand coverage of distance learning beyond just the tertiary institutions to cover the secondary and elementary schools in the country as a catalyst to ensure continuity in education during the days of crisis when in-class activities may be suspended.
5. The security unit of every institution should be well-funded and equipped with modern technology by the management.
6. Provision of sufficient surveillance vehicles. This will be very useful in timely fighting and containment of criminal activities on campus.
7. Access into the institution's environment should be checked. Currently, people who have no business in the school are found everywhere. Access should be restricted.

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