TRANSITING TO VIRTUAL LEARNING UNDER THE NEW NORMAL: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES FOR NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES: A STUDY OF OLABISI ONABANJO UNIVERSITY, OGUN STATE

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A B S T R A C T	K E Y W O R D S
COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way of learning in higher education. Teaching, and learning activities that are usually carried out with face-to-face meetings have turned into virtual meetings in various online learning applications. This paper aims to analyze student essays in the form of perspectives or responses about the challenges of online learning in Olabisi Onabanjo University. Online learning provides various instructions led by the lecturer. Instructions can be synchronous (communication where participants interact in the same time space as video conferencing, zoom, Google meet, and WebEx) or asynchronous (time-separated communication such as e-mail, Google form, streaming video content, posting lecture notes and social media platforms). This paper has shown so many responses about the challenges experienced by the students while studying online, such as, positive and negative impact of online learning, economic conditions, anxiety during online learning, and management of Olabisi Onabanjo University should think and plan for the risk of user data security, and find effective means towards enhancing online learning media towards meeting students' expectations.	Online Learning, Transition, Traditional learning, Change Olabisi Onabanjo University

Introduction

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) in China in December 2019, the pandemic has had an unprecedented disruptive influence on people's lives across the globe, perhaps the greatest socio-economic disruption since the Second World War (WW11). The pandemic has had a detrimental effect on educational systems worldwide, leading to the widespread closure of institutions of learning in almost all the countries in the world. As of July 08, 2020, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimated that 1,184,126,508 learners had been affected by school closures globally (UNESCO, 2020). As a result of the suspension of face-to-face classes, many institutions of higher education migrated classes to online platforms and Olabisi Onabanjo University is not left behind.

Historically, many institutions of learning have paid significant attention to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), as they are regarded as influential tools in increasing access, managing knowledge and increasing engagement (Gunga & Ricketts, 2007, Mohammadi, 2015). ICTs have long been celebrated for their transformative power on various facets of life (Rambe and Bere, 2013), oftentimes with a degree of utopian bliss (Mare, 2013). The purported transformative power of ICTs has also found an eager audience in the learning domain, with its proponents arguing that the permeation of ICT in education is an inevitable development (Clegg, Hudson & Steel, 2003). As a result, the idea of appropriating ICTs for learning purposes is both popular and seductive to many. Inevitably, the COVID-19 pandemic has shone the spotlight on the purported benefits of learning technologies, or e-learning. E-learning is defined as the usage of ICTs in the delivery of instruction, information, and learning content (Bhuasiri, Xaymoungkhoun, Zo, Rho & Ciganek (2012).

E-learning has been embraced by an enthusiastic audience in Africa, chiefly owing to its perceived potential to accommodate learners in varying circumstances (Zongozzi, 2020). Proponents of e-learning argue that it improves the quality of education, students' performance and engagement levels (Shen & Ho, 2020). However, despite the widespread enthusiasm towards e-learning, its use remains in an embryonic stage (Barteit et al. 2019; Eke, 2010; Liu, Han & Li, 2010). Notwithstanding, the COVID-19 pandemic has once more provoked renewed interest on the utility of ICTs to access learning information, thrusting e-learning back on the mainstream. As with their global counterparts, universities in Nigeria have adopted e-learning to ensure that learning activities continue in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. In a country that is regarded as one of the most unequal societies in the world (Pauli & Dawids, 2017), the rollout of e-learning has been received with both optimism and trepidation.

The purpose of this paper is to report on the likely challenges Olabisi Onabanjo University may encounter in the course of transiting from in-class learning to virtual learning especially when accessing learning resources at in the University during the COVID-19 lockdown measures. Student perceptions are an important aspect of e-learning success, yet there is a paucity of studies on challenges faced by these key stakeholders when using e-learning in the Nigerian higher education context (Woyo, Rukanda and Nyamapanda, 2020), particularly in the unusual environment created by the COVID-19 pandemic. E-learning has historically tended to be too technologically centered, with the inevitable consequence of institutions of learning overemphasizing the technologies to the detriment of other factors (Kibuku, Ochieng & Wausi, 2020). It is axiomatic that e-learning success is more than just access to the technology.

Brief History of the Study Area
Olabisi Onabanjo University (OOU) formerly Ogun State University was founded in 1983 and was renamed in 2001, to immortalize the name of its founder, the first civilian Governor of the State late Chief Olabisi Onabanjo. The library consists of the main library and six branch libraries spread across the four geopolitical zones in the State and as well as a research library. The branch libraries serve the following disciplines: Law, Management sciences, Arts, Education, Social sciences, Medicine, Agricultural Sciences and Engineering.

The research library was donated to the university by the late sage, Chief Obafemi Awolowo. The main library serves the entire discipline but major in science discipline such as Chemical science, Computer science, Biological Science, and Earth Science. The library has vast materials on law,

politics, history and economics and the sciences. In the last 25 years the library collections have grown to over 76,000 volumes excluding journals and the collection housed in the research library. The library operates a loan policy of two books per undergraduate students and three books for postgraduates' students and lecturers for two weeks. The university has a student population of about 50,000 offering both full and part time courses as at year 2020.

Identifying specific challenges associated with transiting from traditional in-class teaching methods to online teaching system.

Nigeria's universities have been struggling to shift their activities online following the 20 March federal government shutdown to restrict public gatherings and curb the spread of the coronavirus. Among the reasons is poor internet infrastructure and a lack of reliable electricity supplies. The shutdown has left campuses deserted as students returned to their homes. Except for staff whose activities are key and pertinent on campus, lecturers too have largely vacated their offices. Transiting from an in-class model of teaching to the new normal which is virtual classes; Olabisi Onabanjo University may experience the following challenges.

i.   **Poor infrastructure, lack of power**: "Many people are disadvantaged in terms of the poor infrastructure that we have in the country," evidence from selected students in OOU in the course of this paper reflected that students were faced with poor power infrastructure; majority of them claimed that even for a whole day there may be no power supply and in some cases the internet connection is very poor."

These issues highlight the challenges Nigerian universities face in making online learning serve as an alternative for a majority of students while physical facilities are closed. That said, email can help, requiring very little bandwidth, with many Nigerian lecturers supporting research students who have submitted projects and chapters via email. Again, using the 'track changes' function on MS Word to highlight corrections and comments, inviting responses from students. Some continuous assessment papers are also being submitted online via email. As a result, students can make some progress on their research projects before the universities reopen but poor and inadequate power supply and infrastructure constitute great impediments to both lecturers and students.

ii. **No equal internet access**: Nigeria's weak internet infrastructure would also impede the delivery of lectures online. "Even if the lecturer can arrange to do something, the next problem would be internet access for students wherever they maybe; and once you cannot guarantee equal access for all the students because while some were in Lagos, some may be outside Lagos, and some in their villages; then in reality, it will not be ideal to have anything like that. Unfortunately, we cannot guarantee internet access in Nigeria."

Asides the above listed challenges; below are likely problems to be faced by students especially at the undergraduate level. Here are some of the most common challenges undergraduate students may likely face with online classes along with specific tips on how to address them:

❖ Technical issues.
❖ Distractions and time management.
❖ Staying motivated.
❖ Understanding course expectations.

❖ Lack of in-person interaction.
❖ Adapting to unfamiliar technology.
❖ Uncertainty about the future.

Technical Issues: Unfortunately, experts say, technical issues are bound to happen in an online-only environment. Ashford says that while attending one of her classes live through videoconferencing, her computer suddenly shut down and she needed to restart the device. There are also moments when her Wi-Fi is spotty.

The solution: The most important step is to stay in touch with professors and inform them about what's happening, experts say. They will hopefully understand and be flexible about the situation, perhaps even recording class sessions as a backup.

Distractions and Time Management: While studying from home or wherever students may be, there can be more distractions than usual, especially with family and possibly younger siblings around.

The solution: "Try to think about building a schedule figuring out when you're going to do what you're going to do and then sharing that with the other people in your house. Students should also try to identify a quiet time and place in their house to complete their coursework, if possible even if that time is late at night, Smith says. If their other responsibilities become too overwhelming, students should consider talking with their academic adviser about course load options for the semester, he says.

b. **Staying Motivated**: Given that students may not be attending class at a set time on a physical campus, <u>finding the motivation</u> to get started on coursework can be difficult.
   The solution: In addition to creating a daily schedule and finding a productive workspace, it can also help to simply focus on the ultimate goal.

c. **Understanding Course Expectations**: The sudden switch to online learning has left some students confused about some course requirements for the rest of the semester. They may wonder, for instance, if a final group presentation is still happening given that students can no longer meet on campus, or if they need to complete labs for science classes. Students may also wonder whether their classes will have live lectures through videoconferencing at a set time on a certain day, or whether students are expected to learn the material on their own time.
   The solution: Students should be proactive in asking their professors questions about course expectations for the spring and whether there are any changes to requirements given the transition. Whether classes will be held live varies depending on the school, professor and discipline.

d. **Lack of In-Person Interaction:** The lack of in-person interaction with both instructors and classmates can be particularly challenging. The adjustment can be particularly difficult for students taking classes that are better suited for the face-to-face format, like those with science lab components.
   The solution: Experts say students should take advantage of the tools at their disposal. While not ideal for all learners, the best alternative to actual face-to-face interaction may be videoconferencing

programs like Zoom, Skype or FaceTime. Talking on the phone with classmates or a professor is also an option.

e. **Adapting to Unfamiliar Technology**: Given the transition to online classes, students will need to now adapt some digital tools.
The solution: Use the resources available through the school, while this can include reaching out to technical support, students should determine whether they can save themselves time by looking up answers to their technology questions online or watching a video tutorial.

f. **Uncertainty about the Future**: The sudden switch to online classes for the spring semester and the summer, in some cases has caused anxiety and raised questions among students about their academic futures.

The solution: Student support services are needed to determine whether adjustments can be made to their course schedule or a future semester if needed. For example, a student may want to take fewer course credits in a future semester if his or her school continues offering only online classes and the student finds this format challenging.

Benefits of Virtual Learning

It is of paramount importance to mention the advantages and disadvantages of On-line Education in order to utilized the advantages and avoid disadvantage. Advantages of online education include the following:

a. Firstly, it gives affords an opportunity to develop technology skills for both lecturers and students.

b. Secondly, it gives access to World Resources and experts through Internet connection and Internet resources.

c. Thirdly, it states for an increase in access to education for those who otherwise have no other chances because of the labour, family or financial constraints.

d. In addition, it creates a modality of instruction and best appropriate for certain students. Fourthly, it states greater elasticity to schedule education students can select the time and Location of "class time".

e. It also gives greater elasticity in location for study.

f. It allows learners to participate in courses at home with great library.

g. Bearing in mind that it is student Centered, virtual classes places responsibility for learning on the students and spurs them to be more active and self-directed.

h. It facilitates greater learner-instructor interaction; it also increases interaction with classmates.

i. It Facilitates Pedagogic Development-Individual Instructor Development, produces a carryover effect into the regular classroom of improved pedagogic techniques, and it allows for the internationalization of learning opportunities.

Pitfalls of Virtual Learning

The benefits of virtual education include the following:

a. Firstly, it is a known fact that online education is not for all people, not for the uncontrolled educated or inflexible instructors; so, some might not be able to cope.

b. Secondly, it provides us with sentiments of solitude from time to time.

c. Thirdly, it is likely to be of less cohesion, thereby resulting to isolation and potential non-completion of classes.

d. It requires a great voltage to establish and maintain the technological infrastructure.

e. It also requires considerable effort and cost to develop suitable materials e.g. data plans.

f. It is noted that education design for group activities and group interaction places more responsibility on the teacher.

g. Any form of distortion can create a gap in the learning process which may result in disinterestedness.

h. Online Education takes gap time between learner participation and feedback time interval between need for student support and decision.

i. It is occasionally affected by internet provider downtime; and

j. Finally, another disadvantage is time and frustrations of participate (students) in learning how to access online classes especially at the beginner's stage.

k. **Motivation**: How do you keep motivated?

l. **Accountability**: There is nobody looking over your shoulder.

m. **Time Management**: You have to plan and stick to your own timetable.

n. **Confidence**: students can be easy to fall behind, lose confidence and drop out

Roles of HR Department in Managing the Change Process

Lewin, (1951) is credited for his model of planned approach to organizational change which emerged from his work related to group decision-making, implementation and social change. This three-step model is associated with intentional change in the organization and change initiators may choose to use a range of strategies to implement the intended change. Though, according to Lewin, the first step in the process of change is to unfreeze the existing situation or status quo. The status quo is considered the equilibrium state. Unfreezing is necessary to overcome the strains of individual resistance and group conformity; the second step of this process is movement. In this step, it is necessary to move the target system to a new level of equilibrium. The third step of Lewin's three-step change model is refreezing. This step needs to take place after the change has been implemented in order for it to be sustained or "stick" over time (Robbins & Judge, 2013).

Another model for change is Kotter's model which was introduced in 1995, for the first time in his paper "Leading change: why transformation efforts fail." This model is considered more as a sequence of actions that organizations can adopt during the process of change, it is considered by some researchers and academics as a checklist for implementing the process of change, but according to Burnes (2017) these eight steps were considered to be a process by Kotter and not a checklist. The eight steps model as Kotter suggested are: Create sense of urgency, form a powerful coalition, create a vision for change, communicate the vision, getting rid of obstacles, create short-term wins, build on change and Institutionalize new approaches (Kotter, 1995).

A third model that addresses the change process is what Anderson and Anderson in 2001 created, where their model of planned change provides a comprehensive coverage of the entire process of change and equally explains the whole process of change as a cyclical process. Anderson & Anderson (2001) list four critical factors that must be in place for planned change to be effective: "charismatic leadership, organizational crisis, an understanding across the organization of the urgency of the situation, and a trusting relationship between the leader and the organization members" This model briefly views change based on three perspectives namely content, people and process and is divided into nine cyclical phases. So as an HR, my role in managing the change process will follow thus:
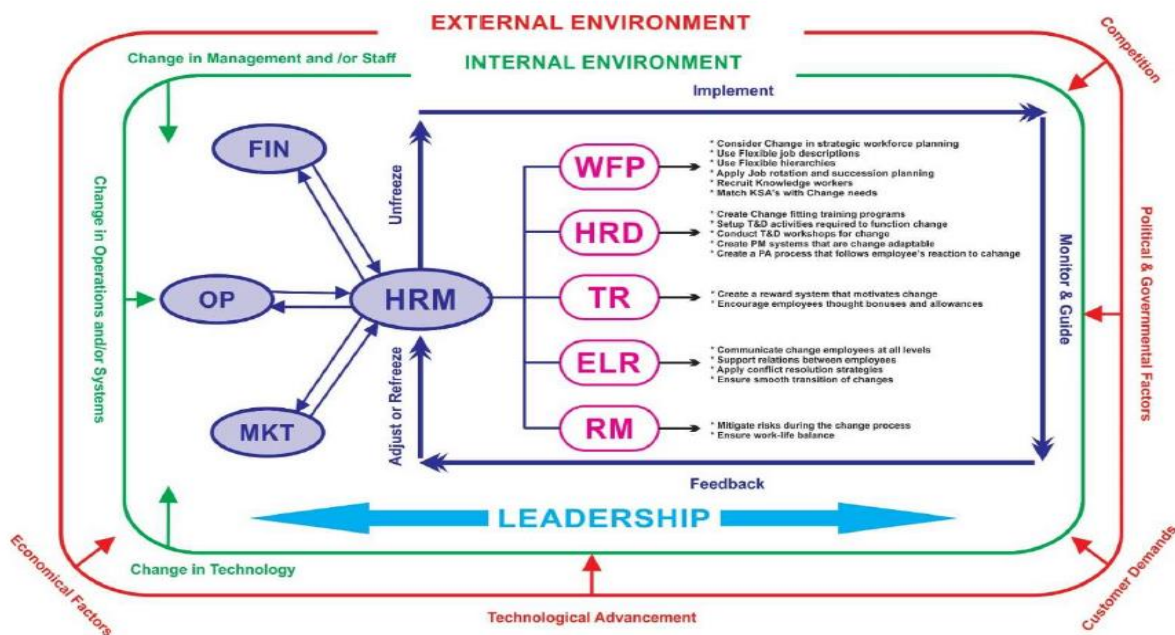

Figure 1: Roles on Human Resource Management in the Change management Process

The above framework shows the organization (Olabisi Onabanjo University) and its environment (external and internal) and the pressures (forces) that the environment puts on the organization that in turn triggers the change process where external forces like competition and technological advancement along with the other forces are external pressures that trigger the change process in the organization, also shown are the internal pressures exerted by the organization on the organization that trigger change as change in management and staff, those forces and pressures are as well applied on the HRM department which in turns deal with the change process according to the five major functions (WFP, HRD, TR, ELR, RM), thus implementing in each function the optimum decision to handle the change process as shown in the framework, where HR implements, monitors and guides the implemented process, controls the process by acquiring feedback, and the final step is either to adjust or refreeze the changes implemented, all that process is coordinated and monitored by leaders in the HR department. Also shown in the framework the relation between the HRM department with the other departments and units in the organization and the mutual connections between them.

Using this framework as a reference when handling change in in Olabisi Onabanjo University can help to plan the steps needed for change management, and when implementing them based on the process

shown in the framework can help to pinpoint gaps leading to a smoother transition from status quo to the new desired state in the organization.

Advising the management of OOU on how to manage 'resistance to change' from some staff, and successfully transit from in-class lecture to online system.

Once the management of Olabisi Onabanjo University have analysed her resisting forces, the followings are six possible strategies for overcoming resistance to change.

i. **Education and Communication**: This includes explanations of why changes need to take place and frequent communication to ensure that everybody is fully aware of plans. It is useful where there has been inadequate information or analysis as it will help to persuade people of the need for change. However, it can be very time-consuming.

ii. **Participation and Involvement**: This consists of the active involvement of everybody involved in the change, in as many of the processes as possible, supported by regular feedback. Participation tends to lead to better commitment, and is particularly useful where leaders do not have all the information; they need to design the change. However, it needs careful handling to ensure all changes are consistent with the overall vision or strategy.

iii. **Facilitation and Support**: This strategy involves providing positive support for people in new situations to allow them to fulfill their roles or job requirements. This may include counseling and training, which can be quite expensive, and may not necessarily have the desired results. You may need to draft in outside help to achieve this strategy, as this kind of support is often best provided by neutral outsiders. This strategy may be best in combination with at least one other.

iv. **Negotiation and Agreement**: This strategy involves reaching realistic and acceptable agreements by listening to and analysing all the various points, both positive and negative, raised by people affected by the changes. Negotiation and Agreement can be used where resistance is coming from a particular, clearly-identifiable group which stands to lose from the change, but be aware that it can be expensive if used a lot.

v. **Manipulation and Invitation/Co-opting:** This strategy involves using the powers available to ensure that everybody involved has their say. For example, in a work situation, invite staff to join focus groups that increase awareness of the current situation, which will increase morale and reduce resistance. This strategy is also sometimes used in a less positive way: to implicate the leaders of resistance in the change and undermine their position, which tends to lead to loss of your own credibility in the longer term.

vi. **Explicit and Implicit Coercion:** This strategy should be used as a last resort only, because it can reduce morale and the self-worth of the individuals involved or effected by the change processes. While it can overcome resistance, the cost could be too great for the organisation or individuals and, if time allows, using negotiation is a better approach.

Conclusion

For the management of Olabisi Onabanjo University to successful transit from the traditional in-class lecture style into the new virtual style; a better digital infrastructure is needed to cope up with such unprecedented situations. The remote population should be made technology-rich and proper training should be given for the smooth conducting of virtual classes. Nonetheless, management should make learning suitable and materials ready for both students and lecturers for open with the adoption of the new normal

Recommendations

Based on the information obtained, numerous recommendations have been put forward for the management of Olabisi Onabanjo University to follow should they continue learning and teaching via online channels and platforms:

i. Management should provide adequate training for lecturers to acquire requisite skills to effectively facilitate online delivery of learning content.

ii. They should provide adequate orientation, motivation and training for students to acquire relevant skills to maximally benefit from online teaching and learning.

iii. Both students and lecturers should be exposed to modern information technology applications to support their learning; also, Parents should try to provide an enabling environment for students at home.

i. They should try as much as possible to provide support ranging from making available the necessary electronic gadgets (such as laptops and android phones), access to electricity power supply (generating sets and solar panels) and sufficient data for strong and consistent internet connection.

ii. Parents should also provide an emotionally enabling environment so that students can benefit from the face-to-screen online teaching and learning. These would help the students to benefit maximally from online schooling.

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