

Original Research Article

A Study of Readiness of Nigeria's Higher Education for New Normal Service Delivery

Isaac Echezonam Anyira^{1*}, Grace Anyaobi¹ and Sotonye Orji²

Abstract

¹Department of Library And Information Science, School of Information and Communication Technology, Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-Uku, Nigeria

²Donald E.U. Ekong Library, University of Port-Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

*Corresponding Author's E-mail: anyiraisaac@gmail.com

This paper investigated the readiness of Nigeria's higher education for new normal service delivery. The study was specifically aimed at determining the means of accessing virtual classes in Nigerian higher institutions, the levels of ICT skills among faculties and students, the preferred mode of learning and service delivery in Nigerian higher institutions among others. The descriptive survey method was used for the study. The targeted population comprises academic Staff and students in selected higher institutions in Nigeria. Online survey questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. The instrument was administered on respondents through e-mail and social media platforms. A total of 715 questionnaires were administered on respondents, but 600 were completed and returned. The respondents were made up of 200 academic staff and 400 undergraduate students in Nigerian higher institutions. This implies 84% return rate. Data were analyzed using graphical charts. The study found that mobile phones and laptop computers are main devices for accessing virtual classes in Nigerian higher institutions. It also found that Majority of Nigerian faculties and students have average ICT skills and their preferred mode of teaching and learning in classroom, but online services in the case of library services. Majority of Nigerian students and faculties use ICT/LMS to some extent. The perceived challenges to the adoption of virtual classes are lack of funds, lack of ICT skills, unreliable power supply, and poor internet services. The study recommended massive ICT deployment in higher institutions to facilitate the adoption of both virtual and classroom mode of education. The need for development of ICT skills to enable stakeholders participate effectively in virtual classes as well as the allocation of more funds to higher education for procurement of ICT, alternative power supply, and internet bandwidths was also recommended.

Keywords: Higher education, ICT, Learning, Libraries, New normal, Virtual classes

INTRODUCTION

Things have changed since the Corona Virus Disease code named Covid-19 was discovered in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. The Federal Ministry of Health confirmed Nigeria's first coronavirus disease (COVID-19) case in Lagos State, Nigeria on the 27th of February 2020. The index case is about an Italian citizen who

works in Nigeria and returned from Milan, Italy to Lagos, Nigeria on the 25th of February 2020 (Anyira and Orji, 2021). He was confirmed by the Virology Laboratory of the Lagos University Teaching Hospital, part of the Laboratory Network of the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, 2020).

Efforts were made to curtail the spread of the virus. One of the measures is the announcement of lockdown. The lockdown policy of the Federal Government was the trigger to the new normal that is now with us.

The COVID-19 pandemic has generally turned life upside down. The rapid worldwide spread of disease caught organizations and governments unawares. The scale of the pandemic is reflected in the exponential increase in new cases every day, requiring organizations and governments to continuously adjust work and life routines as well as public policies. The outbreak of the dreaded disease has transformed nearly every aspect of our lives. Following the announcement of the disease, life took a dramatic turn with fear and apprehension all over the world. For the first time in the twenty first century, the entire world was shut down. Social interaction became a high risk. Handshakes and close contact with family, friends and neighbours, were almost criminalized. Streets were deserted, schools were shut. Workers, students etc were asked to stay at home. Churches and mosques closed their doors, everyone was asked to stay at home while avoiding physical contact. In fact people were asked to avoid touching their own eyes, nose and mouth to avoid contracting this killer disease. Human existence was threatened. This was the beginning of a new way of life, now known as the new normal. The new normal birthed a lot of demands that require unconventional approaches that must be devised to win the war against the pandemic. Lobdell (2021) observed that friends, family, colleagues, and communities have had their lives changed in critical ways that promise to have much longer-lasting effects, as living through a global pandemic has driven dramatic shifts in jobs, eating habits, childcare, and even collective sense of time.

Among the worst hit by the pandemic is the educational sector. In Nigeria for example, formal education is basically delivered in the classroom and online classes are novel to the country's educational system. Be that as it may, the option left for education to thrive since students could not access the classroom as a result of lockdown restrictions put in place by the government, is remote learning, otherwise called online learning or online classes.

However, online classes have been a difficult task for higher institutions in Nigeria who have become overly dependent on traditional schooling mode. A recent study for example reported that Nigerian students had negative dispositions towards online classes. The study explained that the negative dispositions were tied to their home front situations such as higher internet data consumption, distractions from the neighborhood, friends and relatives, erratic power supply and internet network fluctuations (Olasukanmi, 2020). Moreover, the lack of personal interaction and social engagement appears to inhibit teaching and learning as stakeholders were never prepared for online mode of education.

This paper examined the readiness of Nigeria's higher education for new normal service delivery with the aim of recommending strategies for adoption of online mode of education.

Objectives

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the readiness of Nigeria's Higher Education for new normal service delivery. The specific objectives are to determine:

1. The means of accessing online classes among faculties and students in Nigerian higher institutions.
2. The levels of ICT skills among faculties and students in Nigerian higher institutions
3. The preferred mode of learning/teaching/ library service delivery in Nigerian higher institutions.
4. The status of library automation in Nigerian higher institutions.
5. The extent of availability and use of ICT/Learning Management Systems in Nigerian higher institutions.
6. The perceived challenges to the adoption of online classes in Nigerian higher institutions.

Research questions

1. What are the means of accessing online classes among faculties and students in Nigerian higher institutions?
2. What are the levels of ICT skills among faculties and students in Nigerian higher institutions?
3. What is the preferred mode of learning/teaching/ library service delivery in Nigerian higher institutions?
4. What is the status of library automation in Nigerian higher institutions?
5. What is the extent of availability and use of ICT/Learning Management System in Nigerian higher institutions?
6. What are the perceived challenges to the adoption of online classes in Nigerian higher institutions?

Conceptual Framework

Higher education refers to any of various types of education given in post-secondary institutions of learning and usually affording, at the end of a course of study, a named degree, diploma, or certificate of higher studies is awarded. Higher educational institutions include universities, polytechnics and colleges as well as various professional institutes that provide preparation in special fields as law, theology, medicine, business, music, management, agriculture, technology, arts etc. The basic entrance requirement for most higher-educational institutions is the completion of secondary education (Britannica Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2016).

Higher education is the third level education, first and second being primary education and secondary education. It normally includes undergraduate and postgraduate study. Higher education gives the student the opportunity to study a subject or course he/she is interested in and can boost his/her career prospects and earning potential.

The purpose of higher education is to produce knowledge through research and innovations, disseminate knowledge through teaching, learning and research and community service engagement. Hesse (2009) identified five key roles of higher education. According to her, the first key role of higher education is to produce highly educated people by providing imaginatively, thoughtfully, and rigorously conceptualized, designed and implemented teaching and learning programmes and qualifications. The second key role is to contribute to forging a critical and democratic citizenship.

The third key role of higher education is active engagement with the pressing development needs and challenges of the society. The fourth key role of higher education is to proactively engage with our societies at the intellectual and more generally cultural level and to contribute to the intellectual and cultural development of a critical citizenry. The fifth key role of higher education is to imaginatively and creatively undertake different kinds of rigorous scholarship discovery, integration, application and teaching and rigorous research, which has different purposes.

Tague (n.d.) iterated that institutions of higher education hold one of the most important roles in shaping the future of any society. As higher education continues to establish its value beyond the private benefits that inure to individual citizens, research indicates that a strong system of higher education is a significant contributor to any country's ability to compete in the global marketplace and is critical to her economic strength, social well-being. To individual students, higher education creates a path to financial security, economic mobility, personal growth, professional development, leadership opportunities, and the promise of a brighter tomorrow. Opportunities for improving one's position in society are assisted, and sometimes greatly assisted, by a person's degree and alma mater. College graduates find better jobs, earn more money, and suffer less unemployment than high school graduates do (Tague, n.d.).

The benefits of education are many. Not only will you personally benefit from receiving an education when it comes to income, career advancement, skill development, and employment opportunities, but your society and community receive benefits of education as well. Societies with higher rates of degree completion and levels of education tend to be healthier, have higher rates of economic stability, lower crime, and greater equality. Lack of access to education is considered the root of

poverty. Not getting an education can lead to a cycle of poverty. However, access to education can mean getting out of that cycle (University of the People, 2021).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The descriptive survey method was used for the study. A descriptive survey design was employed in this study. Anyira and Anyaobi (2020) noted that descriptive research describes the characteristics of the population or phenomenon studied. This method is most suitable for studies in which research questions focus more on "what" rather than "why" of the research subject. The researchers conducted data collection in August and September, 2021. The target population is defined as Academic Staff and students in selected higher institutions in Nigeria. Online survey questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. The instrument was administered to respondents through e-mail and social media platforms. A total of 715 questionnaires were administered to respondents, but 600 were completed and returned. The respondents were made up of 200 academic staff and 400 undergraduate students in Nigerian higher institutions. This implies 84% return rate. Data were analyzed using graphical charts.

Data Analysis

Chart 1 below shows that out of the 600 respondents, 400 (67%) of the respondents are students, while the remaining 200(33%) are academic staff.

Chart 2 below shows that 300 (50%) of the respondents would access online mode via laptop, 40 (6.70%) via desktop computers, 580 (96.70%) via mobile phones and other 10 (1.67%) would access it through other means.

Chart 3 below shows the level of ICT skills of the respondents. It indicates that 200 (33.3%) of the respondents have advanced ICT skills, 350 (58.3%) have average skill level, 30 (5%) and 20(3.33%) are yet to decide

Chart 4 below shows respondents' preferred mode of learning/teaching/library service delivery. It indicates that 260 (43.3%) of the respondents preferred classroom learning/teaching mode, 340 (56.7%) preferred online classes, 170 (28.3%) preferred physical library services, while 430(71.7%) preferred online library services.

Chart 5 below shows respondents' library automation status. It indicates that 150 (25%) of the respondents said that their libraries are fully automated, 246 (41%) said theirs are partially automated 170 (28.3%) said not automated, while 34 (5.7%) are yet to decide.

Chart 6 below shows extent of availability and use of ICT/LMS at respondents' institutions. Data indicate that 150 (25%) use ICT/LMS to a great extent, 230 (38.3%)

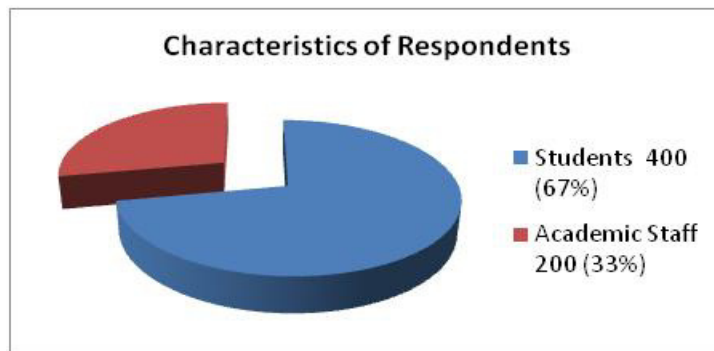


Chart 1. Characteristics of respondents

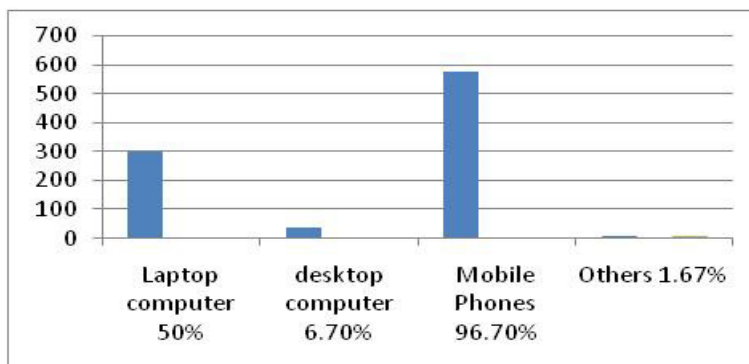


Chart 2. Respondents means of accessing online mode

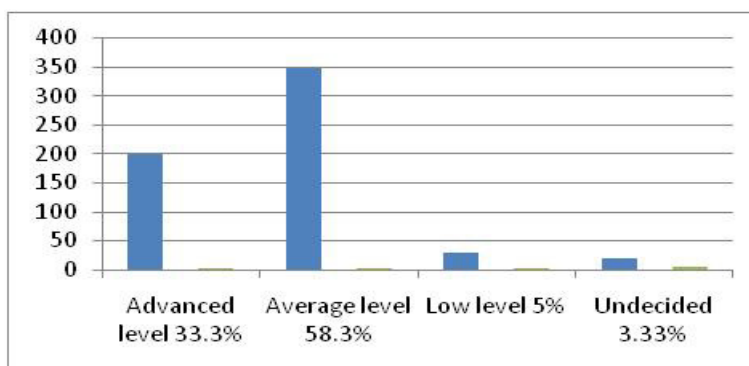


Chart 3. Respondents' levels of ICT Skills

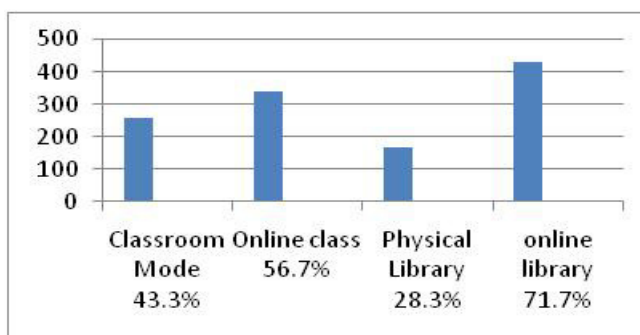


Chart 4. Respondents preferred mode of learning/teaching/library service delivery

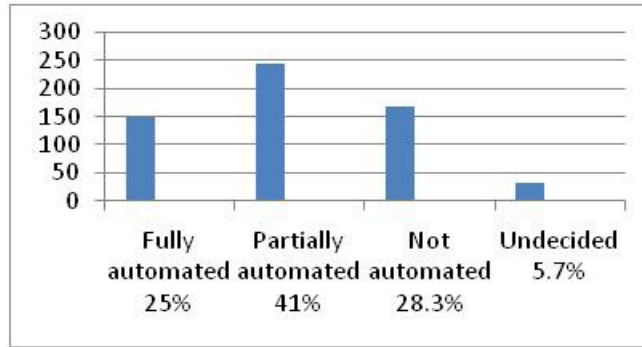


Chart 5. Respondents' library automation status

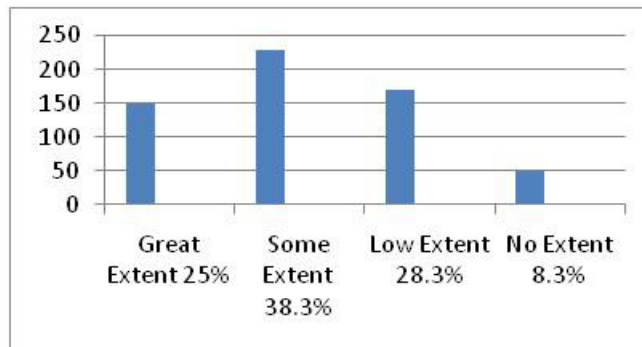


Chart 6. Extent of availability and use of ICT/Learning Management System

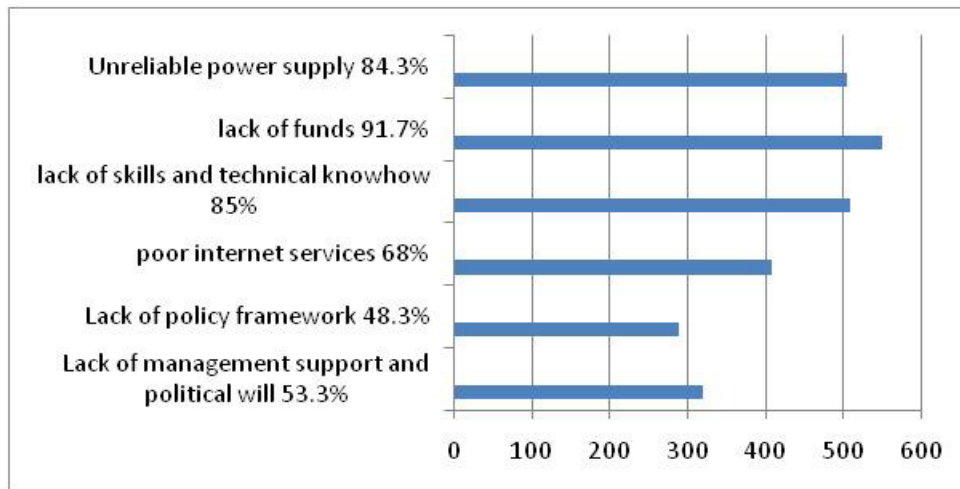


Chart 7. Perceived challenges to the adoption of online education mode

said they use it to some extent, 170 (28.3%) said to a low extent, while 50 (8.3%) said to no extent.

Chart 7 above shows perceived challenges to the adoption of online education mode. 320 (53.3%) identified Lack of management support and political will as challenges, 290 (48.3%) said Lack of policy framework, 408 (68%) said poor internet services, 510 (85%) said lack of skills and technical knowhow, 550

(91.7%) indicated lack of funds, 506 (84.3%) Unreliable power supply, 40 (6.7%) said others.

FINDINGS

The major devices for accessing online classes are mobile phones and laptop computers. Majority of the

Nigerian faculties and students have average ICT skills. Online classes are the preferred mode of teaching and learning among Nigerian faculties and students. Online library service is the preferred mode of library service delivery in Nigerian higher institutions. Majority of Nigeria's higher institution' libraries are partially automated, and only a handful are fully automated. Majority of Nigerian students and faculties use ICT/LMS to some extent, followed by those that use it to a low extent. The perceived challenges to the adoption of online classes are lack of funds, lack of ICT skills, unreliable power supply, and poor internet services.

CONCLUSION

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has changed the scheme of things in the global education environment. The limitations of traditional teaching and learning modes have been exposed as higher institutions in the world had to be shut down in order to protect faculties and students from the risk of contracting Covid 19. The Nigerian educational sector was terribly affected by the outbreak of Covid 19 and the lockdown measure put in place to control it. Most academic libraries in Nigeria were also brought to their knees as they were not prepared to render online services to their clients. The need to embrace ICT in the discharge of library services should form a major focus of librarians especially in higher institutions of learning. This is to ensure their sustained relevance in Covid-19 era and beyond.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is need for massive ICT deployment in higher institutions to facilitate the adoption of virtual education.
2. There is the need for adoption of both classroom and virtual classes in Nigerian higher institutions as both can complement each other and can serve as a great alternative in event of emergencies such as curfews or lockdown.
3. There is the need for academic librarians to develop new skills tailored towards providing and redirecting library service delivery in support of learning in a virtual environment.
4. There is also the need to ensure that academic libraries in Nigeria are fully automated to be able to render services in virtual environment.
5. There is the urgent need for faculties and students to acquire relevant ICT skills that will enable them to participate effectively in virtual classes.

6. Government and funding agencies should allocate more funds to higher education for deployment of ICT, provide alternative power supply, and increase internet bandwidths.

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