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COVID-19 LOCKDOWN: STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS OF ELUSIVE LEARNING CURVE AS NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES RUN VIRTUAL CLASSES

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Abstract
This study centers on Virtual Learning (VL) being implemented by Nigerian universities on directives of Federal Ministry of Education (FME) as reactive approach to COVID-19 Lockdown. Paradoxically, in pre-COVID-19 pandemic times, National University Commission (NUC) concedes, undergraduate applicants exceed available spaces, however, NUC refused to plug the gap through approval of Nigerian universities to run online courses. The foregoing, triggers intention to investigate whether granting Nigerian universities mandate to implement VL in pre-COVID-19 pandemic era, would have given Nigerian universities learning curve advantages during COVID-19 pandemic. The study adopts qualitative research design. Evidences in support of research argument were harnessed from secondary sources. Where applicable, Appendixes were adapted for qualitative analysis. Findings show that: starting VL while COVID-19 pandemic is already raging is a reactive disposition; there were needs for VL in Nigeria, years before incursion of COVID-19 pandemic; Nigerian universities would have amassed experience in operationalization of VL, provided NUC had given Nigerian universities nod on VL long before COVID-19 Lockdown. This study concludes, learning curve eludes Nigerian universities in implementation of VL during COVID-19 pandemic. The study offers recommendations: NUC needs to grant Nigerian universities mandate to run online based degrees henceforth. FME has to craft policy to legitimize certificate from online based course. National Youth Service Corps should recognize graduates of online courses. Nigeria universities should adopt proactive strategies in post-COVID-19 pandemic. Organizations should focus social responsibilities toward supporting Nigerian universities during and after COVID-19 pandemic.
Keywords:*COVID-19 Lockdown; Strategic Implications; Learning Curves; Nigerian Universities; Virtual Classes*

Introduction
Available records show that COVID-19 pandemic propels government to pass lockdown order which affects every sector in Nigeria; much as first case of COVID-19 was recorded in Lagos on 27th of February, 2020; thereafter exponential spread follows (Anjorin, 2020). Apparently, just like any other external environment factors that cannot be controlled internally by organization's

management, COVID-19 offers both threats and opportunities. Strength built by institutions can be deployed to utilize opportunities that come with external environment factors. With respect to university education, COVID-19 Lockdown invariably indicates threats, however, such threats can be avoided by institutions with sufficient strength. Strength in this regard transcends market share, sales revenue, staff population etc. COVID-19 Lockdown necessitated institutional deployment of technology together with experience to exploit available opportunities. In the light of the foregoing, the objective of this study is to determine whether Nigerian universities are better positioned for deployment of technology, expertise and learning curve to exploit opportunities associated with Virtual Learning while COVID-19 pandemic lasts.

Literature Review

COVID-19 Lockdown

COVID-19 is the acronym assigned to coronavirus disease discovered in year 2019 by World Health Organization (WHO). The disease that metamorphosed to coronavirus was initially observed in China (Ebenso & Otu, 2020). Extant reports indicate that coronavirus may have originated from Hunan Seafood Market in Wuhan China (Etukudoh, Ejinaka, Olowu, Obeta, Adebowale, & Udoudoh, 2020). According to Anjorin (2020), World Health Organization delayed proclamation of the said coronavirus disease as pandemic, but, when coronavirus has spread to a total of one hundred and fourteen countries and still counting, then, World Health Organization declared COVID-19 as pandemic. Ebenso, and Otu (2020) categorizes COVID-19 as transmissible through human respiratory drops, sneezing, aerosols, and coughing. Furthermore, Anjorin (2020), confirms, an Italian who flew into Lagos in February, 2020, was the carrier of COVID-19 to Nigeria. Hence, first case of COVID-19 in Nigeria was documented in Lagos, on 27th of February, 2020. Thereafter, government has been implementing phases of lockdown in Nigeria, in an attempt to limit the spread of COVID-19 in the country (Etukudoh *et al.*, 2020). Implementation of COVID-19 Lockdown in phases, nevertheless, aggregate confirmed figure of COVID-19 in Nigeria has not being completely abated. As of August 5, 2020, total number of detected cases was 44,890; total number of discharged cases was 32,165; total number of death was 927 (see Appendix I). As of August 6, 2020, total number of confirmed cases was 45,244; total number of discharged cases was 32,430; and total number of death recorded was 930 (see Appendix II). Comparison between Appendix I and Appendix II, shows 354 increase in confirmed cases, and total death increased by 3. Presumably, war against COVID-19 pandemic continues.

Virtual Learning

In contemporary times, it is not uncommon to use terms virtual learning, e-learning, remote teaching, distance learning, mobile learning, and online class as substitutes for one another. Virtual learning is not a new development in the academic world. Virtual learning has proponents, according to Bichsel (2013), e-learning represents the yearnings of every higher institution. However, it is one thing to desire e-learning, but, another thing to get the nod of the national superintending body to go ahead with e-learning, though, it might be rough at onset. Adeyeye, Afolabi, and Ayo (2014) consider virtual learning as a mode of interaction without face to face contacts between higher institutions' learners and their lecturers. Foregoing acknowledged investigators, unanimously lend their voices, in support of virtual learning in Nigeria. The mentioned authors contend, local area network (LAN) availability has been on increase, providing opportunities for higher institutions' lecturers in Nigeria to disseminate,

interact, and deliver assigned responsibilities through electronic interface with less rigour. Free and open source software (FOSS) constitute another dimension of argument by the cited authors, with wireless access to internet via mobile devices like laptops, palmtops, i-pads, tablets, android, and i-phones, impediments to virtual learning are no longer virile. The writers, argue further, web browser provides facilities for uploading and downloading of document to enhance end to end interaction without physical contacts. In addition, Adeyeye *et al*. (2014) contend, virtual campus and operationalization of intranet can bring about minimization of students idle time, improve students e-participation, enhances e-readiness after graduation; decline in malpractice and cultism. Adeyeye *et al.* (2014) conclude, encouraging virtual learning in Nigerian universities could generally guarantee commendable academic standard. According to Shonola and Joy (2014), virtual learning refers to impartation of knowledge through mobile electronic devices, without personal contacts. Cited the authors hold strong conviction, mobile learning system could be beneficial to stakeholders in Nigerian universities, which was similar to the position of Adeyeye *et al.* (2014).

Yanuschika, Pakhomova and Batbold (2015) posit, virtual learning constitutes interface for improving quality of education. The authors argue that web-based guidelines facilitate assimilation of course content by learners. Virtual learning has been found relevant in carrying international students along in quantitative courses, because, participating students can receive their guidelines in any language of choice (Yanuschika *et al.*, 2015). Virtual learning is synonymous to unhindered access to technology and internet for the purpose of remote teachings (Górska, 2016). Górska (2016) argues that remote teaching will remain a dream, in the absence of internet and technology. Virtual learning is meant to be part of identity of higher institutions, more so, implementation of virtual learning by higher institutions and participation of learners propels skill development (Kuimova, Kiyanitsyna, & Truntyagin, 2016). Kuimova *et al.* (2016) contend that e-learning motivates knowledge acquisition, and upon graduation enhances competency at place of work. Virtual Learning is the variable on which accomplishment of students depends (Kisanjara, Tossy, Sife, & Msanjila 2017). Kisanjara *et al.* (2017) advocate, e-learning should not be denied students in developing countries, it is a catalyst for their academic and career achievement.

Virtual learning is all about utilizing information and communication technology in end to end delivery of educational obligations (Eze, Chinedu-Eze, & Bello, 2018). In comparison with western peers, Eze *et al.* (2018) lament the gap; resource persons in Nigerian higher institutions of learning, have not significantly embraced e-learning as contemporary means of content delivery. Notwithstanding, cited authors, admit, cutting edge facilities are not in place, more so, available resource persons in Nigerian universities require skills upgrade and intermittent refresher courses. Virtual learning denotes well-organized distance information and communication technology for facilitating teachings (Grabinski, Kedzior, Krasodomska, & Herdan, 2020). Grabinski *et al.* (2020) argued, desirable as e-learning may be, academics undergo stress in the aspect of designing and updating course material. Hence, every internal stakeholder has a price to pay for functionality of virtual learning.

Challenges of Virtual Learning

Researchers look forward to seeing identified challenges confronting virtual learning resolved. Shonola and Joy (2014) posit that challenges of virtual learning range from threats, risks and

attacks on network devices, and mobile devices, to servers. Hindrances to information and communication technology include infrastructure insufficiencies; for instance, universities lack e-learning library scope, elusive online seminars and discussion with lecturers, unavailability of facilities for online examination, and inadequate bandwidth (Anene, Imam, & Odumuh, 2014). Anene *et al.* (2014) suggest, current Academic Staff Union of Nigerian University (ASUU) strike, must linger until infrastructure deficiencies are addressed. It has become needful for Nigerian universities to consider Mobile learning, because, qualified applicants for full time programs are more than available spaces and physical facilities (Kayode, Alabi, Sofoluwe, & Oduwaiye, 2018). Kayode et al. (2018) argue, mobile learning has not been working in Nigeria, because dexterity in application and usage of both LinkedIn and Facebook remain vague.

Multifarious challenges to virtual learning in Nigeria, range from insufficient knowledge on the part of lecturers and students in Information Technology (IT), and poor skill in Web navigations needed for implementation of virtual learning (Nwagwu, 2019). Nwagwu (2019) contends, universities' capacity development in IT would propel virtual learning, though, financial elusiveness; training elusiveness; content elusiveness; material elusiveness; Information and Communication Technology (ICT) elusiveness, constitute serious concern. COVID-19 lockdown has necessitated emergency migration of universities in Nigeria to e-learning, however, the attempt is being faced with difficulties such as lack of preparation; lack of fund; policy inconsistency, and poor infrastructure (Adeoye, Adanikin, & Adanikin, 2020). Inability to surmount the foregoing, occasion elusiveness in learning curve, in the implementation of virtual learning by Nigerian universities (Adeoye *et al.*, 2020). Virtual learning is worthy of being embraced by Nigerian universities, conversely, accessibility of the framework by lecturers and students continues to be elusive (Nwabude, Ogwueleka, & Irhebhude, 2020). In as much as virtual learning software platforms are not customized for lecturers and students to make use of the platform without stress, mastery of virtual learning in Nigerian higher institutions of learning is bound to be elusive (Nwabude *et al*., 2020).

Learning Curve

Virtual learning is not a new development in the academic world. According to Bichsel (2013), e-learning represents the yearning of every higher institution. However, it is one thing to desire virtual learning, but, another thing to get the nod of the national superintending body to go ahead with virtual learning. Advanced countries of the world have embraced e-learning much earlier, hence, they have learning curve advantage (Bichsel, 2013). The acknowledge author, argues, higher institutions of learning in developed countries offer several programs online; virtual learning platform did increased both access and enrolment of learners; mobile devices are affordable to all and sundry; institution have become successful with virtual learning so much that they already have encouraging and growing number of international students; there exists pool of staff with Information Technology (IT) expertise; data affordability and security, feedback system works and supports decision making process. Furthermore, Bichsel (2013) identifies seven indicators of institutions' maturity in operationalization of virtual learning, these are: Priority; Investment in Faculty and Staff; Governance and Policy; Synergy; Continuing Training and Evaluation; Outcome Assessment; and Readiness. Going by the above yardsticks, Nigerian universities seem to be far behind.

Virtual learning is not a new experience to large universities in advanced nation, they easily take advantage of access to latest technology and stables internet; and because they have experimented with e-learning, they are no longer worry by threats emanating from external factors, which need to be addressed through virtual learning (Górska, 2016). Górska (2016) contends, polish higher institution model, keeps abreast with cutting edge technology to enhance teaching on virtual platforms, on that basis, universities in that nation have been enjoying competitive advantage. Increase in acquisition of experience over time is referred to as Learning Curve, in reality, increase in experience comes with quantum advantages, for instance reduction in cost across board; building of strength to utilize opportunities from external environment; and using strength to avoid threat arising from external factors (Chen, Leiblein, & Posen, 2019). Early entry into any business makes it possible for managers to learn the secrets of the business ahead of latter entrants, thereby securing position as industry leader, more so, and early entry offers opportunity to secure and maintain competitive advantage (Chen *et al.*, 2019).

Pre-COVID-19 Argument by National University Commission (NUC)

Mohammed (2015) reporting for Premium Times online media, on Thursday, July 23, presents a caption that reads "Nigeria rejects online degrees, warns students against virtual schools." The said correspondence, covers a press conference by National Universities Commission (NUC). According to Mohammed (2015), NUC, speaking through its Public Relations Officer, openly declared opposition to virtual learning by beckoning on fellow Nigerians to desist from embracing online based university degrees, and reiterates that online certificate are not acceptable in Nigeria. According to Kazeem (2016), NUC acknowledges, annually, over 750 qualified undergraduate applicants are denied admission into higher institutions in Nigeria, simply because, existing higher institution have limited intake capacities. In addition, majority of admission seekers could not afford exorbitant fees of private universities in Nigeria; other option available to such candidates is to get a job and continue schooling through online platform. Kazeem (2016), in his report for Quartz Africa, an online media, NUC's stand was captioned, "Online degrees are not acceptable in Nigeria even though they could plug an education gap."

Prior to the issue of COVID-19 Lockdown in Nigeria, NUC has consistently been in the vanguard of campaign against Virtual Learning in the country (Obajemu, 2018). NUC only permits NOUN to run online program, persistent campaign of NUC against certificate obtained from online programs has left both the certificates and the certificate holders stigmatized (Unachukwu, 2019). NUC only supports programs that have physical contacts with students (Obajemu, 2018). Adesanya-Daniel (2018) presents a headline "NUC: Full online degrees yet to be accepted." The mentioned correspondent, reporting for "today ng," recalls, NUC Director of Information and Public Relations, Ibrahim Yakasai, without hesitation condemned full time online courses. According to Adesanya-Daniel (2018), NUC can endure online programs mixed with physical participation, on that basis National Open University (NOUN) and a few distant learning in Nigerian universities were approved.

Yusuf (2019), in his report for legit online media, presents a headline that reads "NUC says it has not approved degree of online universities in Nigeria." According to Yusuf (2018), NUC works hand in hand with National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) for unanimous stand against online universities in Nigeria, by implication, holders of online degrees will neither be admitted into NYSC scheme, nor be issued NYSC certificate, therefore, securing meaningful employment with

such certificates may be a mirage. That sounds like end of road and disaster to those holding online degrees in Nigeria. Quoted writer, reports further, NUC, through its executive secretary, reveals its resolve not to reckon with or approve degrees obtained through any online classes be it within or from outside Nigeria.

Alonge (2020) reporting for Stears News Limited, laments imbalance in Nigerian federal universities, where more students are admitted into limited space and facilities are in acute shortage. The said correspondent, feels for students who desire to have four or five maximum years of stay for degree program, but end up staying much longer, without any wrong on their part. More so, named writer, wails, indigent students are financially edged out from private universities. Quoted writer, concludes, there is no justification for rejection of online degree in Nigeria, contending, Virtual Learning provides certainty of tenure, cost affordability, and also a way by which Nigerian universities can admit more than what their physical facilities can cope with; if such has been the practice in Nigeria, threats at this material time of COVI-19 pandemic would have been confronted with a pool of experience.

National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)'s Experience

In Nigeria, students other than those in conventional programs in higher institutions, are usually stigmatized with derogatory words like unconventional students, students on correspondence program, part timers, sandwich students, elongated program students and so on (Abah, 2015). According to Abah, Law graduates from National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), have suffered rejection from Nigerian Law School. The rejection was traced to the term "correspondence" by which the NOUN students were categorized. The Nigerian Law School rated products of e-learning as unfit to be considered for admission into Nigeria Law School, just the same way the part time law students are rejected. Even, the NOUN Vice-Chancellor remained helpless over the issue. The NOUN students plight attracted the attention of National Assembly in Nigeria, the clause correspondence and part time were removed from the law that established NOUN, endorsed by the seating president of Nigeria, Mohammadu Buhari on 7th of December, 2018; worse still, NOUN law graduates were given ridiculous condition by Council of Legal Education for participation in Nigerian Law School, though NUC gave NOUN's law full accreditation, and resource persons for accreditation were Professors of law (Unachukwu, 2019).

Unini(2019) reports, NOUN law graduates were given Bar Part I option, while their counterparts from other universities were given Bar Part II; NOUN law graduates rejected the offer, Bar Part I option was considered as highly discriminatory and heartbreaking. Going by Bar Part I option, NOUN law graduates are to spend one full year before proceeding to Bar Part II, where they are also expected to spend another year. The crux of the matter is that at Bar Part I, failure to clear all papers will be interpreted as end of the road; whereas foreign students are require to spend only 3 months in Bar Part I, with privilege of reseating failed papers until they pass.

According to Wahab and Abubakar (2020) who report for Vanguard, law graduates from NOUN are being denied participation in National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme; being denied direct participation in Bar Part II toward issuance practicing license; being subjected to discrimination even after President Muhammadu Buhari signed the NOUN Act that accords privileges as full time graduates; Federal Ministry of Education and the National Universities Commission (NUC) failed to raise voice for the helpless student, signals consent to the ordeal of the agitated law graduates from NOUN. Hence, certificates issued by NOUN to law graduates

are not recognized by employers, since they weren't allowed to participate in NYSC and Nigerian Law School. NUC wishes NOUN law students run undergraduate program for a minimum of seven years; NUC treated NOUN law as a part-time programme, but, NOUN law graduates argue, they attend lectures practically every day (Wahab & Abubakar, 2020).
Umegboro (2020) reporting for i-Petition online media, mentions 2012 star price, won by NOUN law students in moot-court national competition where Nigerian universities participated, being 2012 star price winner, NOUN law students further represented Nigeria in India. Thereafter, NOUN was slammed with exclusion from other competitions on the claim that Council of Legal Education has not approved NOUN law accreditation due to the "Correspondence" discovered in NOUN Act. NOUN produced law graduates in years 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020 might join (Umegboro, 2020). Embattled NOUN law graduates are now awaiting court verdict over the matter of elongation of training period to seven years, participation in NYSC, and call to Nigerian Bar on normal condition.

Federal Ministry of Education's Directives on COVID-19 Lockdown

Federal Ministry of Education (FME), is usually saddled with the responsibilities of looking after entire education system from primary to university levels. In Nigeria, FME is usually headed by appointee(s) called Minister. As of the time of this paper, Nigeria's FME is being superintended by two Honourable Ministers, one occupies office as Substantive Minister, the other as Minister of State. Educational departments, and agencies within country receive and implement directives from FME, most especially strategic on issues.

With the manifestation of COVId-19 pandemic, Nigeria's FME has given notable directives. For instance, Olisah (2020) reporting for naira metrics online media, reports "Covid-19: FG orders immediate shut down of all schools." FME called for nationwide closure of all schools in Nigeria. The directive took effect from March 23, 2020. That directive was one of the measure aimed at curtailing the scourge of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria (Olisah, 2020). All educational departments, agencies, higher institutions of learning, colleges, secondary schools, primary and preparatory school invariably submitted to the closure directives (Olisah, 2020). Ali (2020) captions his report for The Nation online media to read "Minister to varsities: restart session through virtual teaching". The quoted headline came out on April 3, 2020, and was the outcome of the teleconference meeting convened by Nigeria's education Minister, Malam Adamu Adamu. In attendance were 237 Vice-Chancellors; Rectors of Polytechnics, and Provosts of Colleges of Education; directive on continuation of academic session through Virtual Learning was a strategy necessitated by COVID-19 pandemic (Olisah, 2020).

Deji-Folutile (2020), a writer for TheCable online media, contends, FME directive to schools was a belated action. In the said writer's April 9, 2020 online report, TheCable came up with a caption "Beyond education minister's directive on online migration." According to Deji-Folutile (2020), directive that schools should migrate to online class, was more or less an attempt to learn the act of swimming while in the middle of ocean, due to incidence of capsized ship. The press, argues further, no one learns the assemblage and use of warfare missiles, after being subdued by assailants in war front. By the estimate of the media, FME has spent so many years discouraging Virtual Learning in Nigeria. The quoted media exclaims, FME has repeatedly used its agencies to mitigate and condemn attempts of Nigerian universities to float online classes. Said press, expresses displeasure on NUC's persistent war against online related degrees, NUC badmouths

online degrees to an extent, employers of labour in Nigeria wouldn't like to offer any holder of degree from online classes a benefit of doubt, NUC made carriers of online degree certificate to feel inadequate, rejected and incapacitated, all under the watch of FME. Deji-Folutile (2020) holds a view that, had FME encouraged and approved Virtual Learning in Nigeria many years back, Nigerian universities would have learnt and overcome teething problem and be in good position to deploy cutting edge technology for Virtual Learning during COVID-19 Lockdown.

Theory

Logical Incrementalism Theory

This research is underpinned with logical incrementalism theory. Bryson and George (2020) identify Quinn as the originator of logical incrementalism theory, the theory was propounded in the year 1980. The logical incrementalism theory assumptions have been affirmed in some studies. Logical incrementalism has certain assumptions according to the cited authors, assumption of logical incrementalism theory include: decision makers can achieve a long term goals and objectives through gradual, but, steady implementation of strategic plan.

Going by the assumptions of Logical Incrementalism, over centralization can be highly counterproductive (Pal, 2011). More so, said author argues, Logical Incrementalism does not only enhance flexibility in decision making, but allows reversal of inappropriately developed implementation policies. Logical Incrementalism sustains transformation, and invariably leads to widespread and monumental organizational achievements (Atkinson, 2011). In addition, Atkinson (2011) asserts, Logical Incrementalism illuminates enquiry procedure and paves way for emergence of quality decision. Logical Incrementalism enhances implementation of strategic plan, addresses complexity and change management (Kowalkowski, Kindström, Alejandro, Brege, & Biggemann, 2012). Logical Incrementalism permits major and minor decision processes, facilitates corporate, formal, and informal collaborations (Camillus, 2016). Logical Incrementalism facilitates collaboration among stakeholders; Logical Incrementalism is practical and responsive to the reality (Camillus, 2016). Logical Incrementalism permits adaptation to occur through gradual processes (Bryson, & George, 2020). Public policy should emanate from interaction and mutual shifting of position based on interpretations from available data, more essentially, Logical Incrementalism is associated with continuous modification and adaptability (Kowalkowski et al., 2012). Logical Incrementalism, also called gradualism, supports taking one meaningful decision or step at a time; thereby realizing big change over time (Pasha, & Poister, 2017). Furthermore, Pasha and Poister (2017) contends, Logical Incrementalism, enhances strategy formulation procedures, and facilitates measurement of actual performance of individuals and organizations without any disorder.

Logical Incrementalism is adopted for anchoring this study because, experience is not a sudden acquisition, but, a gradual acquisition over a span of time. Learning curve could only be applicable in Nigerian universities during COVID-19, if Nigerian universities have been used to or have been implementing Virtual Learning years before invasion of COVID-19 pandemic, which brought about lockdown across all sectors in Nigeria.

Methodology

The study utilized qualitative research design. Secondary sources were used for this study. There were no abundant extant academic publications on the subject matter; hence, the researchers

predominantly dug out the documented interview with the stakeholders by the media. Press conferences, media interactions, electronic and print media reports, and library archives wereconsulted. Also, extracts were drawn from Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC) for updates on COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The data adapted from NCDC were assembled into Appendix I and Appendix II respectively. Deductions were qualitatively drawn from data and evidences captured in the reviewed literature and appendixes.

Strategic Implications of Elusive Learning Curves

The saying "practice makes perfect," would have worked for Nigerian universities, had it been that NUC had granted Nigerian universities mandate to run online classes long ago before COVID-19 pandemic. The implication of erroneous roles of NUC, coordinating war against Virtual Learning, has impacted badly on Nigerian universities while COVID-19 lasts. Government directives, mandating migration of schools to Virtual platform, is nothing, but, reactive approach to COVID-19 pandemic. It is of no benefit learning the use of weapons of war, while already in the war front. Nigerian universities had no prior pool of experience in the application of Virtual Learning platforms.

To start with, strategic implications of elusive learning curve, turn out alarming, should COVID-19 pandemic be prolonged than expected, some Nigerian universities may fold up, especially, private ones. The reason being that, completion of ongoing semester would be prolonged, some would not be able to simultaneously cope with investment in technology and regular payment of staff.

Nigerian universities are still assembling facilities for possible implementation of Virtual Learning, practically from scratch, which constitutes huge cost and would have to be spread over a length of time. Lecturers ought to be retrained to master the use of the newly acquired technology. High likelihood of engaging paid consultants to provide remote support services from overseas. Rather than submitting themselves to Virtual Learning experimentation in Nigeria, students might migrate to online degree awarding universities abroad with well-established technological facilities, students' supports, school fees rebates and the likes. Should COVID-19 pandemic persists, most students attending Nigerian universities could consider online options from abroad where they can complete their program fast enough, since one of the motivation for joining private universities in Nigeria is to graduate on time.

Therefore, argument of this study is that, NUC and other statutory bodies have persistently discouraged e-learning prior to the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic. Every institution shies away from running online programs because of stigmatization of institutions by NUC, individuals have jettison distance learning options because NUC has persistently badmouths e-learning, even when NUC admits that e-learning is the most enlightened option for undergraduate applicant, who could not gain admission into fulltime undergraduate programs. Hence, learning curve of Nigerian universities has remain elusive as far as e-learning is concerned. Virtual learning taking place during COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria is not underpinned by any experience. Every scenario of inexperience has its own cost. Strategically, Nigerian universities wouldn't escape the costs associated with elusive learning curve.

Conclusion

This study concludes, learning curve on Virtual Learning in Nigerian universities is elusive. National University Commission (NUC), in pre-COVID-19 pandemic period denied Nigerian universities much needed permission to run online based degree courses. Virtual Learning was much needed in Nigeria in pre-COVID-19 era because it would have served as an opportunity to plug the existing gap in carrying capacity of public universities. As captured in the reviewed literature, over 750 thousand qualified candidates seeking entry into public universities do not gain admission since there is limit to carrying capacity both in term of space and resource persons. Private universities' fees are too exorbitant for indigent students to cope with, online based degree courses would have offered them succor of flexibility to combine work with learning toward a degree; other advantage is that distance would not have been a barrier. More so, had Nigerian universities been grated mandate to run online based degree courses, much experience, would have been acquired, several teething technological, and digital connectivity problems would have been surmounted, consequently, Nigerian universities would not have been running Virtual Learning during COVID-19 pandemic with avalanche experience. Rather than encouraging Nigerian universities by granting mandate to implement Virtual Learning option in pre-COVID-19 season, National University Commission was busy leading media campaign against online based degrees. NUC went and secures solidarity with National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) to ensure all avenues of survival are shut against Nigerian with online certificates. NYSC refuses those with online based degree for NYSC scheme, which forecloses their chances of being issued NYSC certificates. Incidentally, no Nigeria can make a full proof of being a graduate in the absence of NYSC certificate, even those who had their studies overseas need to tender NYSC certificate, more especially when national job is involved. NYSC certificate will be requested by employers, it will also be required for post graduate studies. NYSC has three categories of certificate; first: NYSC discharge certificate, meant for those who actively take part in any of the batches and completed the service; second: NYSC exemption certificate, usually issued to those who already clock 30 years of age as at the time of graduation from regular full time programs; third; NYSC exclusion certificate, this category is issues to people who graduated from NUC recognized part time programs. Up till the time of this study, NOUN has turned out six sets of law graduates, and none of them has been enrolled for Nigerian Law School. Same students are facing issues of rejection by NYSC. The researcher hopes, NUC would find a way to rewrite its history.

Recommendation

Having reflected on available data and evidences laid bare in this study, researcher has recommendation for a minimum of five stakeholders. Number one, National Universities Commission need to grant Nigerian universities mandate to run online based degrees. By so doing, a gradual assemblage of tangible technology facilities; human capital development in the area of information and communication technology; resolving digital and connectivity challenges; and cost minimization as a result of experience accumulation will become realizable. Number two, Federal Ministry of Education needs to craft policy to legitimize certificate from online based courses, and also neutralize stigmatization assigned to those holding certificates through part time, correspondence and distant learning, one of the evidences in this study shows, NOUN law students, defeated competitors from regular Universities in Moot Court Competition organized in Nigeria. NOUN law students won star price of the competition in 2012, and proceed to represent Nigeria in India. Number three, NYSC needs to dissociate from being used by NUC; NYSC ought not to be NUC's rubber stamp. Number four, Nigerian universities should continue

building strength in the use of Virtual Learning in the foreseen post-COVID-19 pandemic. Number five, corporate Nigeria should focus social responsibilities toward supporting Nigerian universities to build technological base, digital fortress and develop human capital during COVID-19 pandemic, such gesture needs to persist in post-COVID-19 pandemic.

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