

The Challenges and Prospects of the Transition to Open and Distance Learning in Higher-Education Institutions in Nigeria

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Abstract

E-learning has become a viable alternative for increasing educational access globally. In Nigeria, most universities offer face-to-face part-time programmes. In line with international best practices, and considering the need to attract a larger audience, the Centre for Distance Learning at Obafemi Awolowo University began transitioning the existing part-time programme from a face-to-face model to an e-learning model. The purpose of this study is to review the challenges encountered in the process of the transition, the students' perception of the challenges and potentials of online delivery mode, and the probability of overcoming identified challenges.

The paper explores most of the challenges of the transition process and the prospects of the e-learning programme. To present a holistic view of the challenges and prospects, a sample of one hundred fifty students in the part-time face-to-face programme were randomly selected. A self-designed questionnaire was administered to seek their opinion on the challenges and prospects of the e-learning programme. Most of the challenges encountered were classified as attitudinal, technical, technological, and financial. The students expressed their misgivings about the e-learning programme, noting technological access, quality and technical challenges associated with e-learning, especially in developing world. However, the respondents were of the opinion that those challenges are surmountable.

Keywords: e-learning, transition, training, Open Distance Learning, part-time programme

Study Background

The introduction of distance education in Nigeria can be attributed to many factors. First, the increase in school enrolment at every level of education creates additional challenges of access, as the existing universities cannot cope with the ever-increasing rate of prospective applicants. In Nigeria, over 1.5 million candidates sit for the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) annually, but the existing 125 universities can admit only approximately 225,000 applicants (Akinyeye, 2010). Hence, other candidates resort to part-time programmes under the auspices of distance learning programmes. These programmes are known by various names, including correspondence study, study centre, off-campus study, sandwich programme, extra-mural study centre, part-time programme, and telemetric teaching. The regular university staff are relied upon to write the study manuals used by the part-time programme students. Nigeria's federal government approved a radius of 200 km as a host institution's catchment area. The operation of the distance learning programme is similar to that of a regular university class. They operate as weekend programmes, with a long vacation period specifically designed for, but not limited to, teachers completing in-service training. The major challenge is the maintenance of standards. This arrangement is often regarded as the second-best option, especially for students who do not achieve the cut-off mark required for admission into the regular university system.

Second, the establishment of the National Teachers Institute by Nigeria's federal government as a dedicated institute was based on a demand-supply orientation. The launch of free, universal primary education dramatically increased school enrolment, leading to a structural shortage of teaching manpower and a pressing demand for trained teachers. The National Teachers Institute was established by Decree no. 7 of 1978, following the launch of Universal Primary Education in 1976. The introduction of free and compulsory education up to the primary six level caused an influx of pupils into schools. Non-privileged parents who had been unable to send their children to school thereafter could do so. The massive increase in enrolment made the existing teaching workforce grossly insufficient. The purpose of the National Teachers Institute is to provide manpower to meet the phenomenal increase in school enrolment. The National Teachers Institute (NTI) was established to train a larger number of new teachers,

and as an in-service programme for under-trained teachers. The NTI falls outside of the regular university system. They run courses for the Teachers Grade Two Certificate, the Nigeria Certificate in Education, and a Postgraduate Diploma in Education specifically designed for non-professional teachers. The NTI has offices in every state capital in Nigeria, and its national headquarters located in Kaduna and in an office in the Federal Capital Territory. There are 800 study centres across the country, and enrolment continues to increase (Akinyeye, 2010).

Third, the desire among the working class to increase their knowledge through refresher courses is another compelling force driving demand for higher education. The impact of globalisation, the use of new technology and structural changes in the economy require workers to keep pace with current societal demands. Teachers who were initially untrained in the teaching profession were mandated to complete post-graduate diploma training programmes in education. Workers in management, banking and manufacturing sectors were directly or indirectly pushed to register for courses for a master's degree in Business Administration; acquiring a degree certificate is directly tied to increased salaries, higher status, and in some cases, both. Among government employees, workers whose qualification at entry is a diploma often register for university degrees to increase promotion prospects and to become more effective and competent.

Lastly, a silent but strong driving force is the income-generation motive of higher-education institutions. Part-time programmes became a prominent source of internally generated revenue for universities.

The current delivery mode of part-time programmes is face-to-face, but recently, the regulatory body for higher education—the National Universities Commission—has mandated the transition to an online delivery model.

Statement of the Problem

The transition to an Open and Distance Learning model is no longer a choice for universities operating face-to-face part-time programmes due to directives from the regulatory body. The process of transition and the eventual operation of the online platform present some challenges.

Students who are already accustomed to the face-to-face mode displayed mixed reactions to the transition. Challenges of online learning, including the availability of the required technology and the skills for its usage, the pedagogical skills of online instructors, and attitudinal disposition to innovation are real threats to the success of students.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study is to critically examine the challenges of the transition from the traditional face-to-face delivery mode to a fully online delivery mode and to examine the potential challenges to the operation of a fully online programme in the Nigerian context. The specific purposes are as follows:

1. To determine the difficulties encountered by the stakeholders, such as management, content developers, and students, in the process of the transition;
2. To understand the perceptions of the stakeholders on the challenges and prospects of online learning with specific reference to Nigeria;
3. To examine the perceptions of the stakeholders on the possibilities of overcoming perceived future challenges in the full implementation of online learning.

Research Questions

1. What is the nature of challenges encountered in the process of the transition?
2. What are the students' perceptions of the challenges and potentials of the online delivery mode?
3. Can the challenges encountered in the transition period and operation of e-learning be overcome?

Review of Related Literature

The Federal Ministry of Education in Nigeria defines Distance Education as various methods by which a variety of media and technologies are used to provide and/or improve access to good, quality education to large numbers of people who either misused educational opportunities earlier in

life or whose socio-economic and family circumstances do not permit them to acquire education through the formal school system (Federal Government of Nigeria [FGN], 2004).

The goals of Open and Distance Learning (ODL), according to the National Policy on Education (NPE), are as follows: to provide access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied; to meet special needs of employers by instituting special certificate courses for their employees at their places of work; to encourage internalization, especially of tertiary education curricula; and to ameliorate the effect of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing experts as teachers regardless of their locations or places of work (FGN, 2004).

The establishment of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) in 2002 marked the commencement of Open and Distance Education in conformity with international best practices. In addition to the National Open University of Nigeria, which operates a unimode model, six universities were empowered to practice a dual-mode in which they converted their face-to-face part-time programmes to Open and Distance models alongside the existing face-to-face programmes. The Internet, social media and multimedia techniques are to be used to facilitate learning. Eventually, all six universities with dual-mode mandates were compelled to transition their face-to-face programmes to online mode. This type of transition usually involves both opportunities and challenges. It is generally thought that the opportunities in the online delivery mode are the underlying reasons why institutions transition from face-to-face to online learning. Educause (2009) identified many opportunities of online education: the capacity to create a learning environment that promotes active learning, critical thinking, collaborative learning, and knowledge creation; development of 21st century literacy among students and faculty; reaching and engaging today's learners; encouragement of faculty adoption of technology and innovation in teaching and learning with Information Technology (IT); and advancing innovation in teaching and learning with technology in an era of budget cuts.

Online education allows unlimited access in terms of time and space, whereas there is a limit to the number of students a school can provide with adequate facilities such as classrooms, teaching facilities, and staff

and student accommodation, among others needs, in a brick and mortar institution. A result of this unlimited access to online education is the possibility of accommodating a large number of students. Online learning has completely changed the “University’s usual constraints of space and time” (Dziuban, Hartman and Moskel, 2004). Donoghue (2006) noted that flexibility in teaching and learning, critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, and increasingly larger class sizes with little additional development cost are benefits of e-learning. Dziuban, Hartman and Moskal (2004) argue that the advantages of an online system include the ability to extend learning beyond the classroom, tailoring learning to students’ needs, convenience, easy communication with students, management of curriculum development, and effective time management.

The removal of constraints to access reinforces the flexibility and independence of learning in an online environment. Teaching is not restricted to a synchronous model. It can take place asynchronously through the use of technologies (Wall, 2012). Students have access to the course content from the beginning of the academic semester. Educause (2003) noted that institutions adopt e-learning to institutionalize and transform teaching to accommodate growing student enrolment, sustain academic diversity and gain a competitive advantage. Increased enrolment could be an additional burden on the tutors, but this is often overlooked given its propensity to generate substantial revenue to the school (Muhammad Rais and Yusup, 2004; RocSearch, 2003).

Muhammad Rais and Yusup (2004) highlighted the following benefits of online education at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris Malaysia: the creation of tools for instructional management, the creation of support services, a solution to the problem of large classes, control of instructional timing, immediate response to teaching, student remediation and practice, and the opportunity for flexible learning.

However, the process of transition inherently presents a new set of “hurdles and bumps” to be crossed. Woodall (2007) observed that the transition to online delivery requires changes in organizational structures, technological use and teaching. Attitude to change across the organization is very divergent, and the process of adaptation is often difficult. Citing the work of many scholars, such as Stoll and Fink (1996), Anderson (2006), Muirhead (2004) and Levy (2003), Woodall (2007) notes that in

teaching and learning, leadership and organizational culture are important in educational change, and in the case of changes to online learning, a strategic plan for technology is an indispensable factor for success.

The process of initiation can be inhibited by inadequate technologies, lack of funding, poor pedagogical input by the instructors, and lack of support from stakeholders (Alexander, 2001; Latchem, 2005). Many challenges to e-learning in developing countries have been identified: the high cost of hardware, high import tariffs and limited understanding of price, inadequate internet access, shortage of skilled manpower, reluctance of institutions and companies to invest in staff training, under-developed communication equipment, computer technology illiteracy, high costs of acquiring and installing gadgets required for e-learning, inconsistent power supply and lack of affordable dedicated/specialized e-learning centres (Olaniyi, 2006).

Wall (2012) highlighted five areas for which scholars have criticised e-learning: (1) participant isolation online, (2) high participant dropout rates, (3) the increased time and money needed to create and teach online courses, (4) intellectual property rights and (5) the pedagogical soundness of e-learning.

It is documented that instructors of face-to-face programmes are not positively inclined to online learning at the inception of the programme and are against using technological methods as a replacement for face-to-face instruction (Sait et al., 2003). This could be merely attitudinal, or it may reflect the reality that they will face new challenges of teaching in an unfamiliar terrain. Online instruction requires a different pedagogy and unique set of skills quite distinct from those needed in face-to-face settings (Fetherston, 2001; Oliver, 1999; White and Low, 2013). Redmond's (2011) report on the experience of online instructors shows that they were initially sceptical and resistant at the inception of the online programmes. The table below shows the progression of the instructors' attitudes towards online education over a period of time.

Table 1 Instructors' changes in perception and modification of pedagogy

Stage	Attitude	Traits demonstrated
One	Sceptical and resistant to online teaching	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Flexibility: access to materials may be limited; students choose engagement/interaction; online area largely a repository 2. Online discussion: limited student interaction; strong teacher participation 3. Teacher presence: majority of instructor posts facilitated discussion by encouraging, acknowledging and reinforcing student posts; next most common type of post was to present content and questions
Two	Some blended experience and transitioning toward fully online	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Became more comfortable online 2. Less content provided: allowed time and space to increase quantity and quality of discussion; provided models and scaffolding 3. Online discussion: looked for new ways to engage students; concerned about the frequency and depth of student contributions 4. Teaching presence: High involvement in facilitating discourse by drawing in participants and prompting discussion
Three	Working face to face, blended and fully online	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Less critical and more open to new possibilities of teaching online 2. Online considered a space rather than repository 3. Online discussion: high expectations; increased interaction with explicit links to learning activities and assessment tasks 4. Teaching presence: directed instruction to promote higher-order thinking and increased student engagement through direct instruction, design and organization and facilitation of discussion.

Source: Redmond (2011).

Instructors' Changes in Perception and Modification of Pedagogy Methodology

The study adopts a survey design method combined with analysis of documents from the training and stakeholders meetings held in the course of preparation and implementation of the face-to-face to online transition. The study population consists of the management team of the Centre for Distance Learning, the instructors teaching the part-time programmes undergoing transition, and the students from the Nursing and Education departments of Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. The management team comprises four officials, twenty-five instructors and approximately five hundred students, all from the institutions. Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife is used because it is one of the six universities with a dual-mode mandate, and it has actively embarked on the transition programme. Other institutions are still operating blended learning programmes. For the study sample, the 4 officials from the Centre for Distance Learning and all 25 instructors were purposely selected, while 150 students from the Nursing and Education departments were randomly selected. For the research instrument, a self-designed but validated questionnaire was used to elicit information from one group of respondents (the students), while an in-depth interview was conducted with the other groups (the management and the instructors).

The questionnaire was administered to the respondents any time they were available for lectures. In most cases, the questionnaire items were collected immediately. The collected data were subjected to simple percentage analysis.

Findings and Discussion

Research Question 1

What are the challenges encountered in the process of the transition?

The interview conducted with the management team of Centre for Distance Learning and the 25 participating instructors was used to analyse this research question.

Content development challenges

The challenges associated with content development manifest themselves in many ways. First, several of the instructors who are involved in content development are seemingly overloaded. Several of them would not wholly agree with this observation, but experience suggests that this is the case. The decrease in the pace of the work supports this assertion. Aside from the time factor, some of the instructors lack computer skills. Many had to resort to hiring computer operators. This proved to be only a partial solution, as it was impossible for the computer typist/operator to identify the exact points to be put in Power Point slides.

Unequal distribution of the volume of course content also generated some discontent. The reward for the instructors was uniform per course, regardless of the nature of or the volume of the course content. Instructors with a high content volume felt cheated, and their morale was negatively affected.

Gathering the course content from the instructors was also a challenge. The tutors who were mandated to collect the content were sometimes perceived as a nuisance by the content developers. This exercise also reveals the haphazard manner in which some lecturers handle their face-to-face teaching. It was astonishing to discover that several lecturers had no prepared notes. Developing new notes or collating available bits and pieces cut into the planning time and resulted in frequent shifts in the scheduled time off taken from the programme.

Attitudinal challenges

First, there is a widespread perception among faculty members, students, and the general public that e-learning is ineffective and that the quality of instruction is not comparable with that in live classes. Second, there is friction due to a conflict of interest between the Centre for Distance Learning (CDL), which is responsible for coordinating all part-time programmes, and the cognate departments responsible for teaching; the working relationship between the two sides is often cold. While the CDL performs administrative work, the cognate departments are responsible for academic activities.

It is often argued that the essence of Open and Distance Education is to provide access to educational opportunity; yet a subtle driving force is pecuniary interest. Part-time programmes have become a viable alternative source of income for higher education institutions in Nigeria. Sharing and distributing that income among all of the stakeholders, if not properly handled, can become an obstacle to development.

“This simply can’t work. Nigeria is yet to develop for e-learning.”

Source: Instructor comment during the interview

Financial challenges

Operating Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is a capital-intensive project. Funding is needed for many areas: purchasing technology such as Internet facilities and computer systems, both hardware and software; remuneration to instructors and supportive staff; and equipment, building, and resource centres. The instructors are paid both for content development and for actual teaching. The school fees for distance learning are higher than those for live classes because of additional costs incurred in the programme development process.

“I will not release my content unless I am paid.”

Source: An instructor comment during the content gathering exercise

Technological challenges

Poor internet connectivity constitutes a threat to the smooth operation of an online project. Though the university has made a significant breakthrough in this regard, occasional erratic functionality often creates dysfunction for the users. Moreover, while accessibility is not a major threat to the staff and faculty members, the same could not be said for the students.

Closely related to the Internet issue is the instructor incompetence in using online platforms. Many instructors are unaware of the existence of web facilities, and even fewer are efficient users. E-teaching platforms such as Moodle, Blackboard and Tutor are unfamiliar to a large percentage of instructors who are already deeply entrenched in the traditional face-to-face delivery mode.

“Operating computer is a difficult task. I will have to employ the service of a computer operator.”

Technical challenges

The availability of technicians to provide logistical support to faculty members is another challenge. Many instructors are still in the early stages of using a computer effectively. Even after some instructors have completed their content creation exercise, uploading the content to the dropbox is a daunting task.

Research Question 2

What are the students’ perceptions of the challenges and opportunities of the online delivery mode?

Table 2 The percentage of students who perceive various challenges

	Challenge	Yes	No	Indifference
1	Ineffective Teaching	77.46	18.31	4.23
2	High Cost	72.22	23.61	4.17
3	Lack of Face-to-Face Interaction with Fellow Students	71.21	25.76	3.03
4	Lack of Face-to-Face Interaction with Lecturers	69.70	28.79	1.52
5	Low Quality	62.34	31.17	6.49
6	Inadequate electrical power Supply	60.81	37.84	1.35
7	Poor Internet Accessibility	58.82	38.24	2.94
8	High Drop-out Rate among Lazy Students	53.12	35.94	10.94
9	Difficulty with computer use	42.19	54.69	3.12
10	Unfamiliarity with the concept of online learning	31.75	60.32	7.94

Challenges of online delivery mode

The challenges are, in order of importance, ineffective teaching, high cost, lack of face-to-face interaction with fellow students, lack of face-to-face interaction with lecturers, low quality, inadequate electrical power supply,

poor internet accessibility, high drop-out rate by lazy students, difficulty with computer use, and the perception of e-learning as a strange idea.

Most of the students hold the opinion that the teaching may not be effective. This is one of the myths regarding e-teaching. The fear expressed by students concerning the lack of face-to-face interaction with fellow students shows the need for cooperative learning and peer group interaction among the students. The challenge ranked fourth on the list is the students' feeling of separation from the lecturers. This could be likely attributed to ignorance of the elements involved in e-teaching and to the separation from teachers, who they are accustomed to seeing in traditional physical face-to-face instruction. The opinion of the writer is that online teaching is potentially as effective as face-to-face teaching, if not better, because it is subject to the organization of the Learning Management System (LMS) and a greater degree of commitment from the instructors. Ironically, erratic electrical power supply was ranked 5th among the challenges. Power supply is a national challenge in Nigeria, and it was expected to be rated as a major challenge. The students' opinions may be related to the presence of an alternate power supply, which many students can afford. The sixth problem is poor Internet connectivity. This problem is not limited to the third world, but it varies in degree across developed and developing countries. However, with the increasing number of Internet service providers, such as MTN and Globacom, the cost is becoming more affordable.

Curiously, 53.12% of the students were of the opinion that the attrition rate may be high, especially among lazy students. However, this item also had the highest number (10.94%) of undecided respondents. This fear will be confirmed when the programme is fully operational. The 8th ranked challenge is the development of an inferiority complex among the online students compared to face-to-face students. In general, Nigerians tend to perceive online products as being of lower quality than the product of a face-to-face programme. This is another area for further research. A positive aspect of this finding is that, although computer knowledge is identified as a problem, it is rated low among the potential problems identified. Fewer than half of the respondents agreed that it is a problem (42.19%). A greater percentage, 54.69%, responded that it is not a challenge, while 3.12% remained indifferent. This result reflects the

increasing rate of computer literacy among Nigerians. Finally, 31.75% believed that the online system is a strange idea.

Table 3 Potential positive aspects of the Online Delivery Mode

Category	Yes	No	Indifference
Convenient and Self-Paced e-learning	84.09	13.64	2.27
Large Number of Students	78.65	19.10	2.25
Flexibility	68.06	31.94	–

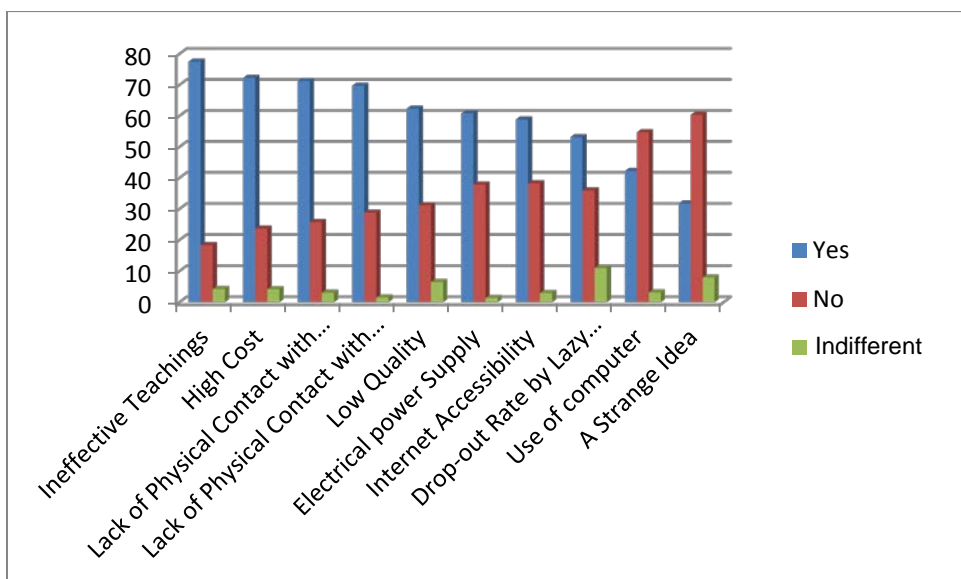


Figure 1 Student opinions regarding the challenges of e-learning

Potential of the online delivery mode

Convenience: It is not surprising that a greater percentage of the respondents are drawn toward the convenience associated with the online mode. First, the students are from the working class. Second, they are mostly parents with family responsibilities. Third, many of them travel a long distance to attend lectures. These are challenges that constitute a

major threat to education access among this group of learners. An overwhelming percentage—84.09%—agreed that e-learning is a convenient mode in which to learn. Héctor Álvarez-Trujillo (2008) argued that the student's access to all course materials at the time deemed more convenient for the student, and the lack of physical setting and time restraints make the online system appealing. He observed that “with online learning, if you can get your hand on a computer connected to the Internet, no matter what you do or where you are, you can get to class on time”.

Large Audience – Open and Distance Learning has the potential to attract a large number of learners. This is not unrelated to the fact that the barriers of time, space, and distance are removed. Regarding time, students can learn at their convenience, except when the teaching takes a synchronous form. This form usually constitutes only a small percentage of instruction time and space. In a traditional face-to-face model, there is a limit to the capacity of normal brick and mortar educational settings. In ODL, the classroom is diffuse and subject to the choice of each learner. In the open and distance learning mode, distance is irrelevant. A student in the remotest part of the world can register for an open and distance course in any other part of the world. Prof. Mitchell Duneier, Professor of Sociology at Princeton University, remarked that, “within three weeks, I have more feedback on my sociological ideas than I'd had in my whole teaching career”. He had approximately 40,000 online students from various walks of life. Among the students was an American senator, an 81-year-old man from Greece, and a Philadelphia fire fighter. The students were from approximately 190 nations, including India, Nepal, Iran, Germany and Russia.

Flexibility – A large percentage—68.06%—agreed that online learning is flexible, unlike the rigid traditional system. The degree of flexibility could also be a challenge (Anderson, 2008). However, working-class learners placed more emphasis on the positive side of flexibility rather than the perceived or real problems that could result from flexibility.

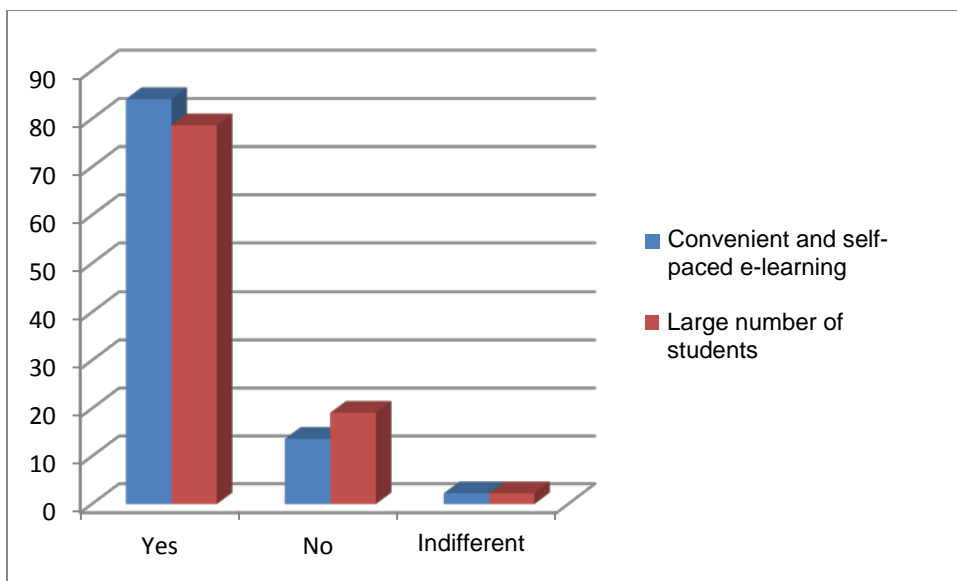


Figure 2 Student opinions regarding the convenience of e-learning

Research Question 3

Can the challenges of e-learning be overcome?

Various measures were put in place to alleviate, if not completely resolve, the challenges identified for e-learning.

Training

The Centre for Distance Learning, in conjunction with a technical partner, conducted a series of training programmes for the content developers. One of the training sessions focused on content development design. Bearing in mind the nature of e-learning and how it differs from the face-to-face model to which they are accustomed, and the nature of the audience, who are likely to be working class and married with family responsibilities, the design must be user-friendly with built-in animation to attract users and sustain their attention.

Specifically, the training sessions on content development focused on cognitive, behaviourist, and constructivist educational theories and their relevance to teaching and learning. The instructors were encouraged to

focus on constructivist ideas regarding teaching and evaluation. The constructivists hold the view that learners are active participants in the teaching and learning process and that learners possess inherent potential in constructing meaning around the concepts being taught. In this regard, instructors provide guidance and direction, whereas learners should actively participate through problem solving, inquiry, and project development.

Another aspect of the training was the use of rationale while introducing the module. The components of rationale are the use of case studies, real-life examples, video or animation. The purpose of using rationale is to stimulate student interest in the action part of learning and to grab the learners' attention, arouse their curiosity and sustain their attention. Instructors are to state the teaching objectives at the beginning of each module. The objectives were to be stated in measurable terms using active verbs and cover the six levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. The levels are knowledge, comprehension, application, synthesis, analysis, and evaluation. Instructors whose academic expertise falls outside of the faculty of education were supplied with a pool of possible verbs they could use to state their behavioural objectives. At the end of each module, the instructors were required to submit multiple questions for evaluation and higher-level evaluation to test students' critical thinking skills and ability to apply the concepts they learned.

Another session focused on the use of Power Point and Dropbox. All instructors were required to create a Dropbox account so that they can upload the completed content and share it with designated CDL staff in charge of the Learning Management System.

Finally, there was a practical demonstration of e-teaching, using the University of Wisconsin Learning Management System. The practical demonstration was to acquaint the instructors with the rudiments of e-teaching, the process and the teaching platform.

Overcoming the challenges of technology

The centre is in the process of constructing resource centres in key locations across the country. The resource centres will provide access to

students who are confronted with technological challenges. At the centre, students can have access to Internet facilities and a power supply.

Another strategy to solving the problem of erratic power supply is the provision of a customized personal computer that has a built-in battery that can work for eight hours once it is fully charged.

Stakeholders' meetings

The Centre for Distance Learning (CDL) organised a series of meetings with staff and directors of various programmes. The main points that are addressed in the meetings included full conversion of programmes from face-to-face mode to e-learning mode, the financial implications for the participating lecturers, the deadline for content submission, and the need for every stakeholder to channel their energies towards successful implementation of the projects. Other issues included quality control mechanisms, proper handling of laboratory and practically oriented courses, mathematical programmes, teaching practice for education students, attrition rates in part-time programmes, potential obstacles and possible solutions. The meetings provided avenues for positive interaction, reaching a position of compromise on contentious issues between the Centre and the cognate departments, understanding of perspectives, and mutual renewal of faith.

In summary, periods of training provide an avenue for addressing technological and technical problems, while stakeholders' meetings address financial and attitudinal problems.

Retreat and awareness with the University administration

Meetings and awareness development were not limited to the staff and directors of programmes. The Centre also organized a retreat and an awareness creation exercise for the university administration, specifically the principal officers such as the Vice Chancellor, the Deputy Vice Chancellors, Deans of Faculty, and other senior personnel within the university administration. This was done to ensure maximum cooperation among the authorities.

Overcoming challenges: Students' perception

The greatest problem is not the existence of problems, but the belief that those problems are insurmountable. Although the respondents admitted that there are challenges to e-learning, they also hold the opinion that those challenges could be solved. The breakdown of their responses is shown below:

Table 4 The category breakdown of student responses

Category	Yes	No	Indifference
1 Solution to Internet Facilities	89.88	10.42	
2 Inability to use Computer	77.38	21.43	1.19
3 Solution to Erratic power supply	63.64	34.09	2.27
4 Low Quality	67.06	28.34	4.71

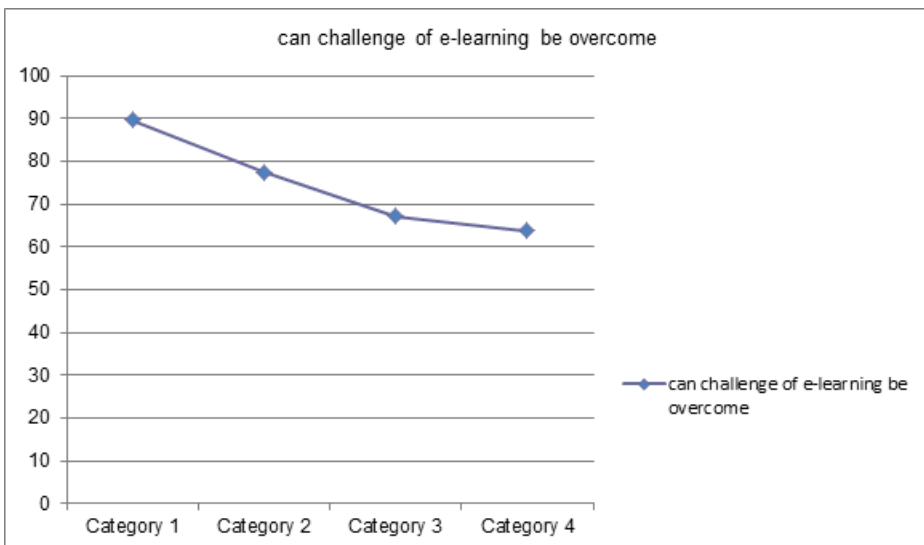


Figure 3 Student responses regarding the categories of e-learning challenges

Summary and Recommendation

The development of a new programme is always beset by challenges. In the case of the transition from a face-to-face to an e-learning model, various challenges have been encountered at the Centre for Distance Learning at Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Most of the challenges are technical, technological, attitudinal, or financial. Students expressed their fears about the challenges of e-learning but were also aware of the inherent and circumstantial potential of e-learning. Additionally, the perception that those challenges can be overcome is strong among the students and instructors.

It is therefore recommended that the Centre continue to hold awareness and training programmes to ensure the programme's timely implementation and effective administration.

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