RETHINKING MONITORY AND EVALUATION OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA IN THE NEW NORMAL

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Abstract
This paper examined the need to rethink the monitoring and evaluation of university education in Nigeria in the new normal. Information for the paper were sourced through secondary data, mainly on the interruption of the university education during and after COVID-19 pandemic learning adoptions. The paper discussed the following concepts as related to the article; The concept of monitory and evaluation, The need for remote learning in the universities in the new normal, Opportunities applicable to integration of remote learning in the new normal, The drive towards tech for monitoring and evaluation in higher institutions in the new normal, A blended approach to monitoring and evaluation of university education in the new normal and what next in monitoring and evaluation of university education. The paper concluded that for effective monitoring and evaluation of university education to take place in the new normal, teachers and students must keep themselves abreast of online teaching and learning technology to engage students in electronic education, this would increase their competence on digital knowledge and skills to master how to apply them in their learning process in the face of unexpected physical learning disruptions.

Keywords: Monitoring and Evaluation, University Education, COVID-19 and Teaching and Learning

Introduction

The implementation of an education system plan is contingent upon monitoring and evaluation (M&E) process. The educational managers are able to get knowledge for future planning and policy by gathering, tracking, analyzing, and evaluating activities of the school system. The Nigerian universities deal with issues like low finance, outdated facilities, underpaid academics, bureaucracy, and insecurity, among other problems. Hence, monitoring and evaluation of the university education system aids in the collection, processing, analysis, interpretation, and archiving of information on the progress of students, the execution of projects and programmes, and the performance of school stakeholders. As provided by the National Policy on Education (2023), the success of any system of education is dependent on inspection and supervision of instruction. Recognizing the need for quality control, the Nigerian government set up agencies that monitors not only the financial management of the universities, but also the teaching of students. It has been established that quality and standards could be maintained in the educational institutions through regular monitoring and evaluation of instruction in the schools (Noun,2009).

It is a known fact that the entire Education system all over the world was altered as a result of the global outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) in 2020. It is, therefore, no news that there will be implications for developmental interventions especially on monitoring and evaluation of activities which was likened to bowling in the dark. Development organisation – both donors and implementing partners were forced to ask critical questions about monitoring and evaluation activities in our universities in the new normal. There are ongoing conversations on how best to engage beneficiaries without attrition, best alternatives to fieldwork, the kind of technology that can be effectively deployed during the pandemic. Despite these thoughts, it is useful to explore available options to ensure that valuable insight and data is not lost during the pandemic.

Monitoring and evaluation personnel in the university system are adjusting evaluation designs, plans, and approaches, postponing, or canceling field missions to avoid putting at risk partners and beneficiaries. A large part of data collection is being done remotely, using various methods and tools e.g., virtual interviews with evaluation stakeholders, use of online surveys. Field-surveys and interviews at the institutional level, were put on hold and alternatives for reaching out to beneficiaries

remotely were being explored e.g. via mobile phone. The question remains – how effective are these alternatives?

THE CONCEPT OF MONITORY AND EVALUATION

Monitoring according to Nabris (2012) is an ongoing activity to track the progress being made by an entity or a phenomenon against a planned task. Abe (2012) said that monitoring is aimed at: improving efficiency and effectiveness; helping to keep work on track and allows management to know when things are going wrong, enabling organizations to find out if resources available are sufficient and well used accountably; and finding out if capacity available is sufficient and appropriate and then providing useful base for evaluation.

Evaluation is all about appraising or judging of performance of workers against a stated goals and objectives using any or various testing parameters. Stuffleabeam and Shinkfield (2007) described evaluation as the society's most fundamental discipline and went further to define it as a process for giving attention on such matters as reliability effectiveness, cost effectiveness, efficiency ease of use and probity and services, the need of the society by providing affirmation of work, value, improvement, accreditation and accountability. It is a periodic objective assessment of a planned project, programme or policy. In practical terms, evaluation is used to help in decision making in how to improve on group programmes.

According to Imas and Rist (2009) evaluation can be used to address such questions as what is taking place (descriptive question), normative question such as comparing what is taking place with what should be taking place for quality assurance, therefore evaluation will appraise the status of change brought about by the students and the institutions (a change in students' behavior). It will also expose students' needs and possibilities. Evaluation in quality assurance will aid institutions in planning and expanding the concept of worthwhile goals and objectives.

Monitoring and evaluation will provide the stakeholders in education with much desired extent to which universities are meeting the aims and objectives of their establishment. Monitoring and evaluation will build greater transparency and accountability in terms of use and available resources in assuring quality in the institution (Abe, 2012). Monitoring, evaluation and quality assurance of university education is carried out through external assessment by the school moderating bodies like National Universities Commissions (NUC) and others. Internally, the university administrators plan, organize, direct, coordinate, evaluate and control the teaching-learning processes to ensure that they are properly done according to procedures, rules and policies stipulated by the school authority. Externally, the moderating bodies also pay visits to schools to ensure that things are done accordingly in terms of adequate provision and utilization of both human and material resources in schools as to achieve the stated goals and objectives of tertiary educational institution.

THE NEED FOR REMOTE LEARNING IN THE UNIVERSITIES IN THE NEW NORMAL

The IAU-COVID-19

Global Impact Survey stated that 77% of higher institutions in Africa shut their campuses in the wake of the pandemic as a precautionary measure. Two-thirds of the universities in Africa were not prepared to move to remote learning and had to suspend teaching in the aftermath of the Pandemic. One-third of these institutions have no required facilities in place to reach their students. To ensure that students continue with their various programmes, frantic efforts were made to exploring remote modalities to continue with the interrupted academic sessions.

Countries in Africa made several plans and 'pronouncements' for remote learning. For instance, the Minister for Education in Nigeria directed higher institutions in the country to resume online teaching during a teleconference with stakeholders in the education sector. Till date, only a handful of privately owned universities have broached the subject of resumption. Teaching has not resumed in most institutions of higher learning and no concrete steps have been made to put the modalities that will facilitate remote learning place.

South African Universities have been rolling out initiatives since May to resume remote teaching in a bid to conclude the 2020 academic year. For instance, the University of Cape Town arranged for the house-to-house delivery of laptops to eligible students in order to make them key in to the remote teaching program of the University. The Stellenbosch University also procured 1500 laptops with the intention of distributing it to students who are economically disadvantaged. The University of

Johannesburg procured 30GB of internet data per student to enable them access education content. The University of Witwatersrand has thrown open the doors of its Mobile Computing Bank, offering students the opportunity to loan devices for their academic use. These arrangements are essentially institution-driven.

The University of Ghana has already started training lecturers via online instructions as a prelude to web based instructions for their students. The University has gone into partnership with a mobile network provider to make pre-loaded SIM cards available to the students so that they can access the remote learning platform of the institution. Although students have been assured that they will still be able to access the online platform even after the 5GB of data is exhausted.

Given the suddenness, severity and unexpected nature of the pandemic, the above efforts are commendable. It is however obvious that there is no systematic approach to surmounting the challenges posed by the pandemic to the predominantly residential mode of education practiced in Africa. Most measures adopted are reactionary without undertaking concrete steps to make them systemic. If the initiatives would be sustained, it is imperative that the challenges facing remote learning should be appraised and appropriate actions taken to address the challenges.

OPPORTUNITIES APPLICABLE TO INTEGRATION OF REMOTE LEARNING IN THE NEW NORMAL

Despite the challenges posed by integrating and embracing the remote or e-learning system, it has become the most preferred platform to learn during global pandemic periods such as the COVID-19 where movement is restricted and institutions of higher learning are on lockdown. The remote learning system is the new era of learning that depends on the user mode (Aina, 2020). The adoption of e-learning system for Nigerian university system will enhance the efficiency of knowledge as both students and lecturers will have easy access to a large amount of information within the global village. In most universities, class space for lectures is usually a problem as sometimes there is clash in timetable or overpopulated students.

The remote learning system will completely reduce the issues of insufficient classrooms for lecturers as student can easily take the lectures online without any disruption at their convenience. Also, e-learning afford students and lecturers to participate in class in their comfort zone with basic amenities they need when compared to the traditional lecturing method where sometimes these basic amenities are unavailable for conducive learning. This is supported by the findings of Pingle (2019) that undergraduates in India have a higher acceptance level of comfort working with computers and other e-learning packages than the traditional face-to-face classroom.

E-learning provides a platform for students to interact with themselves through the discussion forum which eliminates the barrier of participation. It also allows for effective communication and fosters relationship between students and lecturers. It also allows students to study at their open pace and convenience as the lecture material is readily available and the content delivery of the lecturer is quite accessible to them. Hence, it increases satisfaction and decreases stress. The knowledge of e-learning will expose both lecturers and students to the reality of the world outside the classroom since the world is a global web. The e-learning exposure will ease the student's integration into organizations where such platforms are operational.

E-learning can be said to be cost effective as it reduces travel time and infrastructural development in terms of buildings. Arkorful and Abaidoo (2016) discovered that the cost benefit of e-learning in training students is lesser than that of physical (face-to-face) contact. This was arrived at after considering some factors namely: the number of students trained; distance to be travelled; time of training. Guragain (2016) also posit that the value of face-to-face class contact content development, distribution and maintenance cost are exclusively high as compared to e-learning which is of lower cost. All these shows that adoption of e-learning tends to solve educational challenges especially at a time such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prospects for Implementation of E-Learning in Nigeria Education Institutions

There is emerging evidence that e-learning can help to improve attainment and raise standards of education. The evaluation of the National Learning Network (NLN) in further education uses qualitative data to show that learners are becoming more sophisticated in their e-learning expectations and that ICT is increasing permeating college life. Below is the major vision, view, possibility and

prospect of implementing e-learning in Nigeria educational system:

1. Empower Learners: - As stated by National Policy on Education (NPE, 2014) one of the primary aims of the philosophy of Nigeria Education is to produce a self-reliant citizen that can be useful to themselves, their society and to the development of the country at large. E-learning engage learners with more active learning process, people in group or individual irrespective of their age could take responsibility for what and how they learn, achieving their personal goals as self-directed lifelong learners.
2. Creative and Innovative Teaching and Learning: - With E-learning, teaching and learning of curriculum content could be more creative and innovative in preparation for the 21st century global knowledge society.
3. E-Learning Offer Flexibility: - A more responsive education system would adapt to the needs of all learners, wherever and however they need to learn. Wide range of curriculum content deployment to learner that will make the philosophical framework of Nigeria education to be ascertain on the level of equity. NPE recognize equal education for all citizen and with E-learning, the goal can be achieved.
4. E-learning Achieve Better Value: - Education leaders, evaluators and including classroom lecturers and teachers could develop innovative ways of deploying their resources, exploiting e- learning alongside with other teaching methods to improve quality and economies of scale.
5. Generate a Professional Workforce and Fulfilled Citizens: - E-learning would enable a community, group and a workforce for the knowledge society would have a high proportion of people capable of continually updating their knowledge and skills, e-learning will help in managing knowledge transfer and contribute to practitioner knowledge in all its forms. This will improve unity as stated by NPE. With the advent of e-learning to implement curriculum content in the Nigeria educational system will not only help to make the teaching and learning of the content brought by the teacher active but also to revolutionize education system during pandemic. Kajetanowtez and Wierzejewski (2015) pinpointed that e-learning has no rival when it comes to generation of intrinsic motivation and initiation of organized active learning in education. Kajetanowtez and weirzeiewski, equally see e-learning as an efficient means of promoting self– study cum frequent testing in the form of formative evaluation which engender proper monitoring of educational progress and periodical achievement. Overall research report shows that e-learning provide positive effect on learners' achievement. These include the fact that it promotes interest and vocabulary development in students and also provide experiences not easily obtained through other learning strategies and contribute to the efficiency, depth and variety of learning.

DRIVE TOWARDS TECH FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION IN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS IN THE NEW NORMAL

With the recent imposition of lockdown in many countries around the world as measures to contain the pandemic, there will be unintended outcomes for interventions that commenced before the lockdown. These outcomes will have implications for gender, location, social status, health as well as the entire intervention deployed. It is therefore expedient to ensure the continuity of monitoring and evaluation activities during the pandemic to avoid the loss of useful insight which may have implications for future programming and research.

There is therefore, an increased focus on technology through the use of various toolkits of tech-enabled handheld devices for digital data collection including mobile phone-based feedback mechanisms, remote sensing with satellites or delivery tracking, communication and engagements via online platforms and broadcasting with radios and other forms of (social) media.

However, like most innovations, technology has its limitations even in a pandemic situation. Thoughts bothering on the effectiveness of technology, how inclusive is its use seeing that less women have access to high tech devices than men, and its cultural and linguistical sensitivity for monitoring and evaluation are been called to question.

A BLENDED APPROACH TO MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN THE NEW NORMAL

While there are thoughts on how to advance monitoring and evaluation using technology, it will be useful to recognize that field work cannot be entirely done away with even during pandemics. Using mix methods of data collection sometimes means that an evaluator may be required to carry out ethnological studies and perception-based surveys to collect qualitative data especially in areas with little or no technology. Although conversations on the use of third parties to carry out monitoring and evaluation activities has begun, however, its effectiveness has been called to question. There is therefore, a necessity to introduce a blended approach to monitoring and evaluation such that technology is leveraged to enhance and intensify human efforts. This means an understanding that technology may not be able to substitute human efforts and vice versa; they are two sides of the same coin geared towards effective impact evaluation. The limitations and biases of one can be nuanced by the other to ensure that data-driven evaluation tests positive for validity and reliability.

WHAT NEXT?

Although projections suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic could last till the fourth quarter of 2021 which created more apprehension. This is indeed a wakeup call for development partners to rethink how interventions are framed, who benefits from such interventions, how effective monitoring and evaluation can be carried out in the universities, what resources and technology should be deployed, what are the non-essential components that can either be outsourced or done away with. On this note, effective communication is at the core of managing monitoring and evaluation process during a pandemic. Letting funders and or the governments understand the implication and risks occasioned by the pandemic; questions about what should be prioritized, what component of projects can be undertaken remotely to ensure minimal loss or waste of resources. On the flip side, communicating with beneficiaries is equally important; thoughts around how best they can be engaged, what kind of data can be collected from them remotely, how has the pandemic affected the implementation process that may lead to a change in the Theory of Change.

Interestingly, the pandemic offers an important time of learning and reflections for evaluators as they can now go back to their drawing boards, check indicators against emerging outcomes and seek for new and innovative ways to evaluate, rethink frameworks and approaches engage, report, and learn. It is within this purview that the use of technology is encouraged despite the limitations of technology.

CONCLUSION

Covid-19 incidence impacted the stability of the Nigerian universities academic activities, caused teachers attrition, increased the rate of students' dropout, and lack of interest in digital education due to dearth of online learning facilities. Most teachers lacked the competence to deploy online teaching where facilities were provided. To ensure effective monitoring and evaluation of university education in the new normal, teachers and students must keep themselves abreast of online teaching and learning technology to engage students in electronic education to increase their competence on digital knowledge and skills to master how to apply them in their learning in the face unexpected physical learning disruptions.

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