

Article Info

Received: 15 Apr 2022 | Revised Submission: 15 Jul 2022 | Accepted: 05 Sept 2022 | Available Online: 15 Sept 2022

Thinking Beyond the Present: Advocating Continuity of Practice of Emergency Remote Teaching in Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria

Ojokheta K. O. and Adedeji Tella***

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic led to the disruption of the education system and closure of schools of educational institutions all over the world. To ensure that teaching and learning does not stop during the period, higher education institutions (HEI) in Nigeria adopted emergency remote teaching (ERT) by moving their classes to online and distance education platforms. The expectation is that ERT will be jettisoned for the return of on-campus face-to-face pedagogies in the post COVID-19 'new normal'. This paper, therefore, advocated the continuity of practice of ERT in the 'new normal' given strong justifications to support the advocacy. It argued that higher education institutions should not completely discard emergency remote teaching and recommended, among others, that institutions should adopt blended learning model in the new normal and have a contingency plan for ERT in advance of a crisis, make it a compulsory part of academic staff skill set and professional development, build the capacity of academic and other campus support staff for ERT, and develop a strategic plan for solving the challenges associated with ERT. The paper concluded that ERT constitutes a positive pedagogical approach which could transform higher education in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Emergency remote teaching; Continuity of practice; Higher education institutions.*

1.0 Experimental

In the pre COVID-19 period, teaching and learning in the higher education institutions (HEI) was predominantly conducted through the face-to-face physical presence of students with their lecturers in a confined classroom environment. In other words, the history of teaching and learning in higher education settings has predominantly been through classroom education. More recently, lives and education have further shifted as the world has become more digital (Bearman, Dawson, Ajjawi, Tai, and Boud, 2020). For many, turning to Google or YouTube to search for information or learn a skill is common practice (Bhatt and MacKenzie, 2019). However, the emergence of COVID-19 ushered in an alternative teaching and learning process and pattern globally termed emergency remote teaching (ERT) where students were taught online/e-learning through the deployment of various available information and communication technologies.

Before the emergence of ERT, online or e-learning for on-campus education was grossly underutilised in Nigeria. As a result, higher education lecturers encountered notable challenges in the use of ERT to its innovativeness. Some of these encountered challenges included unstable internet connectivity, inadequate computer laboratories, lack or insufficient computers/laptops, technical problems, low or insufficient technological skills of some lecturers to conduct ERT, and inexperience in conducting emergency remote teaching, among others. Due to these challenges, it may be imperatively difficult to encourage higher education institutions to continue the practice of using ERT as the world gradually recovers from the devastating effects of COVID-19 particularly as regards the disruption in the educational system all over the world. This paper, therefore, discussed what must be done to ensure continuity of practice of emergency teaching remote in higher education institutions in Nigeria in the new normal.

*Corresponding Author: Professor of Adult Education, Department of Adult Education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria (E-mail: ko.ojokheta@ui.edu.ng; ko.ojokheta@gmail.com)

**Department of Science and Technology Education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria (E-mail: dejtella@gmail.com)

2.0 COVID-19 and the Disruption of the Educational System

Coronavirus or COVID-19, a new strain of coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) previously unidentified in humans and first reported to World Health Organisation (WHO) on the 31st of December, 2019 in Wuhan, China (Anjorin, 2020), is considered the modern history's gravest public health crisis. At its emergence, nobody anticipated its high transmissibility or virulence rate, judging from the continuously increasing number of confirmed cases and deaths globally.

The spread of COVID-19 to all countries in the world and its high transmissibility rate led the World Health organisation (WHO) to officially declare it a pandemic on the 11th March, 2020 (WHO, 2020).

The aftermath of the declaration of COVID-19, as a pandemic, led to the total lockdown of the world, the closure of schools and other educational institutions in all continents, and the suspension of face-to-face teaching activities. These came as unprecedented global shocks to human activities. For example, in the education sector, COVID-19 pandemic created the largest disruption of education systems in history, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries (United Nations, 2020). The Global Education Coalition (GEC), which UNESCO launched to ensure that learning never stop, reported that "some 1 billion students and youth across the planet are affected by school and university closures due to the COVID-19 outbreak" (UNESCO, GEC, 2020). Lamenting the closing of schools to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay (2020) wrote: "Never before have we {Sic} witnessed educational disruption on such a scale, partnership is the only way forward.

This Coalition is a call for coordinated and innovative action to unlock solutions that will not only support learners and teachers now, but through the recovery process, with a principle focus on inclusion and equity". During the peak period of COVID-19 in Nigeria, all the higher education institutions adopted an unplanned transition to teaching called emergency remote teaching, considered as a branch of distance education (Bozkurt, 2020), as alternative arrangement to facilitate continued teaching by teachers and

continued learning by students. In other words, the COVID-19 pandemic forced teachers and instructors in higher education institutions across the country to move their content online and begin teaching remotely. Emergency remote teaching is different from online teaching (Bates, 2020) because it was a temporary shift from the normal modes of teaching occasioned by the disruption of educational system of COVID-19 pandemic. Emergency remote teaching ensures that teacher/instructors are separated from their learners in time and distance in the teaching and learning activities but provides opportunity for them to remain connected and engaged with the content while working from their homes (Bozkurt, 2020). The significant message emphasised with the adoption of emergency remote teaching in the higher education institutions were summed up by Crawford, Butler-Henderson, Rudolph, Malkawi, Glowatz, Burton, Magni, & Lam, (2020) in 15 ways:

- i. Education cannot wait and learning must never stop due to schools closure.
- ii. Expansion of the definition of the right to education to include connectivity and removal of barriers to such connectivity.
- iii. Educational delivery can no longer be solely facilitated by the physical presence of the teacher in a brick and mortar building.
- iv. Learners do not necessarily need to be physically present as a group in a brick and mortar building.
- v. Home-schooling became a necessity.
- vi. Widespread use of technology to ensure continuity of learning.
- vii. Online delivery of lessons by teachers.
- viii. Online pedagogical readiness support for teachers.
- ix. Online learning of subject content by students.
- x. Availability and accessibility of digital publications and resources for educational delivery.
- xi. Increased levels of digital literacy among students, parents, and teachers.
- xii. Expansion of flexible learning modalities across levels and types of education and training.
- xiii. Alternative modality for students' evaluation such as online testing for final exams.
- xiv. Innovative continuous assessment methods such as monitoring students' progress with mobile

phone surveys, tracking usage and performance statistics from learning platforms and apps.

- xv. The necessity of universal adoption of distance learning practices for educational delivery.

In some quarters, emergency remote teaching is erroneously equated as online teaching. It is definitely not the thoughtful and science-based method of course design that is used to develop online courses. The cardinal differences between the two terms - emergency remote teaching and online teaching- are vividly discussed below.

3.0 Concept Clarification: Emergency Remote Teaching and Online Teaching

The word “remote” is derived from the Latin word *removere*, which transmuted to *remotus*, to mean “move away or move back” or simply “removed”. In its basic form, “remote” therefore implies far-flung, or far afield, isolated and distant from the actual source or epicentre (Harms, Hussain, Newell, Piot, Schein, Shneiderman, Turner, Zhang, Harms, Hussain, and Newell, (2014). Emergency remote teaching (ERT), therefore, entails delivering curricular contents, instructional material or educational resources to the target learning audience physically away from the centre or institution of learning (Nokukhanya, Chuks, and Mfundo, 2021). Emergency remote teaching (ERT) is, therefore, a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, and Bond, 2020). It provides solutions for instruction or education that would otherwise be delivered face-to-face which is not possible because of a crisis.

The special feature of emergency remote education is that it is an unplanned practice, with no option than to use any kind of offline and/or online resources that may be at hand (Bond, Bedenlier, Marin, and Handel, 2021).

The whole essence of emergency remote teaching (ERT) is not to re-create a robust educational ecosystem but rather to provide temporary access to instruction and instructional supports in a manner that is reliably available, contextually more feasible, and quick to set up during an emergency, crisis, conflict or violence (UNICEF, 2020). ERT was the readily available option for instructional dissemination to the closure

of educational institutions in a time of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the contrary, online learning is both a social and a cognitive process, not merely a matter of information transmission through remote information technologies (Conole, 2021).

It requires careful planning not only in identifying the content to be covered, but also consideration of how different types of interactions will be supported and prioritised. Consequently, development of online courses may take up to nine months (Erlam, Garret, Gasteiger, Lau, Hoare, Agarwal, and Haxell, 2021). In essence, online teaching and learning is purposefully designed to be remote or distant in nature leveraging on the deployment of technology to enhance teaching. The major differences between emergency remote teaching and online teaching are summed up in a tabular form in figure 1.

Table 1: Differences Between Emergency Remote Teaching and Online Teaching

Emergency Remote Teaching	Online Teaching
Activated in response to a crisis or something beyond human control	Activated in response to permanent instructional delivery which is within human control
Designed temporarily to be remote and distant	Designed purposely and planned to be remote and distant
Regarded as an exception mode of education (not the main mode)	Regarded as a main mode of education (not an exception)
Meant to be a short-term/temporal solution	Meant to be a long-term solution
Very urgent	Not urgent
Most resources are inaccessible	All resources are accessible
Has temporal faculty support	Has full faculty support
Students are compulsorily enlisting (Students do not have a choice)	Students are voluntarily enlisting (Students do have a choice)

The concise summary of emergency remote teaching and online teaching is that ERT is a

temporary instructional responsive teaching to the crisis, differing from the planned online learning or an unexpected short-term instructional delivery model because of a mammoth catastrophe. In contrary, online teaching is originally planned and designated to be delivered virtually.

4.0 Dividends of Emergency Remote Teaching

The benefits of ERT are inexhaustive. They include:

1. ERT signifies open, unrestricted, and liberated tuition; it envisages intellectual autonomy with far-reaching implications on the social, economic, physical, and institutional developments for both students and lecturers (Toquero and Talidong, 2020).
2. The primary benefit of ERT is social co-existence and cohesion. ERT promotes peaceful coexistence and harmony between higher education institutions and students who would comfortably study from home or at least away from campus where their chances of participation in the social rivalry will be barely present, as they will be united with their families and perpetually be under their watchful eyes. The rate of social injustice and moral decadence on campus could drop abruptly; therefore, the institutional image of higher institutions will be sustained (Nokukhanya, Chuks, and Mfundo, 2021).
3. ERT reduces the financial burden of hostel accommodation with related costs (maintenance, transportation, provisions, etc) for students. It also reduces teaching and administrative costs for higher education institutions.
4. The quality of higher education will be upheld through ERT. Students will be studying at their own pace and their lecturers will have limited physical contact with them, which invariably reduces incidents of abuses, blackmail, exploitation, and gender-based violence (Bond, Bedenlier, Marin, and Handel, 2021).
5. ERT emphasises academic meritocracy and students' performance as opposed to the traditional physical class system where each learner's survival is tempered in collective friction and degenerated by bullying, equal to a survival-of-the-fittest scenario (Hodges, 2020). Marginal costs of a real-place class system,

including interpersonal complications, students' unhealthy politicking at the expense of their studies, cliques and nonconformist, campus gangsterism and occultism, are non-occurrent in ERT mode of higher education (Nokukhanya, Chuks, and Mfundo, 2021).

6. The shift to ERT significantly promotes healthy academic competition among students with no social or physical cost. ERT, therefore, ensures learners' responsibility by placing them in control of their studies with their academic and professional destiny in their own hands (Nokukhanya, Chuks, and Mfundo, 2021).
7. ERT enhances access to higher education since concerns of controlled students' enrolments attributable to limited space in classrooms and hostel accommodation will become a thing of the past (Toquero and Talidong, 2020).

5.0 Necessity for Continuity of Practice of Emergency Remote Teaching in Nigeria

The necessity for continuity of practice of emergency remote teaching in higher education institutions in Nigeria is advocated based on the following justifications.

1. **The possibility of occurrence of another gravest public health crisis or conflicts of catastrophic consequences in the future-** ERT emerged as a result of the closure of educational institutions due to the COVID-19 pandemic which forced academic staff in higher education institutions in Nigeria to move their teaching online. As human civilization continues to grow, there is the possibility that another public health crisis or conflicts of catastrophic consequences could emerge in the future. To get adequately prepared for such possibility, ERT should not be discarded in the new normal.
2. **The flexibility of ERT in combination with face-to-face teaching-** The bitter experience of the disruption of the educational system by the COVID-19 pandemic clearly shows that higher education institutions cannot predominantly rely on face-to-face classroom education any longer. As the new normal emerges, there is need for higher education institutions in Nigeria to adopt blended learning model- the combination of

face-to-face classroom education with emergency remote teaching.

3. **ERT is replacement for fully online teaching and learning-** Despite the advancement and use of technologies in educational practice, the possibility of making courses go fully online in higher education institutions in Nigeria is not feasible for now. The best that such institutions can adopt is blended learning delivery mode that is, the combination of emergency remote teaching with face-to-face teaching.
4. **ERT will serve as a rich reservoir for using open educational resources-** As the new normal emerges, academic staff in higher education institutions in Nigeria can no longer predominantly rely on specific textbooks for their teaching. As ERT has made academic staff to take their teaching online, so also it becomes imperative for them to source for materials and contents of their teaching online too. The competence of academic staff to use ERT will also enhance their competence to source and search for easily and freely available online open educational resources.
5. **ERT will help to build academic staff technological/technical skills and competences-** With continuity of practice of emergency remote teaching, technological or technical skills of academic staff in higher education institutions in Nigeria will continuously be built. Technological skills refer to an individual's ability to interact and complete tasks using computer-based technologies and other associated technologies. These skills include word processing skills, spreadsheets skills, database skills, electronic presentation skills, web navigation skills, and email management skills, among others. With ERT, academic staff members who already possessed these skills will continue the use of the skills in their teaching activities while those with insufficient skills will strive to possess them.
6. **ERT will enable tutors to engage students in synchronous and asynchronous teaching and learning-** Synchronous learning allows tutors to engage students with class materials at the same time as long as they can connect to the internet using videoconferencing technologies like Google Meet, Google Hangouts, or Zoom.

Synchronous learning allows for greater engagement between tutors and students, immediate responses, dynamic learning opportunities, and direct communication with tutors. On the other hand, asynchronous learning allows students the flexibility to study in a self-paced manner, that is tutors and students don't get engaged online at the same time. Asynchronous learning allows for schedule flexibility, individually dictated pace, more democratic and accessible, and more time with learning materials. With continuity of practice of emergency remote teaching, tutors in higher education institutions in Nigeria will develop the skills on conducting synchronous and asynchronous teaching and learning with students rather than complete reliance on face-to-face teaching and learning delivery mode.

7. **ERT will help tutors to identify the challenges students face in online learning-** There is no doubt that going online to teach by tutors and going online to learn by students is more stressful and students encounter some challenges during this process. Such challenges for students include the difficulty of staying motivated, the difficulty of staying in contact with tutors, the difficulty of interacting with peers, the difficulty of staying connected to the internet at all times, and the difficulty of getting immediate feedback, among others. However, if continuity of practice of emergency remote teaching is sustained, it will be relatively easy for a tutor to identify these challenges and develop strategies that will help the students to overcome these challenges.
8. **ERT can help in making academic staff to become digital scholar-** According to Weller, (2018) a digital scholar is someone who "employs digital, networked and open approaches to demonstrate specialism in a field". Scholarly authorship represents the core business of higher education – namely the creation and dissemination of knowledge. Academics, as authors, are expected to continuously read, analyse, assess and compare written texts, such as reports, academic papers and books, undergraduate assignments, as well as postgraduate dissertations and doctorates. They also produce written teaching materials and textbooks for student consumption along with research reports, monographs, articles and

textbooks for publication” (French, 2019). These practices remain critical in the daily operations of academic scholars but are becoming increasingly complex with the rise of digital technologies in education Weller, (2018). With continuity of practice, ERT can help in building the capacities of academic staff to become digital scholar.

6.0 Working with Students While using ERT: What Tutors Must Know and Do

Every tutor in higher education institutions in Nigeria must take into consideration the following when using emergency remote teaching with students.

1. **Must communicate frequently with students-** Communication is very essential to emergency remote teaching. Students should be allowed to ask questions and communicate with tutors/instructors/lecturers outside of teaching hours through phone calls, emails, and school forum boards, etc.
2. **Must prioritise needs-** Emergency remote teaching can happen at any time which means a tutor is likely to be in the middle of teaching something and must have plans for what he/she wants to achieve. As such, every tutor must prioritise what has to be done and what must let go in all teaching circumstances.
3. **Must be flexible-** All policies of higher education institutions in Nigeria are designed for the traditional setting of face-to-face teaching. Therefore, when a tutor has to remotely teach, he/she has to be flexible and be creative with instruction and processes.
4. **Must establish routines-** A tutor has to try to adhere to a regular routine as much as possible. He/she must have class time at different times every day and hold meetings regularly.
5. **Must collaborate with others-** A tutor must work together with school faculty and staff to learn from one another. This will allow for sharing of ideas that work.
6. **Must develop contingency plans-** This is because technology may not work as planned and things may likely not always go as planned. Therefore, tutors must have back up plans when things fail.

7. **Must practice and promote their well-being-** Shifting to an online environment, occasioned by the adoption of emergency remote teaching, from face-to-face teaching can be stress inducing. Tutors must remember to take breaks and give themselves time to adjust. They must practice self-compassion and patience.
8. **Must learn-** Tutors must take time to take a step back from all the challenges of what may be going on when emergency remote teaching comes into play. They should evaluate what works and what doesn't work and learn from each experience every day to get better over time.

7.0 Recommendations for Continuity of Practice of Emergency Remote Teaching in Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria

Even though COVID-19 will soon be a thing of memory (with the discovery of vaccines and the growing massive vaccination of people across the world), and face-to-face teaching will be restored as it was before the pre COVID-era, it is suggested that higher education institutions should not completely discard emergency remote teaching, for face-to-face teaching, because of the likelihood of another grave public health crisis occurring in the future which will necessitate ERT again.

Based on this submission, it is recommended that higher education should do the following for the continuity of practice of ERT; more so, that it has been hailed by some as a positive one which could transform higher education (Govindarajan and Srivastava, 2020).

1. **Adoption of Blended Learning Model by Higher Education Institutions (HEI)-** Continuity of practice of emergency remote teaching can be further ensured when it is combined with face-to-face teaching to form a blended learning model. Therefore, higher education institutions are advised to adopt blended learning model in post COVID-19 new normal. Blended learning model can be practiced through synchronous and asynchronous modes of delivery. For example, in one week, students could work asynchronously by reading the learning resources and writing the posts at their own

convenience. In the second week, students would read the learning resources before coming to the synchronous session at a specific time. In synchronous sessions, students would talk to each other, share their viewpoints, and interact with others in the learning community.

2. **Higher education institutions should have a contingency plan for ERT in advance of a crisis-** Public health crisis and conflicts of wider magnitude and catastrophic consequences, which could disrupt the education system again, can arise in the future. Therefore, higher education institutions should have a contingency plan for ERT in advance of these possibilities. The purpose of ERT, as a contingency plan, is to allow institutions to have a pedagogical model to ensure teaching and learning doesn't stop in the emergence and context of recovery from an unforeseen crisis.
3. **HEI should make ERT a compulsory part of academic staff skill set and professional development-** Professional digital skill development of academic staff in higher education institutions is a necessity in the 21st Century. To develop or enhance the digital competences of academic staff in higher education institutions, ERT, as a cardinal driving force for innovations in teaching and learning, should be made a compulsory part of academic staff skill set and professional development. Similarly, ERT can be used by HEI to develop digital scholarship framework of their institutions.
4. **Identification of the likely areas where academic staff and students struggle the most with ERT-** The sudden transition from classroom education to emergency remote teaching in HEI brought along numerous challenges and left many academic staff and students unprepared. Some of the difficulties faced by academic staff relate to their digital competence in using information and communication technology (ICT) for teaching, for lesson planning and creation of teaching materials, for giving assignments and evaluating student progress, for encouraging student self-education, and for providing a positive and supportive atmosphere for students in the online environment. Some of the difficulties faced by students include taking online classes, acquiring knowledge, and maintaining good emotion state and mental health for learning. Therefore, it becomes imperative for HEI to identify the likely areas where academic staff and students struggle the most with ERT and develop strategic plans for solving the educational challenges associated with ERT.
5. **HEI should determine internal and external resources that are necessary in supporting ERT-** Higher education institutions should determine and collate internal and external resources that are necessary in supporting ERT for continuity of practice in the new normal. The compilation of these resources will tremendously help these institutions to get adequately prepared for any crisis or emergency that could disrupt the educational system again and lead to the closure of educational institutions in the future.
6. **ERT will help motivate academic staff to use open educational resources in teaching-** If academic staff are continuously exposed to ERT in the new normal, they are more likely to embrace and utilise open educational resources in their teaching rather than relying predominantly on using specific textbooks as they do in classroom education. HEI should put in place mechanisms that will motivate academic staff to use open educational resources that reside in the public domain and intellectually licensed for free use. Such easily and freely available online resources can be extensively searched for through Google search engine to enrich their teaching materials and contents.
7. **Provision of sufficient digital technological infrastructure to enhance digital competences of academic staff-** In order to enhance the digital competences of academic staff, HEI should provide sufficient technological infrastructure for ERT practices. Academic staff members need to possess digital competences to foster effective, inclusive and innovative learning strategies, using digital technologies. The Digital Competence Framework for Educators 1995-2021 developed by the European Union and licensed under CC BY 4.0) can be adopted by HEI to build the digital competences of academic staff. However, this is only possible if HEI provide sufficient digital technological infrastructure. For example, HEI

can buy license from the Zoom to engage teachers and students in live discussion when using ERT. Zoom has a very good feature of breakout rooms where tutors can divide the whole class in small and large groups (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2020; Serembus & Kemery, 2020).

8. **Building the capacity of academic staff for ERT-** HEI should endeavour to continuously build the capacity of academic staff for ERT along the following areas: word processors and spreadsheets, file management, email access, Internet browsers, access to WiFi, development of Powerpoint and the use of digital whiteboards to teach, teaching through video instruction (i.e. Zoom), using media tools and record videos, strategies for uploading lessons in a higher education institution's learning management system, strategies for recording student's grades online, and strategies for giving feedback digitally. The need for the acquisition of these capacities should encourage HEI to continue the practice and use of ERT in higher education institutions in the new normal.

8.0 Conclusion

It is easy to predict that teaching and learning in the post COVID-19 new normal will not be the same it were before the pandemic.

It is also safe to advocate that higher education institutions should not be in hurry to discard emergency remote teaching in the new normal considering the factors that could necessitate it continuity of its practice in the new normal. Therefore, higher education institutions in Nigeria should think beyond the present and work-out modalities for ensuring continuity of practice of emergency remote teaching.

References

- [1] Anjorin, A.A. (2020). The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic: A review and an update on cases in Africa. *Asian Pacific Journal of Tropical Medicine*; 13(5): 199-203.
- [2] Bates T (2020) What should we be doing about online learning when social distancing ends? <https://www.tonybates.ca/2020/04/07/what-should-we-be-doing-about-online-learning-when-social-distancing-ends/>.
- [3] Bearman, M., Dawson, P., Ajjawi, R., Tai, J., and Boud, D. (2020). *Re-imagining university Assessment in a Digital World*. Cham Switzerland: Springer.
- [4] Bhatt, I., and MacKenzie, A. (2019). Just Google it! Digital Literacy and the Epistemology of Ignorance. *Teach. Higher Education* 24 (3), 302–317. doi:10.1080/13562517.2018.1547276.
- [5] Bond, M., Bedenlier, S., Marin, V. I. and Handel, M. (2021). Emergency remote teaching in higher education: mapping the first global online semester. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education* Vol. 18. No. 50. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-021-00282-x>.
- [6] Bozkurt, A. (2020). Educational Technology Research Patterns in the Realm of the Digital Knowledge Age. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education* (1), 18. <https://doi.org/10.5334/jime.570>.
- [7] Conole, G. (2021). *Learning Design in Practice: Fostering Different Pedagogical Approaches*. Milton Keynes, UK: Taylor & Francis.