

OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL) AS A PANACEA FOR UNINTERRUPTED LEGAL EDUCATION IN PRE AND POST COVID-19 PANDEMIC NIGERIA

Erimma Gloria Orie*
Folasade Folake Aare**

Abstract

The World Bank stated that by April 2020, over 220 million or 13 percent of students in tertiary education globally experienced interruptions in studies due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, over 30,000 Nigerian law students faced academic disruptions for same reason. Invariably the momentum for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has never been stronger than since the Covid-19 pandemic which urgently demands a paradigm shift in lifestyles and transformation of education through relevant learning models, pedagogies and institutional management reforms. Meanwhile, the Council of Legal Education (CLE) in Nigeria which regulates the admission of law students approves of only the conventional face-to-face teaching method which creates inequalities and lacks inclusiveness. This is inimical to the attainment of ESD for law education in Nigeria where universities were shut down due to Covid -19 pandemic. Using doctrinal research methodology, the paper finds that the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) espoused by the National Open University of Nigeria is a substantial panacea to academic interruptions attributable to present and

* PhD, FCARB, Department of Private & Property Law, Faculty of Law, National Open University of Nigeria. Email: eorie@noun.edu.ng; mmaorie@yahoo.co.uk
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9577-2083>;

** PhD, Department of Private & Property Law, Faculty of Law, Anchor University Lagos, Nigeria.

future pandemics. However, the critical issue is getting the CLE and law faculties to adopt this emerging ODL paradigm trend for sustainable law education in Nigeria. The paper therefore makes salient recommendations to that effect.

Keywords: Sustainable Development (SD), Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), Covid-19 pandemic, Open and Distance Learning (ODL)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Education is recognized globally as a sine qua non to development hence countries strive to boost acquisition of knowledge. In particular, the United Nations Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is anchored on mass education for the increasing populations across countries.¹ However, making improvements in education standards and getting education accessible to large populations to drive development in all spheres of human endeavours face challenges not in the least academic disruptions such as occasioned by coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic ravaging populations globally.²

The pandemic caught the education sector off guard impacting negatively. Over 188 out of 195 countries have been implementing nationwide school closures and restricted education facilities.³

¹ UNESCO. “Education for Sustainable Development” (2021) <<https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development>>. accessed 26 May 2024.

² WHO, Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19. (2020) <<https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020>> accessed 31 March 2023.

³ UNESCO ‘COVID-19 – A glance of national coping strategies on high-stakes’, (2020)

Particularly for tertiary education globally, by April 2020, over 220 million or 13 percent of students experienced interruptions in studies due to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴ In Nigeria schools were shut down and millions of tertiary education students who use the conventional face to face teaching / learning mode faced disruptions of studies. About 65,305 Nigerian law students faced academic disruptions for the same reason.⁵ In addition, the faculties of law in the 57 out of 170 universities offering Law courses in Nigeria and the Nigerian Law schools that insist on face to face mode of teaching were forced to shut down.⁶ Thousands of Law students were disenfranchised from studies while prospective law students could not be admitted. Thus, the implications for policy and practice of non-e-learning became obviously debilitating.

The global trend was for Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and virtual teaching / learning platforms to rescue the situation. Timely responses were recorded in many developed countries, such as Australia, Italy, Germany and Hong Kong, with regard to online

examinations and assessments <
https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/unesco_review_of_high-stakes_exams_and_assessments_during_covid-19_en.pdf > accessed 31 March 2024.

⁴ World Bank Group, “The COVID-19 Crisis Response: Supporting tertiary education for continuity, adaptation, and innovation.” (2020), <
<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/621991586463915490/The-COVID-19-Crisis-Response-Supporting-Tertiary-Education-for-Continuity-Adaptation-and-Innovation.pdf> > accessed 31 May 2023.

⁵ Statista Research Department (2022), Number of undergraduate students at universities in Nigeria as of 2019, by gender and discipline. (Feb. 2020) <
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1262928/number-of-undergraduate-students-at-universities-in-nigeria> > accessed 21 February 2023

⁶ Toppers circle, “57 Universities Offering Law In Nigeria” (7 April 2021) <
<https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=57+universities+offering+law+in+Nigeria> > accessed 11 June 2023)

learning before and during the pandemic.⁷ Expectedly, the pandemic manifested more adversely on schools without online learning platforms. In Nigeria all schools were closed from 27th March 2020, as the Ministries of Education introduced modalities for radio and TV schooling and internet-based learning for students.⁸ Only a handful of public and private tertiary institutions that employed the ODL option with Zoom applications including the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) remained in session.⁹ These ad hoc measures became the saving grace but the situation has necessitated the need for reform of education policy, practice, and development regarding entrenching e-learning leveraging existing information and communication technology (ICT).

Nigeria, that is lagging behind in the quest to meet the inclusiveness objectives of the national policy on education¹⁰ and attainment of the ESD targets enunciated as Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, ought to seize the moment to make Law education seamless at the Law Schools and faculties of Law in the universities as is already the case at NOUN by adopting ODL with its Zoom platform. This will make law education, flexible and accessible to the ever-increasing population of prospective law students who are denied admission due to the limited carrying capacities of the conventional universities and Law Schools annually. However, the Council for Legal Education

⁷ Crawford, J., Butler-Henderson, K., Rudolph, J., & Glowatz, M. "COVID-19: 20 countries' higher education intra-period digital pedagogy response".3(2020) *Journal of Applied Teaching and Learning*, 9

⁸ Aminu, B, and Ayub, AO 'Relevance of Open and Distance Learning Education amidst Covid-19 Pandemic to Nigeria "4(1) (2021), *Journal of Management Sciences*, 336, 341.

⁹ NOUN Website, 'Online Facilitation'. (May2022), <<https://nou.edu.ng/603-2/>> accessed 11 January 2024

¹⁰ National Education Policy (2004) 6th edition < <https://education.gov.ng/uploads/2020/06/N.> > accessed 1 January 2026

(CLE) that regulates admissions into the Nigerian Law Schools is averse to the use of ODL system which it equates to studying law through correspondence course. Also, it is a herculean task to obtain an ODL license from the NUC which regulates the universities in Nigeria.¹¹

The critical issue is getting the CLE, NUC and the law faculties in the universities to adopt the ODL model espoused by NOUN to complement the conventional face to face teaching mode for uninterrupted sustainable law education in Nigeria. This is the motivation for this paper at this time of COVID-19, drawing from the global best practices to canvass for integration of ODL as a paradigm shift in Law education in Nigeria. Potential. Accordingly, this work relied on doctrinal analyses of related works on the subject, drawing from lessons of e-Learning systems in other jurisdictions under similar COVID-19 lockdown conditions of schools in Nigeria.

The paper covers conceptual clarifications of key words to lay foundation for proper understanding. Next is an overview of past and present status of legal education in Nigeria leading to discussion of the NOUN ODL system. Thereafter, issues, challenges and the way forward are highlighted in terms of advocacy for a paradigm shift for legal education reform that deploys ODL to complement conventional model. Lastly, the paper concludes with salient recommendations.

¹¹ Abubakar, Idris 'Without online learning platforms, a few Nigerian universities are using WhatsApp' (2020) 2nd June 2020Image source: Techcabal < <https://techcabal.com> > 2020/06/02 > without-online-lea> accessed 20 March 2024

2.0 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

It is necessary to clarify the concepts adopted for the keywords, ODL, Paradigm Shift and COVID-19. This is in order to interrogate their relationships as well as place the paper in proper perspective.

The ODL, also called distance education, e-learning, and online learning is a general term for the use of telecommunication to provide or enhance learning. According to UNESCO, ODL is one of the most rapidly growing fields of education and its potential impact on all education delivery systems has been greatly accentuated through the development of internet based information technologies.¹² Moreover, software companies are creating user-friendly tools such as “Zoom”, which is a web based innovative tool that enables collaboration through video conferencing, video and audio calling, messaging, and file sharing.¹³ Zoom is therefore part of ODL adopted primarily as a replacement Virtual Live Classroom. Thus, emerging technology is widening the scope and utility of ODL.

The Oxford English dictionary defines paradigm shift as a fundamental change in approach or underlying assumptions.¹⁴ It is simply an important change that happens when the usual way is

¹² UNESCO ‘Open and Distance Learning: Trends, Policy and Strategy Consideration’, (2002) <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000128463> (last visited 10 June 2023) ; Aminu, B and Ayub, A O ‘Relevance of Open and Distance Learning Education amidst Covid-19 Pandemic to Nigeria’ , 4 (2021), Journal of Management Sciences 336, 341.

¹³ Abu, Shadat Muhammad Sayem, *et al* ‘Effective use of Zoom technology and instructional videos to improve engagement and success of distance students in Engineering’ (2017) <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323268816>> Conference Paper · AAEE2017 CONFERENCE Manly, Sydney, Australia, CQ University Australia the School of Engineering and Technology > accessed 1 January 2026.

¹⁴ Oxford Dictionary (2022) < <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=definition+of+paradigm+shift> > accessed 4 April 2025.

replaced by a new and different way. In this paper, ODL in all its ramifications qualifies as a paradigm shift for teaching and learning other than the conventional face to face or traditional approach.

The COVID-19 is a communicable respiratory disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus, called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2, or SARS-CoV-2 that causes illness in humans.¹⁵ It can spread from person to person through infected air droplets and can be transmitted when humans have contact with hands or surfaces that contain the virus and touch their eyes, nose, or mouth with the contaminated hands. It is a pandemic¹⁶ defined as occurring over a wide geographical area and affecting an exceptionally high proportion of the population.¹⁷ The pandemic has affected the education of populations worldwide including Nigerians.

A relationship clearly exists between ODL and COVID-19 as far as education is concerned. This could be appreciated from the perspective of disruptions to academics imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁸ Social distancing restrictions were emplaced to curb the spread of the pandemic. However, it soon became a global imperative to continue with education pursuits in the midst of this infectious disease through the link bridge of ODL. There were cases of virtual classrooms, virtual

¹⁵ Africa Centre for Disease Control (2020). Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Updates. < <https://africacdc.org/covid-19/> > accessed 31 March 2025.

¹⁶ WHO “Director-General’s opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19” (2020) < <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020> > accessed 31 March 2025 .

¹⁷ Merriam-Webster Dictionary ‘Pandemic’. (2022) < <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pandemic> > accessed 31 March 2024.

¹⁸ Nlebem, A ‘FG orders closure of all schools in Nigeria as Coronavirus spreads.’. (2020). Business Day. < <https://businessday.ng/coronavirus/article/fg-orders-closureof-all-schools-in-nigeria-ascoronavirus-spreads/> . 31 March 2024.

court sessions, executive meetings and various gatherings and group engagements successfully conducted. This mitigated the adverse educational, social and economic effects foisted by COVID-19. Therefore, a nexus exists whereby ODL as a paradigm shift facilitates uninterrupted education despite COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, ODL makes it possible for wider populations to access education flexibly and conveniently.

The implication is that ODL with its associated Zoom is being utilized in public and private concerns including law universities worldwide. It behoves individuals, institutions and governments in Nigeria to key into the phenomenon to sustain continuous law education at the tertiary level. This will make law education accessible to all including the vulnerable women, those who wish to keep their jobs while schooling and those who cannot afford to attend classes physically. Lifelong goals of attending law education by using ODL option will be guaranteed towards the attainment of national education policy and ESD.¹⁹

The ESD initiative is anchored on mass education of populations empowering learners of all ages with the knowledge and skills to address interconnected global challenges and is recognized as an integral element of SDG 4²⁰ on quality education and a key enabler of all other SDGs. The SDG 4 means development that will ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all. The deployment of ODL with capacity

¹⁹ Itari, Paul Edet and Ugbe Theresa Beyin.. ‘Education for Sustainable Development in Nigeria and other Developing Nations’, (2018) *British Journal of Education* Vol.6, No.5, 41

²⁰ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2015). The 17 SDG.<<https://sdgs.un.org/goals> >

to reach wider population could ensure the realization of these laudable education objectives in spite of COVID-19 pandemic.

3.0 OVERVIEW OF PAST AND PRESENT LAW EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

The origin of the Nigerian Legal System is deeply engrained in the English Legal System. From 1962, the legal practice was restricted to formally trained lawyers. However, there were no institutions in Nigeria to train aspirants to the Bar and, therefore, persons desirous of becoming lawyers travelled to England for formal training as barristers and solicitors. Thereafter, they formally enrolled at the Supreme Court in England.²¹ In 1959, a committee was set up to investigate the legal education in Nigeria and the recommendations of the committee at that time amongst others included establishment of Nigeria's system of education, the Nigerian Law School, Council of Legal Education and faculties of Law at University College Ibadan and subsequently at other universities in the future.²² Most of these recommendations were implemented through the Legal Education Act of 1963 and the Legal Practitioners Act of 1962. The current Nigerian legal system is based on the English Common Law and legal tradition by virtue of colonization.

The Nigerian Law School was set up in 1962. Today it admits only persons holding a law degree from an approved University or persons

²¹ Dauda, Momodu 'Nigeria Legal Education and Practice: Need for a Renaissance in the Era of Information and Communication Technology', (2014) *International Journal of Law and Legal Jurisprudence Studies*, <<https://portal.issn.org/resource/ISSN/2348-8212>> accessed 3 March 2024.

²² Okpalaobi and Ogelle, 'History of the Nigerian Legal System-1882 till date' (2010). <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317752297_History_of_Nigerian_Legal_System_-_1882_till_Date>

who passed the Solicitors final examination of Great Britain and Ireland.²³ The latter are required to pass the Bar Part 1 Examination designed to introduce foreign-trained students to the general principles of Nigerian law. Recently, the Nigerian Law School improved in the use of computer and computer-based media to enhance its teaching and learning process. Compact Discs containing law reports and relevant cases are now available. Students are now required to have laptops as most materials are made available in soft copies. Also, the use of power point presentation on computer projectors has become the system in most of the Nigerian law school branches.²⁴ It is on record that during the COVID-19 lockdown, the CLE used the Zoom virtual platform to hold its last meeting of 2021 at its headquarters in Bwari, Abuja with members connecting from different locations.²⁵

These are commendable efforts moving forward but more could be done to take full advantage of technological advancements by institutionalizing the use of ODL including Zoom for law education. Moreover, lessons drawn from the academic disruptions due to COVID-19 pandemic make adoption of ODL a necessity. This is e-legal learning at play employing information, communication and instructional technologies to enhance teaching and learning.²⁶

²³ Akinseye-George, Yemi. 'Legal Education in Nigeria' (2014) *The Jurist* < <http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/world/nigeria.htm> > accessed 3 March 2024

²⁴ Dauda, Momodu (2014). *Nigeria Legal Education and Practice: Need for a Renaissance in the Era of Information and Communication Technology*, *International Journal of Law and Legal Jurisprudence Studies* < <https://portal.issn.org/resource/ISSN/2348-8212> > accessed 15 June, 2025.

²⁵ Council of Legal Education (2021) holds meeting with Zoom, CLE Official Bulletin 31 Dec 155 (2021) No.108. < <https://www.nigerianlawschool.edu.ng/Notices/january2022news.pdf> > accessed 1 June 2024.

²⁶ Muntjewerff, Antoinette J. 'ICT in Legal Education' 10(07) (2009). *German Law Journal* 669 at 671. < https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1478726 > accessed 1 May 2025.

Since the eighties, ICT has been introduced into legal education at law schools and law faculties in Europe, in Finland, Germany, Spain and Italy.²⁷ In the UK some universities offer online Law Degrees, for instance, at Essex, there are 100% online and part-time law degrees giving the ability to study anytime, anywhere.²⁸ Cutting edge virtual learning platforms help collaboration among teachers and students in real time. In Canada, at least 14 different universities offer Law courses through ODL models.²⁹ The same is true of some universities in Australia where programmes are selected from among all Australian universities which offer Bachelor of Law degrees online.³⁰ Nigeria needs to follow suit. This paper aligns with the submission of Daudu on the need for a new reawakening in the legal system of Nigeria in the face of advances in technology. It advocates the relevance of ICT to legal practice while noting the lethargic progression towards an ICT-dependent legal system in Nigeria.³¹ On this, it would be

²⁷ Paul Maharg & Antoinette J. Muntjewerff 'Through a Screen, Darkly: Electronic Legal Education in Europe' (2002), 36(3) *Electronic Legal Education in Europe* 311. < <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03069400.2002.9993111?journalCode=ralt20> > accessed 1 June 2024.

²⁸ Essex Online LLB (Hons) Law - Virtual Learning, Real Results. (2022), < https://online.essex.ac.uk/online_degrees/llb_hons_law 2022. > accessed 1 June 2025.

²⁹ Canada Law Degrees (2022). < <https://www.hotcoursesabroad.com/study/training-degrees/canada/distance-online/law-courses/loc/32/s>. > accessed 1 June 2024.

³⁰ Australia Law Degrees, < <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=online+Law+school+in+Australia> > accessed 1 June 2024.

³¹ Dauda, Momodu Nigeria Legal Education and Practice: Need for a Renaissance in the Era of Information and Communication Technology, *International Journal of Law and Legal Jurisprudence Studies* < <https://portal.issn.org/resource/ISSN/2348-8212>; Muntjewerff, Antoinette J. (2009). 'ICT in Legal Education' 10(07) (2014). *German Law Journal* p.671. < https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1478726 > accessed 1 June, 2025.

instructive to examine the progress made in the use of ODL at the NOUN.

4.0 THE NOUN AND ITS ODL MODEL

The background leading to the setting up of NOUN must be appreciated. The conventional universities had low absorption capacity between 10-15 % on the average and could not cope with rise in population of prospective students.³² These universities could not admit up to 20% of eligible candidates making it imperative to conceive the Open University concept in line with international best practices. Therefore NOUN was established in 1983 but after a period of teething difficulties, it was resuscitated in 2002.³³ Presently, 11 conventional universities and the NOUN are accredited by the NUC to run e-Learning programmes.³⁴ As an Open University and the first fully fledged exclusive ODL University in Nigeria, NOUN provides quality tertiary education in a most flexible and convenient manner, allowing working class students to acquire education while retaining full-time employment at their own pace. The NOUN's motto of 'Work and Learn' underscores this notion. Invariably, NOUN has removed the artificial barriers such as the frequent strike actions or COVID-19 which disrupt academic calendars in the conventional universities. Also, the problem of catchment area for admission, purdah restriction for Muslim women, and inflexibility in terms of time and pace to study which characterize the conventional university system are completely eradicated in NOUN.

³² Obichukwu, Nonyem Gladys." Country Report Nigeria: Report on the Regional Focal Point Meeting- Commonwealth of Learning" (2014). < www.col.org/about/...Report-Regional-FP-Mtg. > accessed 1 June , 2025

³³ NOUN Website (2015). < www.noun.edu.ng> accessed 3 March, 2025.

³⁴ NUC's Guidelines for open and distance learning in Nigerian universities. (2015) < [https:// www.nuc.edu.ng](https://www.nuc.edu.ng). > accessed 3 March, 2025.

In consonance with the NOUN Act of 22 July 1983, NOUN has expanded to 103 study centres spread across the 36 states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory. This ensures coverage and access to many remote areas as students are enrolled across the country without discrimination to age, gender, disability, religion and socio-economic background.³⁵ Currently, the student population is over 500,000 in all the 11 faculties of the university including Law. The Faculty of Law became autonomous in 2007 offering the LL.B course in most of the study centres across the country. The Faculty has graduated over 4000 students since 2014 and for the first time, 1500 law graduates from NOUN were admitted into the Law School.³⁶ In addition to access to online course materials, tutorials (facilitations) are done at designated study centres in a face to face fashion, Moot Court sessions are held from time to time and students undergo their academic programmes at their own pace. Thus, NOUN is creating wider access, ensuring equity and equality of opportunities in providing education and lifelong learning for all.³⁷

NOUN is a key stakeholder in attaining the educational objectives of Nigeria as well as attaining the objectives of the SDGs subscribed to by UN member states including Nigeria. In particular, the SDG 4 dealing with inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong

³⁵ Jimoh, Morayo.. An Appraisal of the Open and Distance Learning Programme in Nigeria, *Journal of Education and Practice*, 4, (3) (2013) University of South Africa <
<https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/download/4486/4554> >
accessed 10 June 2025

³⁶ Vice Chancellora, National Open University of Nigeria, 1,500 NOUN graduates now enrolled in Nigerian Law School, *Tribune Newspaper* 22 March 2022 <
<https://tribuneonlineng.com/1500-noun-graduates-now-enrolled-in-nigerian-law-school-%E2%80%95vc/>. > accessed 10 June 2025

³⁷ Orie, Erinna Orie, 'An Appraisal of the Role of National Open University of Nigeria's Open and Distance Learning in the Attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in Nigeria' 7, (3) (2020) *University of Port Harcourt Journal of Business Law* 20.

learning opportunities demands mass education of the populace at the tertiary level to better serve the needs of current and future generations. This is NOUN's cardinal preoccupation in the educational sector.³⁸ The success story of NOUN is predicated on the ODL system which has gained global acceptability and currency particularly as an antidote for academic disruptions due to strike or pandemics³⁹. The ODL model enables the actualization of these laudable objectives and is in place in a couple of tertiary institutions in Nigeria and ought to be entrenched as a matter of policy in all universities to seamlessly complement traditional legal education. Moreover, with the ever - increasing number of applicants seeking admission into the various conventional Nigerian universities, it would be practically impossible for Nigeria to achieve the SDG 4 and other related goals without the ODL mode espoused by the NOUN.

5.0 ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD FOR ODL FOR LAW EDUCATION

This segment treats the contending issues in relation to adoption of ODL as a paradigm shift for law education in Nigeria, in the face of COVID-19 pandemic. These are matters arising from the preceding discussions. They include legal framework for the CLE and NUC, state of infrastructure/technology, growing law student population and conservative attitude to change.

Regarding legal framework, there is an Act setting up the Law Schools⁴⁰ under the administration of CLE and another establishing

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Vice Chancellor "NOUN Holds Virtual Convocation for 32,725 Students Due to Rising COVID-19 Cases." (2021) <<https://saharareporters.com> › 2021/01/31 › noun-holds- › accessed 10 June 2025

⁴⁰ Legal Education (Consolidation, etc.) Act 1976 – CommonLII. <<http://www.commonlii.org>; › accessed 10 June 2025.

the NUC.⁴¹ Statutorily, the CLE regulates legal education in Nigeria and in conjunction with the NUC stipulates the requirements for accreditation of faculties of Law and admission into Law School. One of the main criteria is denial of admission to Law School from universities offering Law on part-time basis or correspondence courses. Also, the NUC regulation does not allow remote learning.⁴² The Acts did not envisage advances in technology such as the ODL that could revolutionize teaching and learning in the manner being experienced presently. Amendments would be needed but the CLE and the NUC must be convinced on the need to embrace ODL. Hopefully, this will be done given the lessons learnt during the COVID-19 debacle when even the CLE held its end of 2021 meeting using Zoom⁴³ and the fact that some of the courts in Nigeria have commenced virtual court sessions with Zoom.⁴⁴

Another issue of concern is the poor state of infrastructure, such as electricity, national ICT architecture and e-library facilities. For instance, Nigeria experiences epileptic power supply and has poor ICT penetration at 37% which is skewed in favour of those in major cities to the disadvantage of the rural areas.⁴⁵ These infrastructure and

⁴¹ NUC Act CAP. N81 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria. < <http://www.nuc.edu.ng> > 2019/06 > accessed 10 June 2025

⁴² Abubakar, Idris, "Without online learning platforms, a few Nigerian universities are using WhatsApp," (2020) < <https://techcabal.com> > 2020/06/02 > without-online-lea.> accessed 10 May 2025

⁴³ Council of Legal Education holds meeting with Zoom, CLE Official Bulletin 155, No.108 (December 31, 2021).< <https://www.nigerianlawschool.edu.ng/Notices/january2022news.pdf>.> accessed 10 May 2025

⁴⁴ Malami, "How virtual court proceedings will boost Nigeria's economy", Punch Newspaper December 6, 2021, p.1, < <https://punchng.com> > how-virtual-court-proceedings-wi> accessed 10 June 2025

⁴⁵ Orie, Erimma Gloria 'Enhancing Access, Openness and Flexibility at NOUN Faculty of Law: A Paradigm Shift for Quality', National Open University of Nigeria Journal of Education, 3 (2016) 80.

facilities must be improved upon for smooth operation of ODL system. However, there are good prospects for improvements given the huge government investments in the power sector and private sector involvement to provide ICT infrastructure and introduction of 5G technology to bolster internet connectivity. In the interim, increased budgetary provisions are required to enable the universities sustain alternative power supply, install ODL facilities and establish Law e-libraries. This stems from the inadequate funding of education by government at 6 percent, far below the 26% of national budgets recommended by UNESCO.⁴⁶

There is also the issue of managing population explosion of law students across Nigeria. For instance, the universities admit about 566,719 students annually out of over 1.7 million.⁴⁷ The Law Schools have only 6000 annual capacity for graduate law students.⁴⁸ In 2017, the law students admitted into universities were 8427 which translates to just 1.48 percent of total university admissions.⁴⁹ This is poor percentage intake aside the numerous candidates disenfranchised due to poverty and vulnerability in rural locations.

⁴⁶ The Federal Ministry of Education Funding of Education in Nigeria below UNESCO Recommended Benchmark” (2019) This Day Newspaper April 9 2018, <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2018/04/09/funding-of-education-in-nigeria-below-unesco-recommended-benchmark-says-ministry/>. > accessed 10 June 2025.

⁴⁷ National Bureau of Statistics (2018), JAMB Applications and Admitted Candidates by State and Gender Within Faculty < https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/pdfuploads/JAMB_Applications_and_Admitted_Candidates_by_State_2017_2018.pdf > accessed 10 June 2025

⁴⁸ Population of students in law schools in Nigeria (2022) < <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-&q=population+of+law+students+in+nigeria>, > accessed 3 May 2025

⁴⁹ National Bureau of Statistics JAMB Applications and Admitted Candidates by State and Gender Within Faculty (2018), < https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/pdfuploads/JAMB_Applications_and_Admitted_Candidates_by_State_2017_2018.pdf.> accessed 10 June 2025

Obviously, conventional universities and the Law Schools, cannot cope with rising growth rate of national population of students due to limited carrying capacities. Although efforts are being made to establish 7 more Law Schools across the country to cope with rising student population,⁵⁰ the ODL system designed for huge populations could be introduced in the Law Schools and other universities to complement the face to face interaction as a flexible remedy to surging student population thereby meeting the inclusiveness objective of national education policy and the ESD and SDGs targets. Definitely, there must be a massive commitment and robust policy direction from government on ODL for the sector to meet global challenges.⁵¹

Conservative attitude to change is another issue bedevilling the adoption of emerging technologies in legal education in Nigeria. Conservative stakeholders in the legal system view ideas of reform with suspicion. For instance, many courts still have not computerized their operations and many judges still write in long hand despite the availability of digital/computer technology over decades.⁵² Similarly, the CLE repeatedly denied law graduates of NOUN admission into Law School on the notion that NOUN's LLB degrees are based on correspondence course.⁵³ Despite efforts by NOUN to convince the

50 Senate Okays Establishment of 7 Additional Law Schools, (2022), This Day Newspaper February 8. < <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2022/02/08/senate-okays-establishment-of-7-additional-law-schools/>. > accessed 10 June 2025

51 Jegede, Olugbemiro, "Why Nigeria must invest in ODL", (2020) Guardian Newspaper 2 April 2020.

52 Dauda, Momodu Nigeria Legal Education and Practice: Need for a Renaissance in the Era of Information and Communication Technology, (2014). *International Journal of Law and Legal Jurisprudence Studies*. < <https://portal.issn.org/resource/ISSN/2348-8212> > accessed 10 June 2025

53 Vice Chancellor (2017). National Open University of Nigeria, '6th Convocation Addresses', 21st January 2017

CLE otherwise, it has taken over 10 years for the CLE to accept that position.⁵⁴

There is need to demonstrate political willpower to move with the times in the legal education sector. The world has become a global village of interdependency, interconnectedness and networking in real time. In the circumstance, the attitude of resistance to technological innovations can only but slows down progress. Therefore, the ODL system could be adopted for legal education to support Online virtual court sessions, arbitrations and moot court practices for seamless operations. With the commencement of some of these virtual court sessions in Nigeria,⁵⁵ it is only proper to entrench the ODL and Zoom platforms at the university law faculties and Law Schools to complement the existing conventional method for training student lawyers who subsequently become practitioners in the future.

6.0 CONCLUSION

This paper advocated for a paradigm shift in legal education and practice canvassing for a reform that deploys ODL to complement conventional face to face model. It was argued that it would be practically impossible for Nigeria to achieve its national education policy without the ODL mode espoused by the NOUN. This makes the ODL system with its associated Zoom imperative towards the attainment of national education policy and the UN Education 2030 Agenda of ESD linked to SDG4 in particular and the other SDGs in

⁵⁴ Vice Chancellor, “National Open University of Nigeria, 1,500 NOUN graduates now enrolled in Nigerian Law School” (2022), Tribune Newspaper 22 March 2022. < <https://tribuneonline.ng.com/1500-noun-graduates-now-enrolled-in-nigerian-law-school-%E2%80%95vc/> > accessed 10 June 2025

⁵⁵ Tsoho, John Chief Judge federal high court; the new 2020 practice directions for the COVID-19 period which takes effect from May 18. (2020), < <https://fhc-ng.com/virtual.htm>. > accessed 10 June 2025

general. This is because in the 21st Century, the deployment of ODL technology has become a global trend, international best practice and enduring viable panacea to academic disruptions occasioned by present COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, Nigeria should seize the opportunity to entrench the ODL system for law education and the judiciary for more effective dispensation of justice in Nigeria.

Over time, law education has fared modestly, albeit lethargically, by adopting use of computers and internet facilities. At NOUN, the ODL system initiative is a success story, applicable to huge population, flexible, convenient and as an antidote for academic disruptions due to strike or pandemics. This ODL system is already in place in a couple of tertiary institutions in Nigeria and could be entrenched at the Law Schools and across the Faculties of Law in the universities as well as the judiciary in Nigeria to seamlessly complement traditional legal education as a matter of policy.

The contending issues highlighted were legal framework for the CLE and NUC, state of infrastructure/technology, growing population of law students and conservative attitude of stakeholders to change. Whilst the statutes establishing the CLE and NUC could be amended by the National Assembly to entrench ODL system, there are good prospects for improvements in infrastructure given the huge government investments in the power sector and private sector involvement to provide ICT infrastructure and introduction of 5G technology to bolster internet connectivity. Meanwhile, increased budgetary provision would enable the universities sustain effective alternative power supply, install ODL facilities and establish Law e-libraries. Regarding students' population, obviously the conventional universities and the Law Schools cannot cope due to limited carrying capacities thereby making the ODL designed for huge populations a credible alternative. Furthermore, conservative attitude of stakeholders

to change could be overcome by demonstrating political willpower to embrace emerging technologies real time. Thus, with the commencement of online virtual court and arbitration sessions in Nigeria, it is only proper to entrench the ODL to complement the existing conventional method for training student lawyers who will subsequently be the practitioners in the field in the future.

It is therefore, recommended that the ODL system with its associated Zoom applications should be adopted as a paradigm shift to law education in Nigeria to complement the conventional face to face methods in the university law faculties and Law Schools. Accordingly, the NASS should amend the Acts establishing the Law Schools and the NUC to incorporate ODL system. Furthermore, the Nigerian judiciary should embrace the use of ODL technology in all courts of law for quick and effective dispensation of justice.