



## **Sustainable Distance E-Learning for Enhanced Students Retention and Support: Faculty of Law National Open University of Nigeria in Focus**

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### **Abstract**

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The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) was primarily conceived to afford the teeming population of prospective university candidates the opportunity to access tertiary education in order to fulfill their life dreams, contribute to national socio-economic development in our ever competitive, contemporary and globalised world. The NOUN is ranked 7<sup>th</sup> in Nigeria, offers about 60 academic programmes including Law and has been delivering academic excellence in consonance with its mandate. The institution has 455,837 students as at April 2016 enrolled and has graduated 12000 students since re-launched in 2002 and in 2017 alone graduated 12000 students, the highest in any year since its relaunch in 2002. Despite the monumental progress made by NOUN, there are challenges related to students' retention and support militating against realization of the objectives of establishing the university. These challenges stem from the peculiar nature of the Open University concept predicated on Distance Learning or e-Learning as means of service delivery. In a developing country like Nigeria, these challenges can be critical compared to the developed countries where infrastructural development is well in place and taken for granted. Therefore, there is need to combat the identified challenges particularly as they affect the Faculty of Law with its peculiarities and to proffer strategies to enhance students success on a sustainable basis at NOUN and thereby promote academic excellence. The paper is essentially predicated on relevant document analyses, interviews and discussions with students, interactions with fellow staff and facilitators who encounter students on a regular basis as well as personal experience as both a legal practitioner and lecturer in Law at NOUN. The motivation to examine the issues stem from the understanding that the pursuit of academic excellence vis-à-vis addressing the challenges

inherent in e-Learning system for students' retention and support could be conceived as a benchmark for evaluating students' and institutional performances. Therefore, the paper explores the challenges related to students' retention and support some of which are considered personal to the student; some are institutional while others are societal or external. Specifically, students' background / orientation, state of infrastructure nationwide, funding and staffing inadequacies constitute the major issues. Strategies proffered to remedy the situation include pre-enrolment orientation in e-Learning environment and mentoring, improved budgetary allocation, improved ICT facilities including e-library, follow-up on students and proper staffing amongst others. Accordingly, recommendations were derived from the strategies to enhance students' retention, support and ultimately success at the Faculty of Law NOUN.

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**Keywords:** Distance Learning, Students Retention, Law, e-Learning

## **Introduction**

Over the years, the pursuit of academic excellence has become an imperative. The world is increasingly competitive in all spheres of human endeavours and witnessing unprecedented quest for knowledge to support and sustain development. This is all the more the case in a modern globalised world of breath-taking advances in technology. So, the quest for quality education is justified, not in the least for development of the individual, to pave way for career progression and lay the foundation for a stronger nation in terms of socio-economic growth and development. This is given credence by late President Kennedy when he averred that "Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education. The human mind is our fundamental resource." (Buzzle, 2013). Thus, a literate population is an asset and crucial to survival in a competitive world. The future of our nation, therefore, is safe and guaranteed in the hands of the educated.

Distance Learning (DL) or e-Learning, used interchangeably, which simply means formalized teaching and learning system specifically designed to be carried out remotely by using electronic communication, remains a veritable tool to access education (What is tech target, 2015). It affords a platform for mass education of prospective university students who otherwise may not be absorbed into the limited spaces available in conventional universities. Leveraging information and communication technology (ICT), the e-Learning has the capacity to reach out practically to unlimited population

even in remote parts of the world. Globally, the concept has gained acceptability and popularity. In the USA, for instance, over 90 % of the largest universities offer e-Learning and almost 5.2 million students offer at least one e-Learning course as at 2008 (Daniel J, 2009). In the United Kingdom Open University (UKOU), e-Learning is provided for over 250,000 students inclusive of 50,000 overseas students. (Wikipedia, 2015) Similarly, the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in India has over 4 million students with a network of 2667 study centres and reaching out to 20 countries. (Wikipedia, 2015). These institutions are providing world class education vide e-Learning to teeming population of students across the globe, albeit with attendant challenges regarding students' retention support and success. The IGNOU, for instance, has up to 62.9% student dropout (corollary of retention) which is considered very high but nevertheless underscores the magnitude of the problem in institutions offering tertiary education via e-learning. (Fozdar, Kumar and Kannan, 2006).

In Africa, e-Learning is gaining popularity as ICT penetration increases. The University of South Africa (UNISA), for example, was the first to commence e-Learning programmes in Africa and currently has student population of over 300,000 inclusive of students in 130 countries worldwide. (Wikipedia, 2015). While it strives to provide quality education to its students, the dropout rate of about 80% at UNISA which is one of the highest in the world reveals the extent of the problem students face (Tabitha Bailey, 2012). The trend is the same in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Tanzania, Senegal and Ghana where e-Learning is being used to provide academic opportunities to meet the United Nations Human Right (UNHR) Charter of Education for all and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (United Nations Millennium Development Goals Report, 2005). Nigeria is not an exception.

As far as Nigeria is concerned, e-Learning is not new. It has become a panacea for offering education to large number of prospective candidates who fail to gain admission into the limited vacancies for academic programmes in conventional universities. Presently, 6 conventional universities and the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) are accredited by the National University Commission (NUC) to run e-Learning programmes (National University Commission, 2015). NOUN was resuscitated in 2002 and has recorded monumental achievements. It was recently rated 7<sup>th</sup> position among the 134 universities in Nigeria and 86<sup>th</sup> position out of the 100 universities in Africa by Webometric International. In addition, NOUN was given the European Quality Award in Education 2011

at Oxford, UK, among other (NOUN, 2015). The student enrolment at NOUN is 455,837 as at April 2016 (Jane-Frances Obiageli Agbu and others, 2016) with presence in the 36 states of Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory using 76 study centres (Vice Chancellor NOUN, 2017). The university offers about 60 programmes including Law and has so far graduated 12,000 students from across the country. Thus the institution is living up to its mandate of providing quality education to Nigerian students from varied backgrounds.

Despite the giant strides at NOUN and the e-Learning platform as enticing as it appears, there are challenges confronting students. These challenges associated with e-Learning may not be particularly disturbing in developed countries but pose quite a formidable threat to students in a developing country like Nigeria. The searchlight is on the Faculty of Law NOUN with its peculiarities. The Faculty of Law is not old enough to allow for the generation of data to conduct detailed research on the subject matter, having graduated its first set of students only in 2014; therefore, the magnitude of the problem could not be categorically asserted. This could form the basis of further research in the future.

There is, however, justification for this work for 2 reasons. Firstly, realizing that the system is not perfect, and that there were indications of possible traces of students' dissatisfaction with service delivery which could eventually lead to dropouts, it was necessary to articulate strategies to forestall such unpleasant outcomes. The understanding is that proactive steps are always profitable to keep track of challenges early enough as they unfold and address them rather than wait until the problems become overwhelming before taking remedial actions. Secondly, the paper needed to highlight international best practices which if adopted could assist NOUN to enhance students' retention and success and thereby fulfil its mandate.

Accordingly, this work relied on document analyses, drawing from lessons of previous e-Learning studies in other institutions elsewhere in Nigeria, Zimbabwe, New Zealand and the UK under similar conditions and circumstances to the situation in NOUN; interviews and discussions with students, interactions with fellow staff and facilitators who encounter students on a regular basis as well as personal experience as both a legal practitioner and lecturer in Law at NOUN. Strategies were proffered to checkmate the difficulties students face, albeit, preventive, interventional and corrective measures in the realm of the personal actions the students must

undertake to help themselves out, institutional activities by NOUN/ Faculty of Law and actions expected of external agents/government.

The motivation to examine the issues stem from the understanding that the pursuit of academic excellence vis-à-vis addressing the challenges inherent in e-Learning system for students' retention and support could be conceived as the benchmark for evaluating students' and institutional performances. Nevertheless, the work has some limitations. Some data related to projected budgets and actual receipts of funds from public and private universities including NOUN were not readily available at the time of writing this paper due to the secrecy and bureaucracy in some of the institutions contacted. This difficulty was overcome using data from various secondary sources. Thus, the validity and integrity of the paper is sustained.

Therefore, the paper commences with brief conceptual clarifications, and then gives an overview of NOUN and its Faculty of Law before expounding the contending issues and challenges. Thereafter, prospects and strategies are discussed. Lastly, the paper concludes with salient recommendations.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

It is necessary to briefly clarify the concepts adopted for the keywords in order to place the paper in proper perspective. The simple dictionary meaning of sustainability in general terms is the endurance of system and processes; ability to maintain, to be supported, upheld or confirmed (Dictionary, 2015). It is imperative to sustain e-Learning and by extension maintain quality standards to enhance students' success at NOUN.

As for the term e-Learning, there are many definitions. However, from a practitioner's stand point, Derek conceptualizes e-Learning as the delivery of learning, training or educational programme by electronic means involving the use of computers or electronic devices such as mobile phones, ICT equipment, CD-ROM amongst others in some way to provide training, educational or learning materials (Derek, 2015). Clearly, e-Learning provides a method of studying in which lectures are broadcast or classes are conducted by correspondence or over the internet and which enables anyone to learn anywhere and at any time. Because it is less expensive to support and it is not constrained by geographical considerations, it offers opportunities in situations where traditional education has difficulty operating. It is flexible in terms of time and can be delivered virtually anywhere irrespective of

attendance and travel difficulties. That is the concept on which Open universities operate including NOUN. Global best practices, indeed.

Retention definitions are multi-faceted and variously applied by organizations depending on their situations and contexts. It can be seen as a measure of performance and could be discussed in terms of other related or similar terms such as withdrawal, dropout rate and student persistence. Retention goes beyond staying on the course but involves active participation and succeeding in completing the programme. In this paper, retention is defined as the submission of all assessment components in a course, irrespective of actual fail or pass (Maathuis-Smith et al, 2015). This definition is apt for this paper. It, therefore, implies that causes of dropout or withdrawal affect retention. The list of these causes include but not limited to dissatisfaction with service delivery, mismanagement of study time, lack of academic ability, weak motivation or goal orientation, quality of tutorials and tutors and inappropriate course choice. Some of these and how they play out in NOUN would be examined subsequently.

Student Support deals with the services rendered to the student to enable the completion of programme. It is conceived in this paper as the range of services both for individual and students in groups which complement the course materials or learning resources that are uniform for all the learners and which are often perceived as the major offerings of institutions using the e-Learning (Tait A, 2015). Some of the student support is considered personal to the student; some are institutional while others are societal or external. This can be achieved through the collaborative efforts of the entire stakeholders – students, faculty, parents / guidance and governing board or government as the case may be. In other words, student support entails providing course materials for learning, creating enabling environment such as establishing administrative and management processes and infrastructure whereby the student can excel in scholastic activities, demonstrate superior learning and develop intellectual capacities and skills and persist to graduation. At NOUN, from orientation to graduation, the students are empowered to achieve their educational goals seamlessly. Preventive, interventional and follow-up services, to varying degrees are employed to successfully prosecute a course from start to finish.

It follows from the submissions aforementioned that a relationship exists between students' retention, support and success. With the stakeholders working harmoniously, students' support, retention and success can be

guaranteed on a sustainable basis. The more robust and adequate the support given to the student, retention is enhanced provided the student applies himself or herself positively and ultimately success is achieved. Conversely, poor support undermines retention leading to possible failure or low success.

### **Overview of NOUN and its Faculty of Law**

The background leading to the setting up of NOUN must be appreciated. The astronomical rise in the population of students seeking tertiary education was such that the existing conventional universities could not cope. The conventional universities had low absorption capacity between 10-15 % on the average (Report Regional Focal Point, 2015). These universities could not admit up to 20% of eligible candidates. So it became imperative to ameliorate the challenge by conceiving 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. (NOUN, 2015). As an Open University and the first fully fledged exclusive DL University in Nigeria, it complements the conventional universities, providing opportunities for a wide range of students to obtain quality tertiary education. This is done in a most flexible and convenient manner, allowing working class students the liberty to acquire education / knowledge while retaining full-time employment at their own pace. The NOUN's motto of 'Work and Learn' underscores this notion.

NOUN has 76 study centres spread across the 36 states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory where tutorial instructions, examinations and advisory/counselling are facilitated. This ensures reasonable coverage and access to remote parts of the country. Thus, students are enrolled from a wide variety of background from all over the country. Presently, the student population is about 455,837 in all the 9 faculties of the university including Law. The courses cover certificate and diploma programmes as well as first and higher degree programmes. (NOUN, 2015).

The university is also recording landmark achievements. In 2017 alone, 12,000 students graduated from NOUN. It was recently rated 7<sup>th</sup> position among the 134 universities in Nigeria and 86<sup>th</sup> position out of the 100 universities in Africa by Webometric International. In addition, NOUN was given the European Quality Award in Education 2011 at Oxford, UK, among others (NOUN, 2015). There are state –of- the-art e-library and ICT facilities in many of the study centres. Furthermore, qualified academic and non-academic staffs are positioned to facilitate service delivery in the study centres. By and large, the facilities to support students are modest and

undergo constant modernization. To all intents and purposes, the NOUN is living up to its billing in meeting the objectives for which it exists.

The Faculty of Law NOUN became autonomous in 2007. The LLB course is available in most of the study centres spread across the country. As at 2014, students' enrolment stands at 10,928 out of which 3,890 students have stopped attending classes for various reasons but without university approval. The faculty has graduated over 1000 students since 2014.

### **Issues and Challenges Affecting Students' Retention, Support and Success**

Notwithstanding the modest milestone attained in the Faculty of Law, there remains certain crucial issues and challenges. These could impact positively or negatively on students' retention and support. The factors are;

- **Students' Perception of e-Learning and Preparedness:**  
Students' perception of the concept of Open University and e-Learning constitutes a cardinal issue which can affect their preparedness. This is because right from the onset, the students' expectation and inclination can shape their conduct, zeal and commitment. Generally, the mind-set in terms of appreciating the difference between conventional university system based on face to face method of instruction and the e-Learning system is important. Students just assume that both systems are the same and that the e-Learning approach could even be easier without taking time to find out the differences (Carnevale, 2000). Little do they know that although the Open University concept may be more convenient, it has attributes such as hard work, rigours and isolation of students. The students must know that the Open University concept is not inferior to the traditional/conventional system (Fozdar and Kumar, 2006). That it is equally of great standard.

In addition, prospective students need to understand that computer literacy forms a key criterion to successful operation of e-Learning. However, the truth is that the background of most of the working class students who obtained their WAEC certificates when computer studies were not common in secondary schools are not very computer literate. So it would take determination for this category of prospective students to go the extra mile to acquire basic computer skills necessary to take on e-Learning. Besides, most of the students are of age, many old, matured and bread winners, and therefore are experienced in life. Some even erroneously believe that they could offer inducements to lecturers to be lenient with them and compromise

standards, thereby making it easier to succeed. They have already formed their character and not easily amenable to adhering or adapting to new e-Learning requirements. It becomes difficult to get such students to prepare adequately to confront e-Learning. This poor students' perception of the concept of Open University is what Ohioze et al (2013) referred to as poor attitude of students in NOUN. Nevertheless, these students must of necessity readjust their life preferences, make sacrifices, save money and put their houses in order in readiness to embrace e-Learning. It takes discipline, self-control and determination not to be detracted from set goal, to go the extra mile and for them to apply themselves appropriately. In sum, perception of e-Learning and preparedness constitute a major issue.

The challenge arising there from is how to exercise the needed level of discipline to go the full hug and to successfully undertake the e-Learning programme. This may not be easy but it is essentially for the student to do, ab initio and to sustain good level of disciplined throughout the period of study which could be quite long, in many cases longer than the conventional university timeframe. Otherwise, the problem of dropout might occur to varying degrees, thereby adversely affecting students' retention and success.

▪ **State of Infrastructure:**

The state of infrastructure, such as electricity supply, national ICT architecture, ICT and e-library facilities at NOUN is an issue related to the subject of this paper. In the developed economies, these are available and taken for granted. However, in Nigeria and a host of other developing countries, these critical infrastructure are not readily available and therefore impact on the quality of service delivery. For instance, despite huge investments in the power sector by governments in Nigeria, power supply is still epileptic and largely unavailable, both in rural and urban areas. Companies and individuals resort to investing in generators as alternative. In the case of ICT, Nigeria ranks first in Africa and 8<sup>th</sup> in the world at 37% ICT penetration in a population of about 170 million (Akanksha, Tim & Barbra, 2015). However, this ICT penetration is skewed in favour of those in major cities and disadvantage of the rural areas on account of lack or poor network coverage depending on remoteness from the cities. Moreover, 92% of the internet users operate on mobile phones many of which may not be ideal for downloading of bulky learning materials in an e-Learning setting (Terragon Limited, 2013). Furthermore, although NOUN has provided regular libraries in designated study centre and e-library that could be accessed from places that have network coverage, the stock of indigenous

law books and publications remains inadequate. Also, the e-library contains mostly foreign materials which at best provide information on general principles of law. The indigenous law e-books are in short supply as there are only a few in publication, hence the need to have decentralized regular libraries in more of the study centres to cater for law students outside major cities.

The challenges then in respect of state of infrastructure are irregular electricity supply, inadequate ICT nationwide network coverage due to concentration of the facilities in the cities to the detriment of rural areas where majority of the law students reside and inadequate stock of indigenous law books in the few study centres. Yet, access to library facilities is critical to law programme. The law students are constrained to augment the paucity of indigenous law books for themselves at extra cost as the case warrants. These challenges, must be remedied to create desired positive impact on student' retention, service delivery and success.

▪ **Staffing:**

The issue of staffing takes a prominent position in the process of e-Learning and in deed for any endeavour. Quality manpower is a sine qua non to success in the learning value chain. Academic and non-academic staff, in the correct numerical strength and mix of disciplines, experience and seniority are required to attend to students, deliver varied services, administer and manage processes, supervise tutorials and research projects, conduct extra lessons, assess students' assignments, conduct examinations, offer library services and record keeping. Others include pre-study advisory, guidance and counselling, programme planning, teaching and a host of others services. Quality course materials, reviewed periodically, enriched in details and written in simple language, are made available by staff through e-Learning platform. Also experience has shown that law students need a lot of practical guidance in the form of tutorials facilitated by lecturers. Thus the staffs play critical roles to support the students and to attain high academic standards.

NOUN has about 198 which by NUC standard are inadequate to cater for about 455, 837 students. Ohioze (2013) highlighted inadequacy of staff in NOUN as a challenge. In the Faculty of Law, the situation is exacerbated. However, the staff strength in NOUN is complemented by engaging ad hoc staff to serve as facilitators at the study centres. This measure improves the staff to student ratio. However, law students in remote areas have difficulties attending tutorials. Some are unable to meet travel expenses regularly while

many have conflict of schedule in their work places. They generally get serious when examinations are approaching and tend to be more regular in tutorial classes.

The challenge here is in terms of inadequacy of staff in the right mix of disciplines, experience and numbers to cover all the study centres. Attracting quality lawyers to the teaching profession seem difficult because the average lawyer prefers private practice for better remuneration than what government jobs offers. The poorer condition of service of government institutions was highlighted as a problem responsible for high attrition of quality senior staff (Okojie, 2008). Over the years, the situation has not abated. This challenge, unless properly addressed could adversely impact on students' retention and success.

#### ▪ **Funding;**

At the centre of effective students' support and service delivery is the issue of funding. Really, hardly can any meaningful progress be made in e-Learning setting with heavy dependence on infrastructure without proper financing. Fund is required for overheads, acquisition of necessary facilities and equipment, maintenance of the facilities to make them available for use when needed and for payment of salaries and training of staff. In the Nigerian education sector, appropriated budgets are inadequate and well insufficient to provide the services required for quality education. This is probably due to many other competing needs from other sectors of the economy.

Whereas UNESCO recommended 26% of national budgets for education, this target has not been met for many years in Nigeria. On the average, public universities including NOUN receive 5.7241% (Peter, Kpolovie & Obilor, 2013). This is inadequate and there is a limit to how much NOUN could charge students in order to generate revenue, otherwise their services would become unaffordable to the vast majority of students and this will negate the objective of making tertiary education accessible to the bulk of prospective students. For instance, whereas school fees for a law student in private universities such as Babcock and Igbinedion are 876,700 (Babcock University, 2015) and 643,350 (Igbinedion University, 2015) annually respectively, the law student in NOUN pays only ₦41,000. At the University of Nigeria Nsukka, a law student pays ₦63,450 while the fees is ₦160,500 at the Osun State University. The charges show that NOUN's fees remain the cheapest and most affordable. The point is that with this modest charge, NOUN may not be able to generate enough additional revenues to augment

government allocations. The challenge remains to get government to increase NOUN's budgetary appropriations to enable the institution discharge its responsibilities to its growing population of students.

### **Prospects and Strategies to Enhance Students' Retention, Support and Success**

There are credible prospects that students' retention, support and success for law students in NOUN would continue to be enhanced. Similarly, a couple of strategies could be employed to improve academic service delivery to attain greater success.

The country's ICT penetration of 37% ranking Nigeria first in Africa is something to celebrate. With an unprecedented 16% annual growth rate, the potentials for greater ICT penetration in the years ahead exists (Internet World Statistics, 2015). Furthermore, with improvements in the security situation across the country, ICT service providers are expected to expand their network coverage to remote areas. Allied to this is the mobile technology penetration of 70%. For instance, based on the prospects of mobile telephony across Nigeria, Osang, Ngole & Tsuma, (2013), recommended the implementation of Mobile Learning for NOUN. This is certainly a good idea to consider given that most students including those in remote areas own cell phones.

Another prospect is in the efforts of government to improve the epileptic electricity supply in the country. According to NERC, over \$20 Billion has been invested in the power sector in the last 5 years to build gas injection stations, lay gas supply pipelines to the power stations in a renewed attempt to revamp the sector (NERC, 2014). For instance, about three years ago, the Federal Government privatized electricity generation and distribution as part of the reforms. New transmission lines are being installed to increase the existing carrying capacity up to 10,000 MW by 2017 from the present estimated 4,500 MW. In addition, about ₦ 213 Billion was recently injected to bail out the beneficiaries of the privatization exercise (NERC, 2014). These efforts are promising and raise the hope for stable power supply. These prospects could bolster external support to the Law students who are located in every part of the country including remote areas.

Regarding strategies for improvements, the suggested remedies cover how students can help themselves personally, institutional support and government measures. All are meant to be achieved with all the stakeholders

working harmoniously in preventive, interventional and to enhance service delivery. These strategies have the propensity to forestall any tendencies towards dropping out or enhance service delivery aimed at providing the requisite support to students for seamless success. The strategies are strengthened by the research finding in DL projects undertaken in similar institutions to NOUN elsewhere in Nigeria, New Zealand, UK and Zimbabwe, under similar circumstances.

1. **Students' Activities:** The personal actions expected of students as their contribution to attain success in their educational pursuit are as follows:
  - a. Self-discipline and determination to pursue their academic dreams in an e-Learning environment.
  - b. Improve perception of e-Learning system by seeking information from relevant internet materials and sources such as NOUN. This will eliminate misconceptions and wrong assumptions thereby paving the way for good preparations prior to getting admission into NOUN.
  - c. Embrace mobile technology and to invest modestly in appropriate mobile phones capable of internet access. This will guarantee ready internet access to most parts of the country as GSM network have permeated almost everywhere.
  - d. Arrange to attend extra tutorials or lessons for one on one and face to face assistance with seasoned law lecturers and facilitators.
  - e. Establish a cordial working relationship with their employers to secure favourable dispositions in terms of flexible timings for annual leaves and permissions to embark on e-Learning in NOUN.
2. **Institutional Remedies:** The NOUN as an institution would be required to support service delivery to students as follows:
  - a. Continually upgrade ICT facilities in terms of connectivity and bandwidth; improve web administration for easy access; increase e-Library stocks of indigenous law books and publications as well as expand regular libraries to more Study Centres.
  - b. Establish real time online platforms for students' enquiries and personalized feedback, particularly for prompt responses with respect to tutor marked assessments.

- c. Carry out elaborate orientation for new law students. This is necessary to enlighten and raise awareness on e-Learning, reframe expectations realistically, douse apprehensions
- d. Introduce computer literacy test as pre-admission qualification requirement.
- e. Use software to monitor, track and follow-up students who fail to access learning materials online weekly. It is some sort of surveillance on passively withdrawn students to raise alerts. This may be cumbersome for academic staff but would pay off handsomely in the end.
- f. Install plagiarism software to improve standards and originality of students' research projects and other assignments.
- g. Create fora for student to student interaction and mutual support by way of study / discussion groups.
- h. Encourage the formation of students' union and include the students' executives in the decision-making machinery of NOUN. This would also enhance feedback from students to NOUN authorities.
- i. Improve academic integration through quality and extended tutorial sessions using experienced legal practitioners as facilitators and extending tutorial periods for robust discussions. This could boost attendance presently put at about 30%.
- j. Establish Moot Courts in more study centres well distributed nationwide.
- k. Intensify training for academic staff on e-Learning and new technologies.
- l. Engage the services of experienced lawyers to beef up manning of tutorial sessions in the study centres not adequately covered presently.

3. **External Measures;** External measures refer to actions to support students required by other stakeholders such as the government and employers of labour amongst others. Some of the interventions are as follows:

- a. The government should vigorously pursue to logical conclusion projects to improve electricity supply nationwide.
- b. The government should increase budgetary allocations to NOUN / Faculty of Law to enable realization of earmarked

- projects, ICT and library facilities as well as staff recruitment and training.
- c. Employers of working class students should be encouraged to maintain good rapport with their employees and grant them permission to attend to school assignments. This would allow students the liberty to attend tutorials, participate in Moot Court sessions or law chamber / regular court attachments and consult their research project supervisors as may be required.

An implementation plan with timeframe could be articulated at this juncture. Table 1 below illustrates the modalities for implementation of the strategies to improve on students' retention, support and success in the Faculty of Law NOUN. There are 3 phases of implementation. Phase I is for short term of 6 months to enable students settle down fast. Phase II is for medium term of 12 months basically for consolidation. Phase III is for long term of 4 years which is essentially for stabilization. The Action column of the table assigns students, NOUN and Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) responsibilities necessary to attain the objective of enhanced students' retention, support and sustainable success at the Faculty of Law,

**Table 1**  
*Implementation Chart for Strategies Proffered*

Serial	Activities / Events	Phase I Short term 6 months	Phase II Medium Term 12 months	Phase III Long Term 4 years	Action
1	Intensify efforts to improve electricity supply nationwide.	√	√	√	FGN
2	Encourage employers of working class students through incentives such as tax waivers to grant e-Learning friendly conditions of service to student employees.	√	√	--	FGN
3	Increase budgetary allocations to Nigeria's education sector including	--	√	√	FGN

	NOUN / Faculty of Law to 26% of national budget				
4	Do pre-admission computer literacy test	√	--	--	<i>STUDENTS</i>
5	Invest modestly in appropriate mobile phones capable of internet access	√	--	--	<i>STUDENTS</i>
6	Attend extra tutorials or lessons for one on one assistance with seasoned law lecturers and facilitators.	√	√	√	<i>STUDENTS</i>
7	Conduct elaborate students' orientation	√	√	√	<i>NOUN</i>
8	Improve regular and e-Library facilities by adequate stocking of relevant indigenous law learning materials.	√	√	√	<i>NOUN</i>
9	Establish Moot Courts in designated study centres.	--	√	√	<i>NOUN</i>
10	Follow-up on passively withdrawn students using software	√	√	√	<i>NOUN</i>
11	Engage services of additional practicing lawyers as tutorial facilitators.	--	√	√	<i>NOUN</i>
12	Establish real time online interactive platform for students.	√	√	√	<i>NOUN</i>
13	Intensify training for academic staff on e-Learning and new technologies	√	√	√	<i>NOUN</i>

## **Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to explore the issues and challenges related to students; retention, support and success in an e-Learning environment in a developing country like Nigeria where the state of critical infrastructure and facilities is poor. The searchlight was on the Faculty of Law NOUN with its peculiarities. The Faculty of Law is not old enough to allow for the generation of data to conduct a detailed research on the subject matter, having graduated its first set of students only in 2014; therefore, the magnitude of the problem could not be categorically ascertained. This could form the basis for further research in the future.

However, the author justified this work for 2 reasons. Firstly, realizing that the system is not perfect, there were indications of possible traces of students' dissatisfaction with service delivery which could eventually lead to dropouts, it was necessary to articulate strategies to forestall such unpleasant outcomes. The understanding is that proactive steps are always profitable to keep track of challenges early enough as they unfold and address them rather than wait until the problems become overwhelming before taking remedial actions. Secondly, the paper needed to highlight international best practices which if adopted could assist NOUN to sustain the provision of effective service delivery to enhance students' retention and success and thereby fulfil its mandate.

Accordingly, this work relied on document analyses, drawing from lessons of previous e-Learning studies in other institutions elsewhere in Nigeria, Zimbabwe, New Zealand and the UK under similar conditions and circumstances to the situation in NOUN; interview with lecturers and facilitators in the Faculty of Law and experience gained from regular interactions with the students. Strategies were proffered to checkmate the difficulties students face, albeit, preventive, interventional and corrective measures in the realm of the personal actions the students must undertake to help themselves out, institutional activities by NOUN/ Faculty of Law and actions expected of external agents/government.

The strategies are pre-admission computer literacy test, students' orientation, improvement of regular and e-Library facilities in terms of adequate stocking of relevant indigenous law learning materials and increase in access time to tutors. Others include improvement in quality of tutorials, establishment of Moot Courts in designated study centres, follow-ups on passively withdrawn students using software, engagement of additional practicing lawyers as

tutorial facilitators and establishment of real time online interactive platform for students. The other remedies are increasing budgetary allocations and encouraging/persuading employers of working class students to grant e-Learning friendly conditions of service to student employees amongst others. All these steps by the stakeholders working harmoniously are geared towards enhancement of service delivery to the students. Thus, the deductions have laid credence to the relationship asserted that the more the improvements in students' support for better retention, the higher the success rate. Conversely, when students' support is substandard and below expectation, students' retention is undermined leading to failure or reduced success rate. The paper, therefore concludes with salient recommendations.

## **Recommendations**

In order to sustain quality standard of e-Learning in fulfilment of NOUN's mandate and to guarantee effective service delivery to enhance law students' retention, support and ultimately success, the strategies proffered should be taken seriously and implemented using the implementation plan and time frames provided. In particular, it is recommended for all stakeholders as follows:

- Law students should do pre-admission computer literacy test, embrace mobile technology and to invest modestly in appropriate mobile phones capable of internet access, attend extra tutorials or lessons for one on one and face to face assistance with seasoned law lecturers and facilitators.
- The NOUN / Faculty of Law should conduct elaborate students' orientation, improve regular and e-Library facilities in terms of adequate stocking of relevant indigenous law learning materials, establish Moot Courts in designated study centres, follow-ups on passively withdrawn students using software, engage services of additional practicing lawyers as tutorial facilitators, establish real time online interactive platform for students as well as intensify training for academic staff on e-Learning and new technologies.
- The Federal Government of Nigeria should intensify efforts to improve electricity supply nationwide and encourage / persuade employers of working class students through incentives such as tax waivers to grant e-Learning friendly conditions of service to student employees.

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