

EDITORIAL

The impact of the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic was a (re)defining moment for teaching and learning, and all forms of educational delivery, especially distance education. No doubt, the pandemic accelerated the adoption of Information Communication technologies (ICTs) and emerging technologies for teaching and learning, globally. However, the challenges associated with the adoption of these technologies and the implications of these challenges for the practice of ‘modern’ distance education (as opposed to ‘traditional’ distance education characterized by face-to-face instructional delivery), especially in developing countries, remain a concern in terms of equity and inclusion. It is instructive, therefore, to examine technology for teaching and learning within the framework of distance education from several perspectives including technological, economic, and educational perspectives to better understand the opportunities, and challenges to provide informed innovative solutions.

In the research article section of this issue, four of the six research papers address the role, application, and challenges of technology in teaching and learning from different perspectives, including the use of Artificial Intelligence to facilitate student support; the challenges associated with using internet-dependent technology in resource-poor contexts, the potential contributions of technology to teacher education, and its adoption at the pre-tertiary level. Two papers explore the role of distance education in economic sustainability and basic education. Two sections are appearing for the first time in this issue, these are the commentary and the book review sections.

Adewale Adesina in his paper titled, *iNOUN: Architecture and Usability of a Chatbot for Academic Enquiries*, explores the use of artificial intelligence (AI)-based applications to improve service delivery in ODL contexts. A web-based virtual assistant chat robot (chatbot) named *iNOUN* was developed to provide human-like responses to academic and general questions about the National Open University of Nigeria for text and voice input. The conversational chatbot was designed using a content management system and Google's Natural Language Processing (NLP) framework

(DialogFlow) to understand and respond to end users' queries. An evaluation of the chatbot's usability indicated over half of the users were comfortable chatting with the Bot. The study demonstrates the potential of AI-based solutions for learner-institution interactions.

Nafisat A. Adedokun-Shittu et al. evaluated *the Nigerian Experiential Beauty and Ugliness of Technological Teaching: the case of Google Classroom (GC)*. The author compares the experiences of learners in two technology-based courses, Educational Games and Simulation (EGS) and Computer Science Methodology (CSM) using Google Classroom (GC) as the learning platform. A qualitative research approach and Content analysis to analyse the data the findings of the study suggest that limited access to the Internet and technological resources are factors affecting learners' learning experiences.

Joy Eyisi, John O. Oparaduru, Chinonso Okolo, Philomena Elom, Frank Onuh, Joy Eyisi Jr. and Adaobi Mac-Ozigbo in their paper titled, *Promoting Teacher Education in Nigeria through Open and Distance Learning* explored the role technologies play in enhancing teacher education. The authors highlight the benefits of ODL using technology to deliver school-based pre-service and Continuing Professional Development Programmes (CPDP) for teachers to upgrade themselves and enable qualified ones to acquire higher teaching qualifications, especially those in remote areas. The authors conclude with a policy recommendation for ODL institutions to pay more attention to the use of technologies in instructional delivery.

Lucky Amede investigated the *Perception of gender and academic qualifications on the application of computer-assisted instruction in secondary schools in Ukwuani Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria*. Using the descriptive design of the survey method and sample from the population of secondary school teachers in Ukwuani LGA, Delta state, the author sought to know the degree of use of the CAI method and the effect of gender and academic qualifications on the use of CAI by the teachers. The findings indicated that the teachers do not utilize the CAI in teaching and there was no significant effect on the use of CAI. The study highlights the challenges associated with access to technological devices contributing to a lack of digital skills and

competencies for the Computer-Assisted Instruction (CAI) method for teaching at the secondary school level.

Chinwe Patience Ihuoma and Nwandu, Raymond adopted an economic perspective in their study titled, *An Empirical analysis of the impact of Distance Education (DE) on sustainable economic growth in Nigeria*. Using a descriptive survey research design, and an instrument designed to collect primary data from a randomly selected sample of the target population, the authors sought to know the extent to which distance education influenced economic growth and development, poverty alleviation, and unemployment. The findings of the study indicated a positive relationship between access to education at a distance and the identified economic indicators. The authors proffer policy recommendations for Government and other stakeholders.

Fidel Okopi and Jeremiah Obera in their paper titled, *Applying Dual Flexible Open Schooling System to Universal Basic Education as a panacea for accomplishing Sustainable Development Goal 4 in Nigeria* discuss the concept of the Dual Flexible Open Schooling strategy, and its attendant benefits of promoting access, cost-efficiency and quality education. They advocate for its application to Nigeria's Universal Basic Education system for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in Nigeria.

We are pleased to launch the commentary section with the republication of two iconic commentaries by two notable distance education experts, **Dr Sanjaya Mishra**, Director, Education, at the Commonwealth of Learning, Canada and **Emeritus Professor Olugbemiro Jegede** respectively. They succinctly address the definitions of distance education in light of current realities in Mishra's piece titled, *Revisiting the definitions of Distance Education* and Jegede's commentary, *More Knowledge on Open and Distance Education*, which is a discursive response to Mishra rather than a debate. The two eminent scholars offer refreshing insights, which bear recalling, into the nature, structure and dynamics of the practice of open, distance and digital learning in a post-COVID-19 world. In keeping with their commitments to open education practice, the two commentaries are provided under the **Creative Commons open**

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In the book review section, **Felix Olakulehin** reviews a report by the UNESCO International Commission on the Futures of Education titled, *Reimagining our future together: a new contract for Education*.

We thank our contributors for choosing WAJOFEL as the platform to share their research, our reviewers for their time and the editorial team for putting together this issue. We hope our readers will find this issue useful and look forward to receiving more manuscripts from across the West African sub-region.

Professor Christine Ofulue,
Managing Editor

