The Sequel to COVID-19: A Global Challenge to the Quality of Higher Education

in *Pivotal Issues in Higher Education Development in Nigeria,* University Press PLC, Ibadan. pp. 249-261

Sir John Daniel[1]

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a massive upheaval worldwide in education at all levels.[2] By late March 2020 UNESCO[3] calculated that 1.37 billion pupils and students had been sent home as schools and higher education institutions closed. Governments and institutions that were ill-prepared to respond to this crisis should now improve their readiness for future crises by making their educational systems more resilient.[4] Although the rapid transitions that institutions had to make in transferring their operations from classroom teaching to distance education were challenging,[5] the design of higher education post-COVID-19 may be even more problematic.

This contribution asks how the higher education (HE) sector will organise itself beyond COVID-19 and how its decisions will affect the quality of teaching and learning. We adopt this focus because the quality of HE has been a defining element of the career of our distinguished colleague, Professor Peter Okebukola, to whom this volume is dedicated. Universities and colleges will face greater challenges than schools in defining their new post-COVID-19 normal. Despite the success of the numerous open schools[6] across the world, which teach large numbers of pupils through distance education, most educationists believe that, where possible, face-to-face teaching in classrooms is the better option, at least in the elementary grades. Furthermore, most schools attract their pupils from their local region.

Both factors are less relevant in HE. Over 50 distance teaching universities, often called 'open universities', have provided quality higher education to millions of students for many years.[7] Furthermore, the student catchment area for many higher education institutions (HEIs) is now international. As Altbach and De Wit note: 'Some institutions have become dependent on international student tuition fees as an important part of their financial survival. …The

---

[1] Former Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO
[2] John Daniel, "Education and the COVID-19 Pandemic", Prospects UNESCO-IBE. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-020-09464-3 (2020).
[3] Press release. 1.37 billion students now home as COVID-19 school closures expand, ministers scale up multimedia approaches to ensure learning continuity. UNESCO. https://en.unesco.org/news/137-billion-students-now-home-covid-19-schoolclosures-expand-ministers-scale-multimedia. (March 23, 2020)
[4] Asha Kanwar & John Daniel, "From Response to Resilience", Report to Commonwealth Education Ministers. Commonwealth of Learning, Vancouver. http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/3592. (June 2020).
[5] John Daniel, "Covid-19 – A Two-Week Transition from Campus to Online at the Acsenda School of Management", submitted to the *Journal for Learning for Development*.
[6] Commonwealth of Learning. "Open/Innovative Schooling". https://www.col.org/programmes/open-schooling. (2020)
[7] Sanjaya Mishra, "Open Universities in the Commonwealth at a Glance". Commonwealth of Learning. http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/2786. (August, 2017)

coronavirus crisis shows that this dependence is deeply problematic: it is likely that institutions dependent on this income will face significant problems'.[8]

It is impossible to forecast what HE's new normal will look like in a few years' time. Until there are widely available therapies and/or vaccines for COVID-19, the staff and students of HEIs will be wary of a full return to classroom teaching as it was conducted before 2020. Indeed, by setting limits on the numbers that can assemble in the same room, the governments of some jurisdictions are setting *de facto* constraints on teaching methods. Faced with this uncertainty, many universities have announced that the emergency online teaching arrangements they put in place from March to May 2020 will continue into the later terms of 2020. The announcement by McGill University, Canada, that: 'Fall 2020 courses will be offered primarily through remote delivery platforms' is typical'.[9] Similar announcements have been made by Cambridge University, UK, and the USA's largest higher education system, California State University.

Our primary concern here is how HE's evolving new normal will impact on the quality of the education and training that HEIs offer. Not surprisingly, given the haste with which emergency distance teaching operations had to be put in place when COVID-19 struck, the quality of teaching and learning often left much to be desired. Altbach and De Wit comment: 'But we are somewhat sceptical that what is being offered is of high quality or that students are very satisfied with the new situation. Most faculty members worldwide are not trained to offer distance courses, do not have the sophisticated technology necessary for high-quality teaching and learning and have not adapted their curricula to the web'.[10]

Various threads will weave together into the judgements that stakeholders will make about the quality of HE post-COVID-19. To disentangle these we begin by outlining three possible scenarios. Since the two most likely scenarios include considerable ongoing recourse to online and/or distance learning (ODL), we continue with a summary review of the evolution of approaches to quality assurance and quality assessment in HE over the last 40 years. Are the determinants of quality in HE through ODL the same as those for classroom teaching and, if not, how do they differ? We conclude by asking how institutions and governments might ensure that post-COVID-19, HE through ODL achieves a satisfactory level of quality. What do our answers imply for the future profile of HE systems around the world? Will the achievement of quality ODL require greater coordination at the institutional or state level?

<u>Three scenarios</u>

HEIs around the world are grappling with difficult decisions about their future operations. Three possible scenarios are prominent in this planning.

---

[8] Philip Altbach & Hans De Wit, H. (2020). *"Covid-19: the Internationalisation Revolution that Isn't"*. University World News, https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200312143728370. (March 14, 2020)

[9] McGill University News, https://www.mcgill.ca/newsroom/channels/news/mcgills-fall-2020-semester-322097 (May 2020).

[10] Philip Altbach & Hans De Wit, H. (2020). *"Covid-19: the Internationalisation Revolution that Isn't"*. University World News, https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200312143728370. (March 14, 2020)

The first scenario, which seems increasingly implausible as this book goes to press, is that the pandemic dies out in a few months or is neutralised by a successful and widely available cure or vaccine. On such a scenario most HEIs would return, no doubt with feelings of relief, to organising their courses for the rest of 2020 and 2021 on their pre-2020 model. Classroom lectures would be the main vehicle for teaching and learning, even if some of the more successful ODL initiatives undertaken during the pandemic were to continue in some form.

Under the second scenario the restrictions imposed by public health authorities to manage the COVID-19 pandemic will preclude a return to classroom teaching before the end of 2020 at the earliest. Already, for example, the large California State University system (CSU) has announced that its courses will be offered online until the end of 2020[11] and Cambridge University will hold all lectures online until the summer of 2021[12]. This scenario assumes that in the course of 2021 the COVID-19 restrictions will be lifted and that, by the end of 2021 at the latest, HEIs will be able to choose their instructional strategies freely.

The third scenario posits a more uncertain future. With no certain cure or vaccine in sight, the COVID-19 infection returns in new waves at different times in various parts of the world. Assuming that governments attempt to manage these new waves by re-imposing some restrictions on movements and gatherings, HEIs will have to be prepared to switch from classroom teaching to ODL solutions and back again at short notice.

The second and third of these scenarios would put most HEIs in a serious bind. Both Cambridge University, because of its prestige, and CSU, thanks to its size, can assume that most of their students will take what they offer without much complaint. But other HEIs will face two difficult challenges. First, the emergency ODL teaching arrangements that were put in place by HEIs for the pandemic received a mixed reception from students. Typical is a survey in Hong Kong, which 'showed more than 60% of university students polled believed online learning was less beneficial than classroom teaching, while fewer than 30% of respondents said they were satisfied with their online learning experience amid the pandemic.'[13] The same article notes that 'at least five Hong Kong universities will continue holding online lessons for at least the first few weeks of the semester beginning in September amid ongoing uncertainty over the COVID-19 pandemic.' Here again, by acting in unison these Hong Kong HEIs will be able to restrict the choices and blunt the resistance of students who might wish to avoid ODL.

A second challenge faces HEIs that depend on international students and those who study outside their own region within their own country. Australia provides a telling example. Monash University, by far Australia's largest and most complex, is now facing a revenue shortfall in 2020 of AU$350 million (US$226 million) because of declining numbers of

---

[11] Lilah Burke, "Cal State Stands alone", *Inside Higher Ed,* 14 May, 2020, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/05/14/cal-state-pursuing-online-fall
[12] "Cambridge University: All lectures to be online until summer of 2021", *BBC News.* Published 19 May, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/education-52732814
[13] Chan Ho-Him, "Hong Kong universities to continue online classes", South China Morning Post, 27 June, 2020, https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200627111713138

students coming from overseas.[14] In large countries like the United States more students may elect to study in their local universities: 'state-funded universities have always striven to keep their states' brightest students at home, knowing that many of those who leave their communities will never return. Now, as the pandemic erodes the economy and civil unrest sweeps the United States, colleges are seeing renewed success in their efforts to reverse years of brain drain, with students responding to a new focus on basics, like family and community, over prestige'.[15]

We shall not address the challenges of post-COVID-19 student recruitment here even though, by putting downward pressure on the finances of most HEIs worldwide, they may seriously reduce their ability to spend money on ensuring the quality of future teaching arrangements.

Higher education: what is quality?

Until the middle of the 20th century there were many fewer HEIs than today and access to higher learning was correspondingly limited. In most countries the perceived quality of an HEI correlated with its age. People assumed that Harvard, Oxford, The Sorbonne and Peking University, for example, offered education of higher quality than HEIs created later. It followed that competition among students to enter these older institutions was fierce. This meant that when, later in the 20th century, governments and scholars began trying to formalise assessments of HE quality, they focused on what we now call 'input measures'. Foremost among these were the scholastic performance of students before they entered the HEI, the academic qualifications of the teaching and research staff, and the extent of the supporting infrastructure – notably the library.

In the late 20th century, however, as rising demand from potential students led to the 'massification' of HE systems and considerable diversification of providers and their methods, it became increasingly difficult to measure inputs in ways that yielded useful results. From the 1990s onwards HE stakeholders explored various ways of assessing and accrediting quality. Systems that once focussed on inputs to HEIs evolved to include reviews of their internal processes for teaching before starting to concentrate on the basics, which are the students' learning outcomes. No matter what the students' earlier academic backgrounds, no matter what methods were used in the teaching/learning process, the vital question is, 'what can students do now that they could not do before they took this course'?

This principle inspired the Quality Platform developed in 2013 by the International Quality Group of the US Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA/CIQG). Professor Okebukola was closely involved with this work as a founding member of the CHEA/CIQG Advisory Committee and its chair from 2016-2018. The Quality Platform had four simple standards.[16]

[14] Geoff Maslen, "Saving Australia's biggest university", *University World News*, May 7, 2020 https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200507090424381

[15] Anemona Hartocollis, "State universities see influx in local students", *New York Times,* June 27, 2020, https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200627110819291

[16] Stamenka Uvalic-Trumbic & John Daniel, *"Innovative forms of Quality Assurance for Innovative Programmes",* in Conference Proceedings, The Online, Open and Flexible Higher Education Conference, Eds.

- Learning outcomes are articulated and achieved.

- Learning outcomes meet postsecondary expectations.

- Curricula provide opportunities for transfer of credit.

- Transparency is maintained and comparability is established.

These standards are the focus of the self-review by the provider using a template providing evidence that each of the four standards have been met. This feeds into an external review and a site-visit by a team of experts. The acceptance of the report by CHEA/CIQG is the basis for the award of the Quality Platform Provider Certificate.

The Quality Platform is a widely applicable tool for all forms of higher education. But old habits die hard and HE systems have generally found it difficult and/or inconvenient to converge on these common principles and approaches to quality. Most universities with a strong commitment to research now prefer to use, and to claim as a surrogate for quality, the global rankings of universities that are published regularly by various bodies such as THE (Times Higher Education)[17], The Academic Rankings of World Universities (Shanghai Rankings)[18], the QS World University Rankings[19], and U-Multirank.[20]

With the exception of U-Multirank, which tries with some difficulty to nuance its assessments by using many dimensions, these rankings essentially hark back to the days of input measures. Despite efforts to diversify their criteria, research inputs and outputs remain the determinant factor in these rankings, although QS also tries to measure external reputation, which tends to mean research reputation and therefore gives a similar result.

The fundamental problem is that none of these rankings pay consistent attention to the – admittedly difficult – challenge of assessing the quality of teaching. However, the universities ranked highly in these league tables are quite content to downplay the dimension of quality of teaching because, as we shall see again later, they much prefer to be assessed on research inputs and outputs.

But as the world moves past the high season of COVID-19, students will ask more insistent questions about the format and quality of the teaching offered to them. Although most students were less than fully satisfied with their experience of ODL during the pandemic, many HEIs assume that some form of hybrid between ODL and classroom teaching will continue for the foreseeable future.

George Ubachs, Lizzie Konings, (EADTU, 2016) 103-110
https://sirjohnca.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/72627-eadtu_quality_paper.pdf
[17] "World University Rankings", *THE (Times Higher Education),* (2020),
https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings
[18] "World Top Universities", *Academic Rankings of World Universities* (2020),
http://www.shanghairanking.com/
[19] "Top Universities", *QS World University Rankings,* (2019), https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2019
[20] "U-Multirank: Universities compared your way", U-Multirank (2020), https://www.umultirank.org/

Given this assumption that the post-COVID-19 era will see continued recourse to ODL in HE systems worldwide, we shall summarise the history of ODL and provide some background to the assessment of its quality.

Quality in ODL

Because distance education is often called 'online education' in the rich world today, many in those countries are unaware that remote teaching and learning long predate the internet. The letters that the Christian apostle Saint Paul wrote to communities around the Mediterranean in the 1st century served as primary teaching material for the priests and congregations of the new churches. To judge by the expansion of the Christian church up to the present day, this use of distance education was very successful.[21]

Since Saint Paul's time distance education has evolved by taking advantage, often rather promptly, of each new development in technology. The invention of printing in the 15th century made it easier and cheaper to reproduce printed documents. The development of railways in the 19th century speeded up the distribution of material and, once England took advantage of the railways to establish a universal postal system in 1840, Isaac Pitman taught a system of shorthand by mailing to students texts transcribed into shorthand on postcards and receiving their transcriptions in return for him to correct. Pitman's crucial innovation was student feedback, which remains a vital feature of quality distance education.[22] It was not until the 20th century that correspondence education was offered in public school systems, one of the pioneers being the British Columbia Elementary Correspondence School (1919)[23], which in 1938 hosted the founding conference of the International Council for Correspondence Education (ICCE), renamed in 1982 the International Council for Open and Distance Education.[24]

A few HEIs also offered correspondence courses, starting in the 19th century. The University of London (1858)[25], Queen's University, Canada (1889)[26], and the University of New England (1950)[27], Australia, were the first HEIs to offer distance higher education on their respective continents. For most of the 20th century, however, correspondence education was provided primarily by private, for-profit organisations. Although the ICCE provided a network of professional support to its members, there was little regulation of their offerings. This began to change after Mitford published a devastating exposé of a large US

---

[21] John Daniel, *Mega-universities and Knowledge Media: Technology Strategies for Higher Education* (London, Kogan Page, 1999), 47-48.
[22] Douglas Archibald and Sean Worsley, "*"The Father of Distance Education"*", TechTrends, Washington Vol. 63, Iss. 2, (Mar 2019): 100-101. DOI:10.1007/s11528-019-00373-7
[23] "Celebrating 100 Years of Learning", Open School BC, 2020, https://www.openschool.bc.ca/100years/
[24] "Our Impact", International Council for Open and Distance Learning, 2020, https://www.icde.org/
[25] "History of the University of London: The Birthplace of Distance Learning", London University, June 2020, https://london.ac.uk/about-us/history-university-london.
[26] "Continuing and Distance Studies", Queen's University Encyclopedia, 2020, https://www.queensu.ca/encyclopedia/c/continuing-and-distance-studies
[27] "Study Online", University of New England, 2020, https://www.une.edu.au/study/study-online

correspondence school in 1970.[28] She later described entertainingly how this article caused a flurry of regulation of the correspondence education industry.[29]

Meanwhile, the 20th century's most significant development in ODL occurred in 1969 with the creation of the UK Open University (UKOU).[30] Created by Royal Charter with the simple slogan: 'open to people, open to places, open to methods, open to ideas', the UKOU quickly became the UK's largest university, reaching 200,000 students by 2000, and set a new benchmark for quality in ODL. Over the subsequent decades some 50 jurisdictions followed the UK's lead and also created open universities, many of them in Commonwealth countries.[31]

Harold Wilson, UK Prime Minister from 1964-70 and from 1974-76, made the creation of the UKOU a personal priority. To protect it from potentially damaging decisions by the University Grants Committee,[32] the buffer body that determined the funding of the UK's older universities, the Wilson government funded the UKOU directly. This arrangement continued until the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992, which was a thoroughgoing reform of the organisation and funding of tertiary education in the UK. The Act 'abolished the binary system (or binary divide), allowing polytechnics to assume the title of 'university', and introducing the Higher Education Funding Council, with separate councils to fund higher education in Scotland and Wales.'[33]

This Act had major implications for the UKOU. It not only placed it in the same legislative framework as all other UK universities and polytechnics but also, by enabling it to receive funds from each of the new funding councils, made it effectively the UK's only 'national' university. Each of the other HEIs received funds from only one of these councils: England, Scotland or Wales.

I was involved personally in the implementation of the 1992 Act, because I had joined the UKOU as vice-chancellor in 1990. By then the UKOU had the country's largest student body and, since it operated exclusively by distance education, it had a different economic structure from the other HEIs. In negotiating with officials on how to integrate it into the provisions of the Act, the UKOU's representatives argued, successfully, that the councils should create funding mechanisms and quality assurance frameworks that could apply in a similar manner to all HEIs.

This allowed the UKOU to develop rapidly during the subsequent decade, growing its enrolments from 100,000 to 200,000 students and performing excellently in the many quality

---

[28] Jessica Mitford. "Let us now appraise famous writers", *Atlantic Monthly* 226 (1970): 45-54. https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1970/07/let-us-now-appraise-famous-writers/305319/

[29] Jessica Mitford, *Poison Penmanship: the gentle art of muckraking,* (New York, Knopf, 1979)

[30] Walter Perry, *The Open University: A personal account by the first vice-chancellor* (Buckingham, Open University Press.

[31] Sanjaya Mishra, "Open Universities in the Commonwealth at a Glance". Commonwealth of Learning. http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/2786. (August, 2017)

[32] Michael Shattock and Robert Berdahl. "The British University Grants Committee 1919–83: Changing relationships with government and the universities," *Higher Education* 13 (1984): 471-499

[33] "Further and Higher Education Act 1992", *Oxford Reference,* published 1992, https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095839655

audits and assessments conducted during the 1990s. Of particular interest, in this context, was a programme of teaching quality assessment (also called universal subject review) that ran from 1992 to 2002.[34]

Six areas were considered by the review teams and the outcome of each was scored on a scale from 1 to 4. The system was applied equally to the campus universities and the UKOU:

• curriculum design, content and organisation;
• teaching, learning and assessment;
• student progression and achievement;
• student support and guidance;
• learning resources;
• quality management and enhancement.

The final score, out of a total of 24, rapidly became seen as a quantitative measure of the quality of teaching of that subject and fed directly into university league tables. The comments of Jackson and Bohrer are very relevant to our discussion about ensuring ODL quality post-COVID-19:

'the subject review was far more wide-ranging and valuable than the quantitative assessment. As a process it raised awareness about quality and standards and provided a stimulus for enhancement activity. It could be argued that both audit and subject level reviews led to benefits for institutions and students, including a more systematic approach to policy implementation across subjects. However, while audit was concerned mainly with the management of education… subject review required much more intensive use of academic staff time… (The) preparation for a review visit was a good opportunity to raise awareness of institutional and subject level policies for teaching learning and assessment. For the academic staff involved it was a chance to learn about academic practice in other institutions. However, the resulting competitiveness that arose from the grading system, …combined with the league table approach taken by the press, added to the negative feelings towards the process. …The review of subjects in English higher education institutions was brought to an end in 2001 following the completion of a full cycle of all the academic disciplines. The decision followed complaints from influential institutions concerned about the cost of the review process and the relatively limited value of the outcomes.'

My own observation was that the 'complaints from influential institutions' (code for the research-intensive universities) had nothing to do with cost. The outcomes had 'relatively limited value' to them because they had little correlation with the outcomes of the research output assessments – and the rankings discussed earlier – on which these HEIs preferred to base their reputations.

After the termination of the subject review programme in 2001 the press published a consolidated table of the results for all subjects in nearly 100 English HEIs. In this table the UKOU placed 5th, coming after Cambridge, Loughborough, the London School of

---

[34] Stephen Jackson and Janet Bohrer. "Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Recent Developments in the United Kingdom", *Research in Comparative and International Education* 5, no. 1 (2010) 77-87. http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/rcie.2010.5.1.77

Economics and York and above Oxford, Imperial College and University College London. In this same period, during which the UK authorities took an intense interest in HE quality assessment on many dimensions, the UKOU also came top in national surveys of student satisfaction several years running.[35]

Since the UKOU is a purely distance-teaching institution, these results showed that ODL can deliver high quality HE and great student satisfaction. What can HEIs around the world learn from this as they prepare to continue offering ODL in their post-COVID-19 teaching arrangements?

Making a success of ODL after COVID-19

We offer five recommendations to HEIs planning to continue use of ODL after the COVID-19 pandemic subsides.

First, they should acknowledge that the emergency moves into online teaching induced by COVID-19 do not provide them with a sufficient basis for the successful longer-term use of ODL. In his blog, 'Crashing into online learning', Professor Tony Bates reviews reports of how HE in various countries moved to online learning in response to COVID-19, concluding that, 'the results are not pretty'. He urges that for the future, 'half-measures are not going to work… just moving your lectures online will only work once. What do you do for the next semester, and more importantly long-term?'[36]

Second, since most HE leaders and staff know less about ODL than they think they do – and are often sceptical of its value – they should inform themselves more fully about it and develop a suitably nuanced vocabulary for discussing it. The UK's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education has produced a useful taxonomy.[37]

Third, when and how to use ODL depends not only on the evolution of the pandemic, but also on the age and level of students being taught. One size does not fit all. Bates provides advice on this in his blog, which those making decisions about ODL should track.[38] They should also follow the website of Contact North | Contact Nord, which carries the Bates blog and other useful information in its bulletin, Online Learning News, which is addressed particularly at institutions where ODL is not the primary teaching medium.

Fourth, HEIs designing post-COVID programmes incorporating ODL should approach quality in a holistic manner. The six areas that were used in England's teaching quality

[35] John Daniel, "Turbulent and Testing Times for Higher Education: Lessons for Nigeria", 50th anniversary lecture – National Universities Commission of Nigeria, 22 October, 2013, https://sirjohnca.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/65076-131022nigeriatx1.pdf

[36] Tony Bates, "Crashing into online learning: a report from five continents - and some conclusions", Online Learning and Distance Education Resources, April 26, 2020, https://www.tonybates.ca/2020/04/26/crashing-into-online-learning-a-report-from-five-continents-and-some-conclusions/

[37] "Guidance: Building a Taxonomy for Digital Learning", Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, published 25 June, 2020, https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/guidance/building-a-taxonomy-for-digital-learning.pdf

[38] Tony Bates, "Online learning and the fall semester: advice for decision-makers", Online Learning and Distance Education Resources, May 2, 2020, https://www.tonybates.ca/2020/05/02/online-learning-and-the-fall-semester-advice-for-decision-makers/

assessment programme are a good place to start: 1. Curriculum design, content and organisation; 2. Teaching, learning and assessment; 3. Student progression and achievement; 4. Student support and guidance; 5. Learning resources; and 6. Quality management and enhancement.[39]

Notably absent from this list is any reference to technology, although for most HEIs that 'crashed into online learning' for their emergency teaching during the first wave of COVID-19 this was their principal preoccupation. For the future, Bates' advice is to 'use Zoom lectures sparingly'.[40] Attention to students: their support and guidance; and their progression and achievement is a more important contributor to quality than the latest technology.

During the height of the pandemic I had the opportunity to watch a small, private HE business school make a rapid transition to online teaching. Despite the technical difficulties it encountered, at a time when HEIs worldwide were all piling onto online platforms and making them crash, the school came out of the process rather well, largely because of the intense attention it paid to supporting students and communicating with them.[41]

Bates' magisterial work, Teaching in a Digital Age' is a vital resource,[42] and for some technical aspects of online teaching and learning, two guides to quality in online learning[43] and post-traditional online learning (MOOCs, etc.)[44] may also be helpful.

Finally, think of quality ODL as a student sitting on a three-legged stool. The first leg is learning materials; the second is student support; the third is organisation and logistics. If any of these legs breaks, the student will fall (fail). During the emergency online teaching period of the early pandemic, most HEIs tried to provide all three of these functions through synchronous communication on platforms like Zoom. This is neither effective nor sustainable. HEIs that intend to continue using ODL must build stools with three strong legs. First, they should develop a pool of learning materials, drawing as needed on Open Educational Resources, for students to work on either synchronously or asynchronously.

---

[39] Stephen Jackson and Janet Bohrer. "Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Recent Developments in the United Kingdom", *Research in Comparative and International Education* 5, no. 1 (2010) 77-87. http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/rcie.2010.5.1.77

[40] Tony Bates, "Online learning and the fall semester: advice for decision-makers", Online Learning and Distance Education Resources, May 2, 2020, https://www.tonybates.ca/2020/05/02/online-learning-and-the-fall-semester-advice-for-decision-makers/

[41] John Daniel, Covid-19 – From Campus to Online: A successful transition at the Acsenda School of Management, May 30, 2020. https://sirjohnca.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/asm_transition_final.pdf

[42] Tony Bates, *Teaching in a Digital Age: Guidelines for Designing Teaching and Learning* (BCCampus, 2015) https://opentextbc.ca/teachinginadigitalage/

[43] Neil Butcher & Merridy Wilson-Strydom, *A Guide to Quality in Online Learning,* (Dallas, Academic Partnerships, 2013). https://www.academicpartnerships.com/Resource/documents/A-Guide-to-Quality-in-Online-Learning.pdf

[44] Neil Butcher & Sarah Hoosen, *A Guide to Quality in Post-Traditional Online Higher Education,* (Dallas, Academic Partnerships, 2014). https://www.tonybates.ca/wp-content/uploads/Guide_Quality_Online_LearningBooklet_V4_final.pdf

Second, any HEI using ODL at scale will require numerous tutors/mentors to support the students. Charles[45], quoting Glennie[46] gave this advice to the planners of the Open University of Nigeria: 'Spend at least 30% of the institution's recurrent budget on tutors who will support students through tutoring of various kinds, teaching on assignments and face-to-face tutorials.'

Third, quality ODL requires impeccable organisation and logistics. In face-to-face settings informal contacts between students and staff usually see that problems are addressed. Where such contacts rely on IT systems HEIs must ensure that the systems are always in working order with back-ups available.

Conclusion

These are difficult times for HEIs. In early 2020 most had to vacate their campuses, including classrooms and research facilities, and adapt almost overnight to teaching at a distance. Most HEIs considered that they deserved a passing grade for the way that they navigated that transition, even though most students were less than fully satisfied with the education they received.

The future now presents HEIs with even starker challenges, although with more time to get ready to face them. Against a background of shaky finances, unpredictable student demand, and the imperative of re-launching stalled research, many HEIs are now expecting to have to use ODL in their teaching for the long haul. We hope that the thinking in this paper will help them face successfully a future that many find unwelcome and for which most are unprepared.

---

[45] Hubert Charles, *Advocacy and Change: Promoting Innovative Approaches to Education and Culture,* (Roseau: Pont Casse Press, 2008), 172.
[46] Jenny Glennie, Distance Education: A way of providing cost-effective access to quality education? *Education in Africa Forum,* Education in Africa, (First Edition, Johannesburg, 1999) 90.