

HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

BY

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PROTOCOLS

His Excellency, the Executive Governor of Lagos State, the Deputy Governor, the Pro-Chancellor and members of the Governing Council, the Vice Chancellor and Principal officers of the University, Our Royal fathers, and Members of the University Senate & Congregation, Special invited guests, Gentlemen of the Press, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

APPRECIATION

It was with great delight that I received your invitation to this august occasion. I am deeply honoured to play a significant role with you today as you mark the 26th convocation of this great institution, which was established in 1983 marking 40 years of continuously delivering excellence in our tertiary education system.

I congratulate and thank you most sincerely for the critical role you play in ensuring that the Nigerian University System remains dynamic, strong and vibrant.

Your chosen theme, 'Higher Education in the Digital Age', is by no means an easy subject, but in fact, requires a critical assessment of our situation, where we are, and where we are going. In essence, it raises the question of the impact of digitization in our tertiary education system, and what has been achieved so far.

You will note that before my present assignment at the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund), I had served at the epicentre of policy formulation and implementation at the Federal Ministries of Education and

Communication/Digital Economy. So today brings me to a familiar terrain on the subject of higher education in the digital age.

INTRODUCTION

"It's a great thing to live in a digital age. It's convenient; it's fast."

- [Loretta Lynch](#)

"Especially in the digital age, people want everything now, now, now." - [Mark Waid](#)

"The Web as I envisaged it, we have not seen it yet. The future is still so much bigger than the past."

- Tim Berners-Lee, Inventor of the World Wide Web.

When we consider digital literacy with respect to our tertiary education today, we are primarily discussing the integration of digital technologies, tools, and resources into the teaching and learning process and environment. Beyond this, we must also consider some of the ancillary technologies powering the administrative processes of our institutions such as Computer Based Test (CBT) Centres, admissions, and clearance portals, and importantly, our digital repositories and libraries, where academic output is safely stored and shared.

However, at a fundamental level, one of the key outcomes of the digital age is the increased access it provides to education, particularly where access to education can be limited by a lack of physical infrastructure, geography, and other socio-economic factors. The evolution of the digital age bridges the gap, providing hybrid forms of learning and access. TETFund is contributing to this evolution through its Digitization roadmap and other ICT-driven projects.

IMPERATIVES FOR, AND THE DYNAMICS OF EDUCATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

"Today, companies must radically revolutionize themselves every few years just to stay relevant. That's because technology and the Internet have transformed the business landscape forever. The fast-paced digital age has accelerated the need for companies to become agile." - [Nolan Bushnell](#)

As we are all aware, a multitude of global events, with unexpected far-reaching impacts, which we are ill-prepared for, can only be ignored at the peril of our desire for sustainable development. Some of these events, which have formed the basis for 17 Global Goals, including climate change, health care and well-being, escalating levels of hunger and poverty, lack of clean water and sanitation, and COVID-19 are derivatives of low-quality education. Like everything else, these crises exert copious effects on how we teach, what we teach, the skills we need now and in the future as workers and learners, and the calibre of those we raise to teach them and those that are graduated into the labour market subsequently.

From Aristotle, Socrates, and Leonardo da Vinci to sages like Bloom, Gandhi, and Fafunwa, efforts have been made to train teachers to render their learners' skills relevant and effective for their time and environment. In hindsight, these laudable efforts are only limited to the transmission and acquisition of knowledge. The method of teaching (pedagogy) and learning of that period are now outdated and retrogressive in our modern world being redefined by the great strides in technological development.

Apart from the fact that there is now a shift from personal learning to personalized learning, there are emerging learning ecosystems which demand new knowledge and skills for lifelong learning of which digital literacy remains indubitable and yet to be fully integrated into all levels of education in Nigeria. To survive and succeed in today's innovation-driven economy, in a world where technology is increasingly dominating all aspects of life and work, our graduates would need a different mix of skills than in the past. Unprecedentedly, all the skills required to navigate through the 21st-century world hinge on digital literacy.

The evolving demands of the employment market have compelled everybody to have these skills. The shift in skill demand in the contemporary world has revealed a void in skill supply. While the world is bedevilled by massive unemployment, most global companies are complaining about their inability to fill open vacancies due to shortages of people with key skills to man their operations and businesses. 87% of McKinsey Global Survey respondents agree that they are already experiencing gaps now or are expecting them within a few years. Never in human history has it been so high.

THE CHALLENGE OF TERTIARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

The challenge facing Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria today is similar to what is afflicting institutions of Higher Education in some other countries of the globe. The skills that workers, students and graduates need to be successful in today's economic environment are neither widely taught nor captured by either CCMAS/Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) or Continuous Professional Development programs for the tertiary education workforce or their students after graduation.

The Emerging skills programs required to bridge the deficit, to define the knowledge needed for establishing business practices and career paths are often assumed rather than be taught, assessed and amplified. The development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, data and analytics, convergence, robotics, nano technology and artificial intelligence in Nigeria, yet their effective harnessing will provide practical turnkey solutions to today's complex developmental challenges that can be implemented at scale.

At Nnamdi Azikiwe University in 2022, I did refer to, the general decline in the fortunes of our Higher Educational Institutions occasioned by the acute shortage and poor quality of teaching personnel, poor quality of and lack of appropriate curriculum, and lack of exposure to modern pedagogical techniques among other factors. Professor A.A. Rasheed in 2019 did identify further challenges to include but not limited to, inadequate funding, governance deficit inclusive of incessant strikes, paucity of facilities for teaching, learning and research et cetera.

The digital age has thrown up challenges and concerns associated with digitization in tertiary education. Low broadband penetration coupled with unequal access to technology and infrastructure can limit the reach and impact of digital learning, while limited interaction with peers and instructors can be isolating for students, as well as staff and researchers learning and carrying our research in isolation. I believe it was Bill Gates who once said that ***"technology is just a tool. In terms of getting learners working together and motivating them, the teacher is the most important"***.

The issues around digitization are too many to go over in one lecture, so please permit me to focus my presentation on some of the efforts at digitization we have undertaken at the national level and especially at TETFund.

THE DIGITAL LITERACY ROADMAP

Nigeria recently adopted the EU and UNESCO framework to develop a National Digital Literacy Framework to seek synergy in the implementation of a uniform digital literacy strategy which would especially, establish digital literacy as a core subject in primary, secondary, and tertiary schools; make digital literacy a criterion for graduation at tertiary education level and for admission at postgraduate level of the Nigerian education system. It would also require digital literacy certification for employment and promotion of all public service workforce in all job roles and cadres, and demanding career-specific digital skills certification as an additional criterion for employment and promotion of workers in every sector of Nigeria's economy.

All these point to the urgent need to reimagine our education system, especially the curriculum, on what to teach and how to teach so that our graduates are relevant and fit for purpose in the new world. Nigeria must join a growing global movement for educational transformation focusing on a transformation agenda rather than a reform strategy.

Our education system must redefine both content and pedagogy, and shift from transmission to transformation, directed at stimulating innovation, promoting creativity, and encouraging critical thinking as weapons for relevance in the new world of daily life and work. It is therefore imperative, as gatekeepers and avant-garde of tertiary education, to think differently about educational leadership, and to design a new pathway, using digital literacy as a disruptive foundation. We must also engender new perspectives and practices by employing emerging models of curriculum delivery. At no time in our history has there been a louder call for our education to be more relevant and transformative.

TETFUND'S RESPONSE AND DIGITAL LITERACY AGENDA

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." - Nelson Mandela

There is no doubt that education is the quick and indispensable tool to put Nigeria on the right course of digital literacy and skills development. TETFund, Tertiary Education Trust Fund was established by the Federal Government of Nigeria to provide funding for public tertiary educational institutions through various targeted interventions. We at the Fund are conscious of the role technology plays in elevating our institutions.

We are also cognizant of the emerging massive, unprecedented and irreversible digital transformation taking place in the world; necessitating workforces of our tertiary institutions and their graduates to acquire new technologies and skills to accelerate their social and economic development. At the very minimum, it is a pre-requisite to fit into the modern global ecosystem. Consequently, I inaugurated the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND), Advisory Committee on Digital Literacy, Productivity and Emerging Skills on 17th January 2023, with a charge to ignite the

process of blending our tertiary education system with global trends and to adopt best global practices to avail Nigerian Tertiary Education workers, students and graduates of digital advantages that support sustainable prosperity.

The effectiveness and efficiency of digital literacy and skills development and training at our tertiary education institutions require appropriate, time-on-task and excellent planning and implementation. To achieve the objectives of this intervention, all regulatory agencies, viz: National Universities Commission (NUC), National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) must take ownership of the initiative.

At TETFund, we are fully aware that the future of education in Nigeria is inseparably hinged on the development of capacity in digital literacy and skills to address the acute dearth of workers with in-demand digital literacy and emerging skills as well as the mismatch between the skills which graduates possess and employers need this 21st century. Nigeria is incredibly deficient in the digital skills that are essential for most skilled jobs in industries, education, health, engineering, infrastructure and other sectors.

NATIONAL POLICY ON DIGITAL LITERACY

The goal of the National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy is **"To transform Nigeria into a leading digital economy providing quality life and digital economies for all."** - (Source: National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy (2020-2030)

The Federal Government had earlier approved a National ICT Policy (2017) as well as the National Policy for ICT in Education (2019).

To ensure the achievement of the objectives of the above policies, the Federal Ministry of Education and TETFund have developed separate but complimentary strategies with focus on basic/secondary and tertiary education respectively.

EFFORTS BY THE FEDERAL MINISTRY OF EDUCATION IN DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

The Federal Ministry of Education's strategy document was articulated and received additional impetus from the outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic. In response to the ensuing lockdowns, the Ministry developed a COVID-19 Education Sector Strategy and updated its online Portal for sharing resources across the country. This enabled other States to adapt and develop their state-specific strategies and provide messaging on the prevention and containment of COVID-19 as well as using radio and TV to broadcast lessons. Some of the ICT project achievements recorded in the last 4 years includes: -

1. Education Cloud (eCloud) Project

The eCloud project is designed to provide certified content accessible online from across the nation by learners covering the three tiers of the education sector. It has produced 4,000 video lessons for the basic level, 7,000 video lessons for the secondary level, 4,000 audio lessons for the secondary level, and 1,050 assorted contents on Nigeria Learning Passport.

2. Inspire & Ignite Digital Learning Platforms

The Inspire & Ignite eLearning platforms cover the 3 tiers of the education sector; basic, secondary and tertiary while Ignite is the component for educators to plan, author, curate and roll out lessons in text, audio and video formats. The platform includes a collaborative chat system for stakeholders.

3. Nigeria Learning Passport

The Nigeria Learning Passport platform includes a suite of online and offline functionalities and abilities. The platform, powered by Microsoft, will prioritize deployment in places with intermittent or no internet connectivity.

4. Certificate Verification Portal

The Certificate Verification Portal came online 4 years ago. This has greatly eased the logistical and financial challenges students go through, cutting down the time it takes to physically come to the FME headquarters to queue for hours waiting to get their certificates verified.

5. Open Education Data Project

The Open Education Data Project is a frontier for all information regarding education indices in Nigeria. The OED portal is accessible through the official FME website.

6. The eNIN Strategy

The eNIN (Education National Identity Number) Strategy is a framework proposed for the implementation of a National Identity and Access Management system in Nigeria's education sector. It aims to create a digital identity system that covers teachers, learners, administrators, and other stakeholders in the learning ecosystem.

7. National Digital Learning Policy Draft

The National Digital Learning Policy (NDLP) draft concluded in May 2023, includes an Access Devices Strategy for the country. This shall be unveiled in due course.

8. Capacity Building and Content Production

ICT hubs have been established in each of the 36 states and FCT with equipment to support content production. 148 ICT administrators across 36 states and FCT have been trained to support content production and airing of content for radio, TV and digital platforms.

9. Tertiary Education Network (TEN)

The proposed Tertiary Education Network (TEN) will have several objectives viz to:-

- (i) to create an ecosystem that includes creating a collaborative online content network between tertiary institutions in the country with a specific interest in STEM and TVET subjects;
- (ii) creating a National Database on Research to encourage innovation through sharing of research papers;
- (iii) creating a National Education IT Infrastructure Policy to address the low participation of the private sector and the incoherent approach to the sector;
- (iv) instituting a policy for close collaboration with the Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy and telecom companies in providing a combination of free and low-cost access to data and infrastructure made available to tertiary institutions and students; and
- (v) reviewing and reinventing present collaboration mechanisms to address the new reality brought about by COVID-19 and any future pandemic.

TETFund DIGITIZATION ROADMAP

TETFund intends to use its various Digital Literacy initiatives to achieve the following:

- To prepare a digitally literate and highly skilled workforce to substantially drive Nigeria's realization of the SDG4 goal and to increase the number of graduates of Nigerian tertiary institutions who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.
- To support the realization of Nigeria's digital economy vision for all Nigerian citizens to have digital skills equal to or exceeding the demands of their daily transactions and occupations.
- To propel Nigeria to become a nation that creates, uses and supplies advanced digital technologies and content to improve productivity across all sectors of the economy.
- To ensure that the Tertiary Education sector contributes substantially to the success of the National Plan and National Digital Literacy Framework.
- To provide an equitable, comprehensive and sustainable plan for the uptake and full participation of members of staff and students of Nigerian tertiary institutions in digital literacy training to provide individual members of staff and students with every skill needed for the 21st-century educational ecosystem.
- To propagate digital literacy in the higher education sector as the first port of call to transforming Nigerian society towards a digital economy through the acquisition of basic digital literacy and skills in a well-developed digital literacy programme.
- To draw up a workable programme for digital literacy and emerging skills training to be extended to all students in Tertiary Education Institutions to meet the specifications of the National Digital Literacy Framework and National Development Plan for the country.

Based on the realization that digitization and ICT are critical to the success of our beneficiary institutions, we have prioritized it, beginning with the simple ICT-related procurements for computers, servers, power equipment, etc. requested by our beneficiaries. With this intervention, most of our beneficiaries have expanded their computer-

based testing facilities and witnessed increased efficiency in administering those computer-based exams for their general studies courses amongst others.

Our Education Support Services (ESS) department constantly vets and processes requests for interventions to provide online e-Journal subscriptions for research and teaching, with many of our beneficiaries receiving regulatory accreditation through this intervention.

Similarly, our ICT Support intervention, although relatively small in the past, is actively accessed by our beneficiary institutions with guidelines that have enabled us to direct the impact of our interventions to specific technology needs.

From 2016 to 2018, we focused on digital literacy and capacity development for staff at our beneficiary institutions, which by 2020, achieved the training and certification of over 19,000 persons in various digital skills relevant to today's ICT world.

In continuation, the 2019/2020, ICT Support provided funding for eLearning implementation. The objective is to achieve hybrid /blended learning and to expand access beyond the confines of physical classrooms. The initiative had the added benefit of reducing the burden of students in accessing learning materials. As of today, over 180 out of 240 institutions are at various stages of completion in implementing this intervention.

Furthermore, the Fund commenced the Thesis Digitization project to ensure scholarly works produced in Nigerian Public Tertiary Institutions are properly dematerialized, put online, and used to strengthen the integrity of our academic institutions with plagiarism checking, open access, public repositories, and other scholarly resources.

In furtherance of our digitization efforts, a Digitization Project Steering and Coordinating Committee was established to develop a framework for federating research outputs and theses from our Beneficiary Institutions towards a sustainable National Knowledge Bank, coordinate the successful implementation of the dematerialization of the physical theses, identify intellectual property issues, develop and adopt a model digitization policy and collaborate with similar knowledge repositories across the globe.

Having recognized the ICT needs of our beneficiaries, we dedicated our Zonal intervention for 2022 towards improving our beneficiary Institutions' ICT infrastructure and needs. An ICT Infrastructure Committee, drawn mainly from our universities and regulatory authorities was set up to supervise the success of the projects.

This intervention will provide access to the internet for staff and students on and off campus, provide access to research e-Journals online all year round, and at a minimum provide renewable power solutions for our beneficiary institutions' Libraries. Equally, the Institutions are at liberty to access and commit their 2023 zonal intervention for ICT infrastructural improvement.

Within the Fund itself, ICT remains a major pillar of our operational excellence. We have adopted various technologies to increase the impact of our interventions and launched online submission portals to reduce the burden of making submissions to the Fund. We have also opened our impact assessment portal to our beneficiaries thereby receiving and assessing feedback from beneficiaries on the interventions we provide.

A total sum of **₦ 27,762,500,000.00** has been made available to all our Beneficiary Institutions as the ICT Support Intervention from 2016 to date. This is in addition to other intervention funds which optionally have ICT equipment components. (See Table 1) So far, the Fund has spent **₦3,428,500,000.00** of the above amount on Digital Literacy and Productivity Skills Capacity Development in our Beneficiary Institutions.

Table 1

ICT ALLOCATION FROM 2016-2023 TO BENEFICIARY INSTITUTIONS			
UNIVERSITY	POLYTECHNIC	COE	TOTAL
740,000,000.00	340,000,000.00	550,000,000.00	2,200,000,000.00
740,000,000.00	340,000,000.00	275,000,000.00	1,412,500,000.00

So, we have kicked off all these initiatives, you may ask, what is the impact? How is our tertiary education system strengthened by all these? Aside from the short-term impact I already presented, I wish to highlight that the fruits of digitization will not sprout overnight. We must consider various timeframes, some will germinate in a short time, while some will take a little

Long. Some will even surprise us in their outcomes over longer periods. But looking at the longer term, I can assure you that we will witness the following results				
	2019	2020	2021	2022
Increased Access: Digitization has already led to increased access to tertiary education, and this will continue in the foreseeable future. Online courses, webinars, and virtual lectures have made it possible for students to access education from anywhere, anytime as long as they have an internet connection, which the Fund is working to provide.	1,185,000,000.00	405,000,000.00	427,500,000.00	2,017,500,000.00
Improved Quality: Digitization has already led to improvements in the quality of education, and this too will continue to increase. The use of digital tools such as smart boards, virtual simulations, educational apps, and online resources have made it possible for students to engage in interactive and immersive learning experiences, which can enhance their understanding and retention of taught courses.	1,185,000,000.00	435,000,000.00	427,500,000.00	2,047,500,000.00
Reduced Costs: Digitization has also helped us to reduce costs through aggregation and convergence of services needed by many of our beneficiary institutions.	15,585,000,000.00	6,377,500,000.00	5,800,000,000.00	27,762,500,000.00

Increased Efficiency: Digitization has led to increased efficiency in the delivery of tertiary education. Online learning platforms and tools have streamlined administrative processes, making it easier for institutions to manage student records, course materials, and other academic resources, etc. The incremental improvements will be sustained over time.

CHALLENGES OF DIGITIZATION

From my vantage point, I can affirm that digitization presents many opportunities, but it will be remiss of me if I fail to tell you of the challenges. There are indeed serious challenges and major issues that should worry all of us. From the perspective of the Fund, we constantly battle with the following issues concerning our educational institutions:

Broadband Penetration: Broadband penetration remains a challenge given the difficult land terrain in some parts of the country. Also of concern are multiple taxes across states, the cost of Right of Way (RoW) access and the dearth of incentives for local operators especially in the provision of last mile solutions and value-added-services.

Unequal Access: Despite the increased access to education that digitization has provided, Nigeria still has a significant digital divide. Students in rural areas or from low-income backgrounds may not have access to the necessary technology and infrastructure to participate in online courses and other digital learning activities. There are also challenges occasioned by the burden of licensing, data subscription charges, and inappropriate use of digital resources, amongst other factors.

Limited Interaction: Digital learning can be very isolating, as students may not have the same level of interaction with their peers and instructors as they would in a traditional classroom setting. Infact there is already foreboding that in the digital age, human contact may become the most expensive commodity.

Quality Concerns and Compliant Teachers: There are concerns about the quality of digital education and teachers, as some institutions may not have the resources or expertise to develop and deliver high-quality online courses and resources.

Digital Security and Safety: There are also challenges in terms of internet security and identity theft. These include but not limited to insider threats, Student Privacy and Compliance, distributed network and cloud services, phishing and social engineering, bring your own device (BYOD), research and intellectual property, personal and financial data, cyberattacks, cyberterrorism, inappropriate content, and lack of user awareness amongst others.

WAY FORWARD

The various projects already embarked upon by the Fund as earlier mentioned provide focused and deliberate efforts towards ensuring that Higher Education benefits from the Digital Age which is upon us. Other efforts include but are not limited to the following:

- Promoting the comprehensive computerization of Student records in Schools, facilitating the effortless verification of students' academic journey from enrolment to graduation. The digitized records can be accessed and shared with individuals or institutions worldwide, ensuring convenient global availability. TETFund has already started efforts along this pathway by providing a Beneficiary Identity Management platform through which students, teaching and non-teaching staff of our beneficiary institutions will access the digitized thesis platform and other educational resources.

- Government (Federal and State), parents, donor agencies and philanthropic individuals should actively promote a mechanism that could entail offering soft loans to students and teaching staff, enabling them to acquire digital devices for teaching and learning and repay the loan gradually over time. This initiative aims to enhance device ownership and usage among staff and students, facilitating their access to technology for education and professional purposes.
- Mobile and Fixed Internet availability is key to deepening broadband penetration thus increasing access to teaching and learning across the length and breadth of the country.
- Adoption of converged services which enables aggregation of resources and taking advantage of economies of scale to reduce rising costs, and increase access to teaching, learning and research.
- TETFund is currently partnering with key stakeholders in the education industry worldwide to improve and provide access to digital education. An example is the partnership we are currently developing with Anthology Cooperation for Capacity development using Blackboard infrastructure and technology.
- We are also providing access to Electronic Journals and supporting Database Subscriptions commencing with EBSCOhost, and provision of mobile data packets to both teaching staff and students of our beneficiary institutions.
- Another key component of our strategy is the capacity development of the ICT staff of our beneficiary institutions to support ICT service delivery in their various institutions. We are enabling digital literacy development using the ICDL certification track, and communication skills development amongst others.
- The last but not the least is the standardisation of ICT infrastructure across the institutions and provision of measures to solve the digital security and safety breaches. a few measures i.e., robust information security policies, user awareness and education, secure network infrastructure, multi-factor authentication (MFA) data encryption and access controls, regular security audits and vulnerability assessments, incident response and recovery plan, collaboration and information sharing etc. These, in addition to adopting a proactive and comprehensive approach will create a safer digital environment for teaching, learning and research. TETFund is already addressing some of these concerns using the converged and core services projects.

CONCLUSION

“The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.”

- Eleanor Roosevelt

The dreams of our founding fathers to build a united and prosperous country can only be realized if we take the necessary steps and make the right investments in the youth of our country. Education allows translating that lofty idea into reality. Higher education anchored on ubiquitous access, quality curriculum and nimble delivery systems can be a catalyst for sustainable national development.

For graduates of the future to be relevant and agile in taking advantage of opportunities and providing solutions to societal problems, they must not only be digital natives but also global citizens honed on the skills for critical thinking, problem solving, communication and technology adoption, adaptability and cross cultural awareness.

As educators, we must embrace the disruption that change brings. The digital age is upon us, and we all must do our part to ensure that we march henceforth with confidence and assurance that the sacrifices of today will deliver a

glorious future of shared prosperity.

Madam Vice Chancellor, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you again for this opportunity to be part of your 26th convocation ceremony.

Thank you for your kind attention and may God Bless you all.

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