EMERGING TRENDS IN LIFELONG LEARNING: THE COVENANT UNIVERSITY PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

In the last few decades, lifelong concept of education has resonated with other concepts such as the knowledge society, new knowledge economy, open courseware, open source, wikieconomics, and technology enabled learning. Embedded in all of these concepts and emerging from them is the notion that access to knowledge and learning is a universal right. Infact, knowledge is increasingly regarded as the solution to individual and collective, social and economic problems. In other words, lifelong learning is an essential part in the community development process, where community members acquire their life skills, soft skills and vocational skills throughout their lifespan to take part in their social, cultural, vocational and professional life. It is indeed an intervention tool for socio-economic empowerment in a globalizing world to stay ahead in a competitive world with knowledge superiority. In this connection, the purpose of this paper is to share the lifelong learning management experience of Covenant University in terms of its programmes, processes and strategies adopted to cope with some internal and external constraints within the context of key global trends in lifelong learning. This may be of value to lifelong learning community because Covenant University is already becoming a global brand in higher education. The idea is to provide some lessons for global lifelong learning managers as well as expose them to issues and challenges confronting lifelong learning in our own part of the globe. This exposure will further show how lifelong learning has been planned, not only to bridge the knowledge gaps between university curricula corporate practices, but also between information rich and information poor citizens, particularly for the citizens who cannot afford formal education due to socio-economic backwardness.

Keywords: Emerging trends, lifelong learning, Covenant University, Nigeria, higher education.

1 INTRODUCTION

Market-led funding system has become particularly urgent for both privately and publicly owed tertiary institutions of learning. The rationale is to sustain the delivery of the right kind (quality) of educational services (Ogunriola, 2009).

A number of pre-deposing factors indicate that the demand for education will remain on the increase: first, the increasing level of unemployment in most developing nations is compelling the youths to desire further education as a strategy to beat unemployment. Second, employers take undue advantage of mass unemployment situation to hike the educational requirements for jobs positions at all levels. For example, a first-degree holder now fills a job position hitherto requiring a secondary school certificate holder two decades ago. Finally, most nations have put in place measures, in response to pressures from the global community on the formal sector economy, to improve employment generation. Improved employment situation is a harbinger to increased demand for higher education. This is where lifelong learning comes in. Lifelong learning stresses the importance and practice of continuous education and training throughout life. It is learner-motivated and found to be superior to the traditional formal educational system. Opportunities abound for the suppliers of lifelong Learning services both locally and internationally and this must be explored not only for the purpose of profit maximization but for its developmental impacts on our nation. For instance, in Nigeria as in many developing countries of the world, the literacy rate is low, manpower shortages in critical areas of all sectors of the economy exist in spite of the high level of open unemployment in these countries. Many graduates of tertiary institutions are said to be unemployable due to low level of technical, managerial and communicative skills. Thus, a management development Institution that is committed to lifelong learning would be found helpful in imparting the required technical,

managerial and communicative skills to young graduates to make them better prepared for the job market, while those that succeeded in securing employment would also need to be retrained from time to time in most areas of critical skills and competencies that they need for organisational performance (Obayan, 2010).

The Covenant University (CU) perspective of lifelong learning is rooted in the vision of her establishment over a decade ago. The establishment was through a divine mandate delivered to our Chancellor. Dr David Oyedepo, the president of the World Mission Agency. Covenant University came into the scene of the provision of life-applicable, regular, as well as lifelong education with a decision:

> *'Produce men and women who will change their generation through unparalleled ingenuity, creativity, and purposeful living. Our goal is to develop the man that will develop his world. Our mission is clearly reflected in our motto "Raising a new generation of leaders." (CU 2002)*

The University curriculum is designed to achieve her mandate as the university pioneered the teaching of courses relevant to its vision, but not taught anywhere in conventional universities. Such courses include Total Man Concept; and Entrepreneurial Development Studies. In furtherance of its vision and goals, the University designed Core Values, which clearly define the vision, purpose, and practices inculcated in all students while they are on campus believing that those values would have formed in them before graduation; such that by those values, they will impact their world positively. These core values are Spirituality, Positive Mentality, capacity Building, Integrity, responsibility, Diligence and Sacrifice. These core values, together with the special courses designed to drive the University's mandate- EDS and TMC are responsible for the creation of an appropriate organizational structure and culture, which makes our educational system unique. The Total man Concept (TMC) course, offers a curriculum that addresses the total man (spirit, soul and body). The Entrepreneurial Development Studies (EDS) teaches the art of recognizing, focusing, and releasing the entrepreneurial abilities divinely packed in man for the purpose of making unforgettable contributions and impact in life. Rather than programming our students for paid job, which is daily vanishing in Nigeria, we equip them with special academic and business skills which are meant to enhance their capacity towards planning for and practicing their dream businesses in line with their aptitudes and interests right from the school until they graduate.

The Covenant University Centre for Lifelong Learning (CELL) is designed to run two core programmes – Part Time Programmes [PTP] and Open & Distance Programmes [ODP]. Both programmes will address the same cluster of courses. The major difference is that for the ODP, virtually all learning activities shall be done online; and students shall be allowed to go at their own pace. Except for applied sciences like Engineering and Medical Sciences, virtually all other courses currently undertaken at Covenant University shall also run under the CELL. The flowcharts of events, the programme structure and the organogram are presented in this document.

2   CURRENT STATE OF LIFELONG LEARNING

Nigeria is the most populous black nation in the world with almost 168 million people, 30 million of which are students. Achieving Universal Basic Education (UBE) is a Millennium Development Goal (MDG) that Nigeria aims to achieve by 2015. There is paucity of quality academic staff in virtually all areas, particularly in the critical areas of science and technology (USA, 2012). Nigeria has the challenge of both access and quality of education occasioned by poor funding and inadequate manpower/infrastructure. The continuous technological advancement powered by the internet and the huge impact on learning has brought about a paradigm shift in education. The application of ICT-based learning has great potential for increasing access to university education in Nigeria.

The advent of the internet has modernized educational delivery in Nigeria. Several schools and colleges today have started offering online courses. Several academic institutions have been established in Nigeria in the last few years that offer accredited career enhancement programs to students (Sharon, 2012). Despite the proliferation and benefits of Lifelong Open and Distance Learning (LODE) in Nigeria, the quality of delivery and infrastructure has been a major concern to stakeholders.

The basic characteristic of LODE is the separation of teacher and learner in space and time. The National Universities Commission (NUC), Nigeria, in an attempt to ensure that standards are maintained in the operations of distance education enacted some regulations. One of such is the stipulation that the LODE study centres should offer both academic and social support. Students

should have easy access to ICT facilities for learning purposes. For specific programmes, functional internet access is required at all study centres (NUC, 2013).

The social and economic development of a country ultimately depend on the quality of human development. It is universally recognised that investment in human development is an essential component of a nation's development plan (Col-adb, 1999). The issue of human development and its impact on the society is partly a product of effective delivery of LODE in Nigeria. This has necessitated a yawning need for standard LODE programme. Covenant University (CU) is warming up to meet this need.

On the foreign scene, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) currently offers 338 programs of study through 3,500 courses leading towards doctorate, masters, bachelors, postgraduate, and under-graduate diplomas and certificate programs (Hanover Research, 2011). The University has established a network of 43 Regional Centers (RCs), six Sub-Regional Centers and 1,400 Study Centers (SCs) throughout India to provide easy access and effective support services to its learners. In India today, there are 10 open universities and 62 correspondence learning institutions affiliated with conventional universities that are catering for the educational needs of about one million students annually.. From the survey conducted by Zhang and Venkaiah (2000), ICT usage for distance education has not been fully harnessed. With the current distance learning trends in the United Kingdom, the vast majority of online distance learning offered by higher education institutions is at the postgraduate level (Hanover Research, 2011)

Kappel, Lehmann, and Loeper (2002) gave a history of distance education at University of Koblenz-Landau, Germany. Students have made use of computer that allows them to download and read guidebook, submit questions to course lecturers prior to videoconference, and work on assignments that are sent and submitted via email. The University of Koblenz-Landau LODL programme is reaching thousands of students that could not ordinarily be reached with the traditional classroom delivery approach.

Hanover (2011) presented a global overview of current and future trends in distance education. The report identified seven key players in global higher education distance learning. They are: Open University UK; University of Derby; University of Maryland USA; Drexel University; Indonesia Open University; Indira Gandi National Open University (IGNOU) and University of South Africa (UNISA). In the findings, these key players in global distance education enrol between 100,000 to over 500,000 students. The analysis showed that Africa and India are two of the growing markets for distance education globally.

One of the core millennium goals is *Education for All*, popularly tagged EFA goal. The surest and fastest means of achieving this laudable goal is via a well-run Lifelong Open and Distance Learning. It is this lofty dream that Covenant University is set to achieve.

3   TEACHING AND LEARNING IN CU CELL

The trend in CU CELL demonstrates an increasing preoccupation by our institution with the quality of instruction. This preoccupation is encapsulated in the various efforts to facilitate student learning, evaluate teaching effectiveness, improve faculty teaching and develop radical alternatives.

3.1   Facilitating Student Learning

Student dissatisfaction with the traditional teaching/learning method, which is mostly one way communication process as shown in figure 1 below, has attracted outcries from parents, legislators, administrators, activists, etc. In response, our faculty are now going public about their interests in teaching and learning.
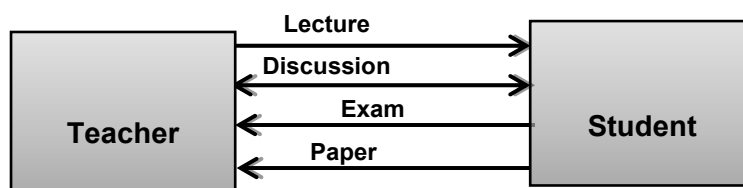

Figure 1: Traditional Teaching/Learning Feedback: Mostly One Way Communication
Source: Adopted from COX, M.D. (2014).

3.2 Emerging Trends in College Teaching for 21st Century

Emerging now in Covenant University are many new two-way paths connecting not only teacher and student, but also student (see figure 2). All activities can be summarized in the following developments:

- A trend towards individualizing instruction
- Greater use of multi-media system and the computer;
- The creation of student learning or resource centres; and
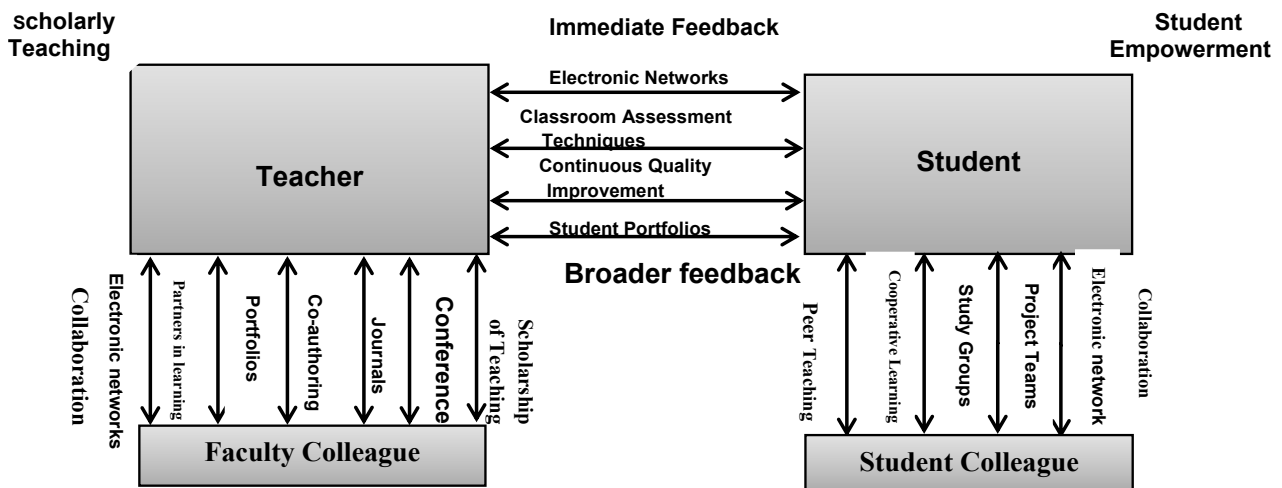- The development of peer-teaching.

Figure 2: More paths of Communication -Adopting Emerging Trends
Source: Adopted from COX M.D. (2014)

Covenant University is adopting emerging trends as indicated in figure 2, which depicts the communication levels. In addition to the increasing number of paths of communication, there are new levels at which communication is taking place to meet emerging teaching and learning goals. In addition to teaching disciplinary content, more faculty are attempting to facilitate student intellectual development and ways of knowing. There are more activities in the design of courses and curriculum to foster interdisciplinary and connected learning. Ways to teach critical thinking continue to grow.

Emerging methods of communication, which we have adopted, enable teaching and learning to take place on more paths and at more levels. Technology is used to enhance the speed, detail, economy, and efficiency of communication, but is tempered by practical and humanistic realities. Electronic networks and journals engage some teaching and learning styles, but not all. Workshops and case studies, often used in teaching in business schools, are now emerging in other disciplined to connect in-class learning with the reality outside the classroom.

3.3 Assessing Teaching Effectiveness

Covenant University encourages the assessment of teaching effectiveness. However, the following points are worthy of note:

- Formal assessments of teaching effectiveness by students are on the increase.
- Although student rating have been found valid and reliable, covenant University uses them advisedly for the purposes of faculty selection and promotion.
- In any case, student course evaluation helps teachers improve their instruction.
- Faculty are encouraged to be willing to act upon the feedback from students assessments in order to improve their teaching effectiveness.
- Alternative to student evaluation, such as assessments by peers and administrators, have found little acceptance and are not promising.

- Self-evaluation by means of video-recordings, on the other hand, may be useful, especially for traditional, teacher-centred instruction (e.g. lecture or seminar).

3.4 Improving Teacher Performance

The following trends reflect an increasing professionalization of University teaching in Covenant University.

- The creation of pedagogical service units or instructional resource centres designed primarily to inform and train faculty on educational procedures and develop more effective instructional strategies.
- There are occasional workshop on teachings for lecturers.
- Continuous curriculum development and update which involve close co-operation among content-matter specialists and instructional consultants.

Covenant University provides the necessary incentives for faculty development along the aforelisted lines.

4 RADICAL ALTERNATIVES

Our University is also pursuing radical alternatives to traditional University instruction such as the open and Distance Education (ODE). This makes Covenant University, the University without walls. The benefits are manifold:

- Permit more far ranging experimentation than the more typical small scale innovations, and /or
- Allow students, who previously lacked such opportunities (for example working adults) access to higher education.

The positive evolution reflected in the above four trends is not an indication of arrival or success celebration. It only shows that we are sensitive and responsive to global trend and will not hesitate to change in the direction global best practices as occasions demand. A beginning in the right direction has, however, been made.

4.1 Vision Statement

"The ultimate institution for flexible and lifelong learning"

4.2 Mission Statement

To enhance the knowledge and skill of lifelong learners through sustainable open and distance learning programmes and services

4.3 Core Values

- We can do nothing without God (Spirituality)
- Character defines our value (Integrity)
- Creativity is our key to success (Innovation)
- We leave nothing to chance (Diligence)
- There is no height we cannot reach (Possibility Mentality)
- We follow the technological trend (Technology-Oriented)
- We widen access to learning (Inclusiveness)

4.4 Core Objectives

- Provide a platform for mounting high quality, flexible and part-time education for lifelong learners.
- Develop innovative curriculum that would lead to multi-skilling and re-skilling of all learners, irrespective of age, gender, or location

FLOWCHART OF EVENTS AT CU CELL [OPEN & DISTANCE LEARNING]

Administrator	Student	Portal	Facilitator
Start ● Post admission requirements (online)	Purchase of admission form (online) Completion of form (online) (Admitted)	Validation of student's results (online)	(Not admitted)
	Payment of school fees (online)	Transfer of fees to e-wallot (online)	
Student's orientation (online) Virtual Lecture Delivery – Text & Virtual (online)	Registration of courses (online)		
	Distance Learning (online)		Interactive lecture (online)
	CA (online) Exam (online)	Release of results (online) End ●	

CU CELL PROGRAMMES STRUCTURE

Centre for Lifelong

Part Time Learning Programmes

Open & Distance Learning Programmes

Certificate Programme → Coordinator, Certificate Programme → Intensive 6 months | Flexible 1 year

Diploma Programme → Coordinator, Diploma Programme → Intensive 1 year | Flexible 2 years

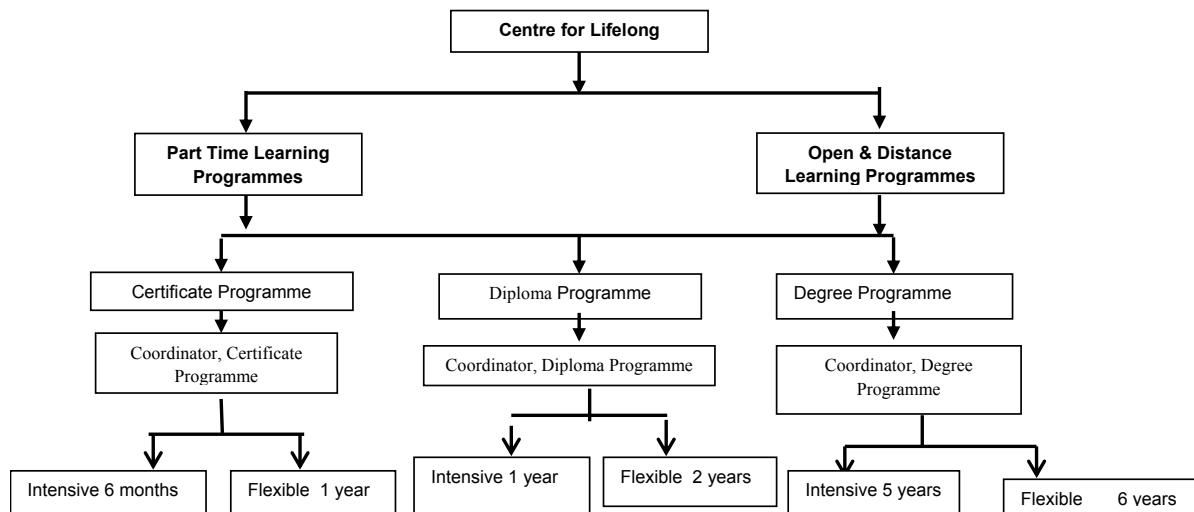Degree Programme → Coordinator, Degree Programme → Intensive 5 years | Flexible 6 years

Figure 4: CU CELL Programme Structure.

NOTE: *The key feature of the Open and Distance Learning Programme is that virtually all learning activities shall be done online and Students are allowed to go at their own pace. They can even pause on a programme and resume sometime later after taking due permission online*
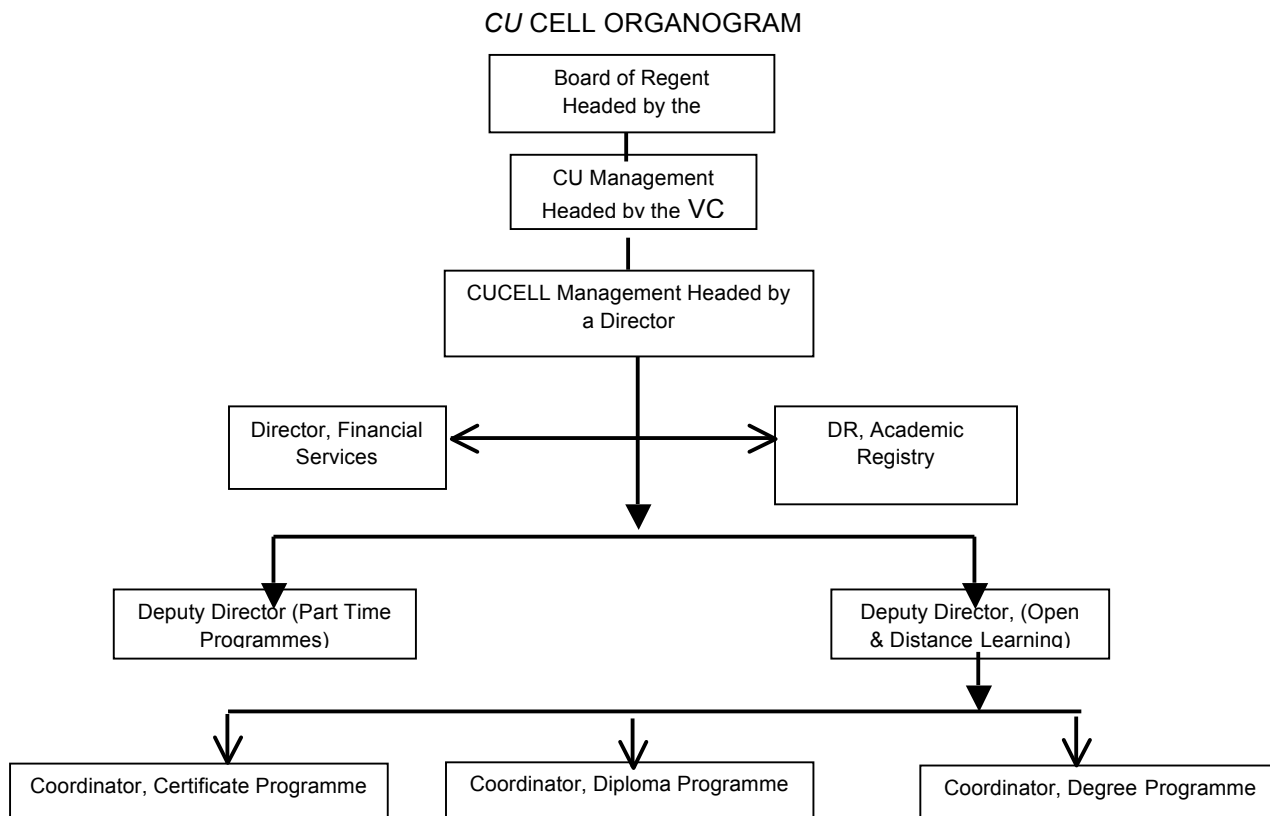
CU CELL ORGANOGRAM

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                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │   Board of Regent   │
                    │   Headed by the     │
                    └──────────┬──────────┘
                    ┌──────────┴──────────┐
                    │   CU Management     │
                    │  Headed by the VC   │
                    └──────────┬──────────┘
                 ┌─────────────┴─────────────┐
                 │ CUCELL Management Headed by │
                 │        a Director          │
                 └─────────────┬─────────────┘
    ┌────────────────┐         │         ┌────────────────┐
    │ Director,       │◄───────┼────────►│  DR, Academic  │
    │ Financial       │        │         │   Registry     │
    │ Services        │        │         │                │
    └────────────────┘         ▼         └────────────────┘
         ┌───────────────────────────────────┐
         ▼                                   ▼
 ┌──────────────────┐              ┌──────────────────┐
 │ Deputy Director  │              │ Deputy Director, │
 │ (Part Time       │              │ (Open &          │
 │ Programmes)      │              │ Distance Learning)│
 └────────┬─────────┘              └────────┬─────────┘
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| Coordinator, Certificate Programme | Coordinator, Diploma Programme | Coordinator, Degree Programme |

Figure 5: Organogram for the Covenant University Centre Lifelong Learning (CU CELL).

5   STRATEGIES, METHODS & POLICY STATEMENTS

5.1   The CU CELL Programme Duration

5.1.1   Part Time Learning Programmes

Flexible Courses

Certificate Programme	1 years of weekends lectures
Diploma Programme	2 years of daily evening lectures
Degree Programmes	6 years of daily evening lectures

Intensive Courses

Certificate Programme	6 months of intensive daily evening lectures
Diploma Programme	1 year of daily evening lectures
Degree Programmes	5 years of daily evening lectures

5.1.2   Open & Distance Learning Programmes

University Level [CU Template]

Flexible	6 years
Intensive	5 years

***Note:** Acceleration is allowed if the student proves competent and capable*

5.2 Advertisement & Promotion Policy

The following forms of promotion will apply

- *Advertising*: e.g. Newspaper, Radio, Television, Electronic adverts etc.
- *Sales promotion*: e.g. Organising awards, national and international competitions etc
- *Publicity/Public Relations*: e.g. Announcements in public forum like the Living Faith Church platforms worldwide, Networking and media relations, etc.
- Corporate contacts and related Direct Marketing.

5.3 Admission Policy

- Admission is open to all, irrespective of age and location. In this connection, only programmes for tertiary levels of education are available.
- For the Open and Distance Learning admission is done on line.
- Admission to Certificate, Diploma, and Degree Programmes are based on standing requirements for admission to tertiary institutions in Nigeria.
- Admission forms are completed online.

5.4 Payment Policy

All fees are paid online before the commencement of registration and lectures.

5.5 Orientation, Career Choice & Development Policy

There is always orientation and online counselling for career choice and development.

5.6 Staff Employment & Remuneration Policy

- The staff of CU CELL are predominantly the current faculty of the Institution. However, for some specialised courses, part time staff are recruited.
- Considering that CELL is predominantly an ICT driven programme, all staff are ICT literate. Consequently, regular in-service training and capacity building workshop are held to update staff skill.
- No organization grows beyond the quality of its staff, hence the significance of the application of this policy.
- For staff that are already employees of the University, a proportion of their current remuneration should be paid, while those outside they University receive full pay.

5.7 Lecture Delivery Policy

- The use of global ICT technologies
- Workshop and case study methods
- Creativity and problem solving approaches
- Pre-loaded tablet with lecture modules (software).
- Encourage the challenge of orthodoxies in teaching and learning

5.8 Practical & Productivity Policy

The CU CELL, as a matter of policy, encourages all faculty and students to move beyond learning for examinations to learning for *survival* and *impact*. This, therefore, entails the injection of practical and productive exercises.

5.9 Examination [Development & Administration] Policy

For open and distance learning, all examinations are done online. However, some examinations are done under close invigilation at designated examination centres.

5.10 Certification Policy

Certificates are issued in accordance with the policy operating in the University

6   CONCLUSION

The importance of networking among like-minded organizations in delivering lifelong learning activities for global impact cannot be over emphasised. We, at covenant University are ready to open our hands of fellowship to any lifelong learning institution that is committed to similar core values like ours. As a world class university in the making, we are prepared to use all legal means to break all barriers to learning and becoming a leading agent of change in the manpower development industry both at home in Nigeria and the world at large.

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