



## ARTICLE

# Examining Intricate Dynamics of Transformative Education among Junior Academic Staff in HEIs: A Nigerian Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

In higher education, transformative education has become a crucial paradigm for re-evaluating leadership, instruction, and learning. It places a strong emphasis on social change, technological innovation, inclusive education, and critical thinking. Although this strategy has become relatively popular worldwide, there are still many context-specific obstacles to overcome before it can be applied in the Global South, especially in Nigeria. The paper examines the intricate dynamics of transformative education as experienced by junior academic staff in Nigerian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), within the broader context of learning, leadership, and technology. Nigeria offers a distinctive case for analyzing how early-career academics engage with transformative pedagogies in settings characterized by structural inequality, inadequate technological infrastructure, and ongoing educational reforms. Using a qualitative and multi-institutional case study methodology, the paper reveals how junior academics struggle through institutional cultures, demonstrate leadership in pedagogical innovation, and incorporate technology in teaching and learning—frequently with limited support. The results show a conflict between institutional goals and academic staff members' daily reality, where policy-practice gaps, a lack of proper mentorship, and digital divisions often limit transformational potential. Despite these obstacles, examples of grassroots creativity and adaptable leadership show a strong dedication to revolutionary change. In order to empower younger academics as agents of significant educational change in Nigeria, the paper advocates for focused interventions in capacity building, inclusive policy frameworks, and sustainable technological integration.

**Keywords:** Junior Academic Staff; Transformative Education; Institutional Culture; Professional Growth

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, transformative education has emerged as a vital pedagogical paradigm in global higher

education, focusing on reshaping instruction, leadership, and learning to address contemporary social, technological, and ideological challenges.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Mezirow, "Learning to think like an adult: Core concepts of transformation theory". In E. W. Taylor & P. Cranton (Eds.), *The Handbook of Transformative Learning*, pp. 73-95. Jossey-Bass; 2012

Rooted in critical pedagogy, transformative education emphasizes developing critical consciousness, social justice, inclusivity, and innovation through reflective and participatory learning processes. While transformative education has gained significant traction in many parts of the Global North, its implementation in the Global South, especially in Nigeria, remains underexplored and under-theorized.<sup>2</sup> The dynamics of transformative education in Nigerian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are particularly complex for junior academic staff, who often navigate entrenched institutional hierarchies, inadequate mentoring structures, limited technological infrastructure, and shifting policy landscapes.<sup>3</sup> Junior academics, usually early in their careers, are uniquely positioned as both recipients and potential agents of transformative change. However, their experiences and agency are often limited by systemic inequalities, rigid academic cultures, and poor institutional support.<sup>4</sup>

Despite growing discourse on educational transformation in Africa, existing literature tends to prioritize high-level policy analysis or focus on student-centered transformations, overlooking the positionality and contributions of junior faculty members as pedagogical leaders and innovators.<sup>5</sup> This paper seeks to fill this critical gap by examining the intricate and context-specific experiences of early-career academics within Nigerian HEIs, interrogating how they engage with transformative pedagogies under conditions shaped by inequality, reform, and limited resources. Through qualitative document analysis and an observational data approach, this paper investigates how junior academic staff members navigate institutional expectations, demonstrates leadership in pedagogical innovation, and integrates technology into teaching and learning. It explores the tensions between institutional goals and on-the-ground realities, highlighting policy-practice gaps, mentorship deficiencies, and digital inequities that challenge the

transformative potential of higher education in Nigeria. For this reason, the study offers a nuanced understanding of how systemic barriers can be negotiated through transformative education and grassroots innovation, ultimately contributing to the discourse on educational transformation in the Global South. By focusing on the experiences of junior academics, the study not only enriches theoretical discussions on transformative education but also provides practical insights for policy makers, institutional leaders, and development partners. It advocates for targeted interventions in capacity building, inclusive policymaking, and sustainable technological integration as pathways to strengthening transformative practices in Nigeria's tertiary education sector.

The 21st-century higher education landscape is undergoing significant transformation, driven by the urgent need to align academic practice with the demands of a rapidly evolving global society.<sup>6</sup> In many parts of the Global North, the principles of transformative education have been widely adopted and institutionalized. However, in the Global South, and particularly in Nigeria, its adoption remains fraught with complexities.<sup>7</sup> These systemic issues profoundly affect the academic workforce, especially junior academic staff members, who are often burdened by high teaching loads, limited research funding, poor mentorship and minimal institutional autonomy.<sup>8</sup> Junior academic staff connotes early-career professionals typically within the first ten years of academic service occupy a crucial yet vulnerable position in Nigeria's higher education system.<sup>9</sup> Although their role is critical to the realization of transformative educational goals, little empirical attention has been paid to how they engage with or experience transformation in their professional practice. Existing studies on transformative education in Nigeria tends to focus on student outcomes, curriculum reforms,

<sup>2</sup> Peter Olorube, Obi Uriah and Kpolovie Egbezor, "Education policies and teachers' professional development in Nigeria: Myths and realities". *Journal of Education and Learning* 8, no. 3 (2019): 204-212.

<sup>3</sup> Femi Adebayo and Oduolowo Akinola, Challenges of academic staff development in Nigerian public universities: Implications for educational transformation. *Journal of Education and Practice* 12, no. 14, (2021): 10-17.

<sup>4</sup> Francis Ofoegbu and Henry Alonge, "Mentorship and academic productivity of early-career faculty in Nigerian universities". *African Journal of Educational Management* 18, no. 2, (2020): 98-112.

<sup>5</sup> Abdulbakar Tijani, Owolabi Oyebode & Joseph Babalola, Higher education and the dynamics of academic leadership in Nigerian

universities. *African Educational Research Journal* 8, no. 3, (2020): 518-526

<sup>6</sup> Knud Illeris, *Transformative Learning and Identity*. London: Routledge Press, 2014; Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th Anniversary ed.). Houston: Continuum Press, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Akinyemi, Higher education governance and quality assurance in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. *African Journal of Educational Management* 23, no. 1, (2021): 55-68.

<sup>8</sup> Okolie, U. C., Nwajiuba, C. A., Binuomote, M. O., & Odukoya, J. A. (2021). Transforming higher education in Africa: Quality assurance perspectives. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 40(3), 466-481.

<sup>9</sup> Nwarusi Nwagwu, Rethinking higher education reforms in Nigeria: From policy to implementation. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Research* 20, no.2, (2022): 1-15.

or macro-policy directions, often overlooking the agentic role of faculty in enacting and sustaining transformative change.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, where faculty experiences are examined, there is limited emphasis on early-career academics, who, due to their dual identity as both institutional learners and emerging leaders, offer a unique vantage point for examining the intersection of leadership, learning, and innovation. This paper seeks to fill this critical research gap by interrogating the multifaceted experiences of junior academic staff in Nigerian HEIs within the broader discourse of transformative education.

Existing literature highlights disparities in the adoption of transformative education between public and private institutions in Nigeria.<sup>11</sup> Studies indicate that public universities often struggle with inadequate resources, rigid curricula, and limited professional development opportunities, whereas private institutions benefit from better funding and flexible educational frameworks.<sup>12</sup> This discrepancy underscores the need for a nuanced exploration of how junior academics in different institutional settings experience and implement transformative education. Junior academics, often at the forefront of pedagogical experimentation, face systemic barriers such as insufficient mentorship, lack of institutional support, and misalignment between educational policies and practical realities. These challenges necessitate a deeper investigation into how early-career academics navigate these constraints while striving for educational transformation.

This paper seeks to bridge this research gap by examining the intricate dynamics of transformative education among junior academic staff in Nigerian HEIs. It aims to contribute to the discourse on educational reform and advocate for targeted interventions that empower junior academics as agents of meaningful change in Nigeria's higher education landscape. As a result, this study raises research questions on how junior academics in Nigeria navigate institutional norms and demonstrate pedagogical leadership. It also queries the context for integrating technology into their teaching and learning practices. It examines the dynamics of institutional culture,

mentorship access, technological adoption, and the tensions between policy rhetoric and everyday academic realities. Through document analysis and observational data across multiple institutions, the study uncovers the contradictions, innovations, and adaptations that shape the transformative educational landscape for early-career academics.

Theoretically, the paper is situated at the intersection of critical pedagogy, transformative learning theory, and educational leadership frameworks. These perspectives collectively provide a lens through which the actions, constraints, and aspirations of junior academics can be interpreted.<sup>13</sup> By foregrounding the Nigerian situation marked by political volatility, digital divides and educational reform, the paper advances a nuanced understanding of how local realities mediate global educational ideals. This introductory section is followed below by the conceptual clarification and methodology. The case study work is then divided into two main sections. Section three reviews the dynamics of transformative education with emphasis on the experiences of junior academic staff in Nigerian HEIs. It discusses the theoretical context of learning, leadership and technology in the Nigerian higher education as well as the institutional struggles of junior academics face. Section four focuses on the leadership and pedagogical innovation shown to counter some of those challenges. It includes analyses of the incorporation of technology in teaching and learning within Nigerian higher education, and acknowledges the conflict between institutional goals and academic staff daily realities. The last section offer the concluding remarks, explaining how for Nigerian junior academics, the pursuit of educational transformation is marked by deep commitment amid profound constraints. It also offers policy suggestions around mentorship, infrastructure investment and addressing the digital divide, as well as around decentralizing certain aspects of academic decision-making and better institutionalising the contributions of early-career academics.

<sup>10</sup> Femi Adebayo and Oduolowo Akinola, Challenges of academic staff development in Nigerian public universities: Implications for educational transformation. *Journal of Education and Practice* 12, no. 14, (2021): 10-17.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Ifeoma & Raphael Udofia, Professional development needs of early-career academics in Nigeria: An institutional perspective. *Journal of Academic Leadership and Policy Studies* 15, no.2, (2023): 33-48.

<sup>12</sup> Hassan Abubakar and Emma Essien, Digital challenges in Nigerian higher education: Voices from early-career faculty.

*Journal of Educational Technology and Policy* 7, no. 2, (2021): 45-61; Lawal Mohammed and Abubakar Bello, Equity and technology in Nigerian higher education: The case of SMS-based micro-learning. *Journal of Inclusive Education in Africa* 6, no. 3, (2023): 90-105.

<sup>13</sup> Femi Adebayo and Oduolowo Akinola, Challenges of academic staff development in Nigerian public universities: Implications for educational transformation. *Journal of Education and Practice* 12, no. 14, (2021): 10-17.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION AND METHODOLOGY

Transformative education, as a pedagogical framework, aims to transcend traditional modes of teaching and learning by fostering critical consciousness, social responsibility, and active engagement in systemic change.<sup>14</sup> It is rooted in the belief that education should not merely transmit knowledge but empower learners and educators alike to challenge oppressive structures, think innovatively, and act inclusively. With reference to Nigerian HEIs, this framework is operationalized albeit unevenly through four interrelated conceptual pillars: social change, technological innovation, inclusive education, and critical thinking. Relevant concepts are explored below through the lens of multi-institutional practices and challenges.

Transformative education strongly emphasizes the role of education as a tool for catalyzing social change. It aligns with the belief that academic institutions should contribute to resolving social inequalities and fostering justice-driven communities.<sup>15</sup> For junior academic staff in Nigerian HEIs, engaging with social change often involves integrating community-oriented projects into the curriculum, advocating for marginalized voices, and contributing to public scholarship. For example, a federal university in South-West Nigeria, where junior lecturers in the Department of Sociology have initiated service-learning modules that connect students with underserved rural communities.<sup>16</sup> These initiatives involve participatory research projects aimed at understanding local development challenges such as youth unemployment and access to health care thereby linking academic content with social realities. However, without sustained institutional backing, such programs often depend heavily on the individual commitment of faculty members.<sup>17</sup>

The integration of digital tools and innovative technologies is central to transformative education, enhancing engagement, collaboration, and access to knowledge.<sup>18</sup> However, in the Nigerian context, technological innovation is significantly constrained by infrastructural challenges, erratic electricity supply, and uneven digital literacy among both staff and students. For example, a state university in the North-Central region introduced a blended learning model in its Education Faculty, led by a group of early-career academics. These academics utilized Learning Management Systems (LMS), Google Classroom, and locally developed mobile applications to deliver instruction.<sup>19</sup> Despite initial success, the programme suffered from poor internet connectivity and lack of institutional training support, underscoring the infrastructural and administrative barriers to technological transformation.<sup>20</sup>

Inclusive education within a transformative paradigm calls for dismantling institutional and pedagogical barriers that exclude students and staff based on gender, disability, socioeconomic status, or cultural identity.<sup>21</sup> In Nigeria, efforts toward inclusion remain fragmented, with significant gaps in policy implementation and faculty sensitization. For instance, a private university located in South-East Nigeria, junior academics in the Faculty of Arts have introduced inclusive classroom practices by adopting Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles e.g., offering multiple means of content delivery and accommodating students with disabilities.<sup>22</sup> While these practices have been praised internally, the absence of a formalized inclusive education policy and minimal administrative recognition has limited scalability and institutional impact.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Funso Adebayo & Adama Musa, Strategic visions vs. ground realities: Technology and pedagogy in Nigerian universities. *Higher Education in Africa* 11, no.2, (2022): 55–70.

<sup>15</sup> Patricia Cranton, *Understanding and promoting transformative learning: A guide for educators of adults* (3rd ed.). United Kingdom: Stylus Publishing Press, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Femi Adebayo and Oduolowo Akinola, Challenges of academic staff development in Nigerian public universities: Implications for educational transformation. *Journal of Education and Practice* 12, no. 14, (2021): 10–17.

<sup>17</sup> Maruf Adesina & Christian Okonkwo, Hierarchies and the suppression of innovation in Nigerian university departments. *Journal of Critical Education Studies* 10, no.2, (2021): 44–59.

<sup>18</sup> Allan Collins & Richard Halverson, *Rethinking education in the age of technology: The digital revolution and schooling in America*. Teachers College Press, 2018.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Odekunle & Tayo Fagbemi, Disrupting tradition: The role of young academics in digital pedagogy. *West African Journal of Educational Transformation* 18, no.4, (2021): 59–75.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Okonkwo & Anthony Lawal, Educational reforms and early-career academics in Nigeria: Structural constraints and emerging practices. *West African Journal of Education* 6, no.2, (2020): 14–29.

<sup>21</sup> UNESCO. *A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO Publication, 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Awodiji Afolayan & Yakub Musa, Leadership without position: Peer-led transformation among early-career academics in Nigerian HEIs. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Administration* 13, no.1, (2023): 24–39.

<sup>23</sup> Nwarusi Nwagwu, Rethinking higher education reforms in Nigeria: From policy to implementation. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Research* 20, no.2, (2022): 1–15.

At the core of transformative education is the cultivation of critical thinking, the ability to analyze, question assumptions, and engage in reflective discourse.<sup>24</sup> For Nigerian HEIs, fostering critical thinking among students and staff often involves a shift away from didactic, exam-oriented instruction toward dialogic and inquiry-based teaching. At a federal university in North-West Nigeria, junior faculty members in the Law Faculty redesigned their legal ethics course to incorporate case-based learning and peer debate sessions.<sup>25</sup> This approach encouraged students to interrogate legal principles through real-life scenarios, enhancing both critical engagement and practical reasoning. However, traditional assessment systems and lack of recognition for pedagogical innovation by senior faculty pose significant challenges to sustaining such reforms.<sup>26</sup>

In synthesizing these social changes, technological innovation, inclusive education, and critical thinking, it becomes clear that while junior academics in Nigerian HEIs demonstrate remarkable initiative in applying transformative principles; yet their efforts are often undermined by systemic institutional inertia, insufficient support structures, and policy-practice disjuncture. Nevertheless, the emerging practices across institutions illustrate both the potential and the precocity of transformative education in the Nigerian context. Transformative education has gained global recognition as a paradigm that fosters critical thinking, social change, and technological innovation in higher education.<sup>27</sup> However, its implementation in Nigeria presents unique challenges, particularly for junior academic staff navigating institutional cultures, infrastructural limitations, and policy-practice gaps. While transformative education has been extensively studied in Western contexts, there remains a significant research gap in understanding how early-career academics in Nigerian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) engage with and adapt transformative pedagogies within their specific socio-political and economic realities. Furthermore, the intersection of leadership, technology, and pedagogical innovation remains underexplored in Nigerian HEIs. While

transformative education emphasizes digital integration and inclusive learning, infrastructural deficiencies and digital divides hinder its effective application. This paper argues that any meaningful effort to transform higher education in Nigeria must recognize and invest in the capacities and conditions of junior academics. Their struggles and successes offer both a mirror and a map for understanding how transformation can be achieved from within, even in resource-constrained settings. As such, the study advocates for targeted interventions in areas such as faculty capacity building, inclusive policy formulation, mentorship schemes, and sustainable digital infrastructure as strategic levers for educational transformation.

Nigeria's HEIs operate within a broader socio-political and economic environment characterized by structural inequalities, infrastructural deficits, unpredictable policy shifts, and underfunding.<sup>28</sup> However, the junior academic staff members are expected to contribute meaningfully to research, teaching, curriculum development, and community service, all while navigating entrenched academic hierarchies and constrained working conditions.<sup>29</sup> The lived realities of the junior academics, particularly their capacity to implement transformative pedagogies amidst institutional and systemic constraints which remain insufficiently explored in the literature, particularly in Nigeria with complexities in terms of mentorship, technology and structural inequalities. Through a qualitative and multi-institutional case study approach, it will explore how these educators engage with transformative pedagogies, demonstrate leadership in pedagogical innovation, and incorporate technology in teaching and learning despite systemic limitations.

### *Methodology*

This study adopts a qualitative research paradigm rooted in interpretivist epistemology, which is most suitable for exploring the intricate, lived experiences of individuals within their socio-institutional contexts.<sup>30</sup> Focusing on how junior academic staff in Nigerian

<sup>24</sup> Stephen Brookfield, *Teaching for critical thinking: Tools and techniques to help students question their assumptions*. Texas: Jossey-Bass Press, 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Funso Adebayo & Adama Musa, Strategic visions vs. ground realities: Technology and pedagogy in Nigerian universities. *Higher Education in Africa* 11, no.2, (2022): 55-70

<sup>26</sup> Abdulbakar Tijani, Owolabi Oyebode & Joseph Babalola, Higher education and the dynamics of academic leadership in Nigerian universities. *African Educational Research Journal* 8, no. 3, (2020): 518-526

<sup>27</sup> Ibrahim Garba & Murtala Tanko, Barriers to academic innovation in Northern Nigerian universities: Voices from early-

career faculty. *Nigerian Journal of Political and Administrative Studies* 9, no.2, (2021): 88-101.

<sup>28</sup> Haleem Salihu & Abubakar Jega, Challenges and prospects of university education in Nigeria. *Journal of African Higher Education* 8, no.2, (2020): 45-61.

<sup>29</sup> Temitope Ajayi & Folusho Oladipo, Junior academics and the quest for pedagogical transformation in Nigerian public universities. *Journal of Higher Education Reform* 6, no.1, (2022): 45-60.

<sup>30</sup> John Creswell & Cheryl Poth, *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications, 2018.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) experience and engage with transformative education, the research privileges depth, context, and meaning-making over generalizability. The qualitative orientation is justified by the exploratory nature of the study, which seeks to uncover complex, often nuanced phenomena such as institutional culture, pedagogical innovation, and leadership in constrained environments that cannot be fully captured through quantitative approaches. Document analysis and observational data across multiple institutions were employed to allow for comparative insights across different HEIs, highlighting both commonalities and institutional specificities. Document studies are particularly well-suited for investigating phenomena within their real-life settings, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.<sup>31</sup> The inclusion of multiple institutions enhances the robustness, credibility, and transferability of the findings by providing a broader range of perspectives and experiences.<sup>32</sup> This paper is devoid of making references to individuals/groups in order to avoid what could appear judgmental or blame-game.

However, a limitation to the study is its reliance on exploratory and desktop approaches. Nevertheless, this approach remains well-suited as transformative education, especially as it relates to junior academic staff in Nigerian HEIs, is a relatively under-explored area with limited empirical studies. An exploratory approach allows for open-ended inquiry and the identification of emerging patterns, themes, and conceptual frameworks without being constrained by existing theories or rigid hypotheses. The desktop approach, which involves the systematic review and analysis of existing literature, policy documents, institutional reports, and other secondary data sources, enables the researcher to construct a rich, contextualized understanding of the educational landscape in Nigeria. This allows the researcher to draw on a wide range of credible and relevant data sources without the need for extensive on-ground data collection, making it especially useful for a national-level perspective.

As an exploratory effort, this approach lays a critical foundation for more targeted empirical studies. It can help identify knowledge gaps, formulate relevant research questions, and develop conceptual frameworks

that can guide subsequent qualitative or quantitative investigations. It is particularly valuable for building an evidence-based agenda for reform in Nigerian higher education. The findings are presented in concise manner that will provide relevant knowledge needed in understanding intricate dynamics of transformative education among junior academic staff in HEIs.

### **3. SOCIAL CHANGE AND DYNAMICS OF TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION: EXPERIENCES OF JUNIOR ACADEMIC STAFF IN NIGERIAN HEIS**

Transformative education within Nigerian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is shaped by a constellation of contextual realities, including historical legacies, institutional cultures, economic constraints, and national policy frameworks. For junior academic staff (early-career scholars within 0-10 years of academic service), these dynamics are often experienced in uneven and deeply personal ways, marked by tensions between ideals of pedagogical innovation and institutional inertia. While many exhibit a strong desire to innovate and democratize learning, they must often navigate systemic constraints that shape and sometimes limit transformative aspirations.

#### *The role of the Junior Academic*

Junior academics often serve as the vanguard of pedagogical transformation, especially in the integration of student-centered learning and technology-enhanced instruction. Their educational experiences often involving more recent exposure to global trends in pedagogy position them to challenge the conventional lecture-heavy, didactic styles prevalent in many Nigerian universities.<sup>33</sup> However, attempts to implement innovative practices frequently clash with rigid departmental expectations, outdated curricula, and a lack of institutional support mechanisms. At a federal university in South-South Nigeria, junior lecturers in the Faculty of Education initiated the use of flipped classroom models, which were initially welcomed by students but met resistance from senior faculty who viewed the model as "unorthodox".<sup>34</sup> Despite enthusiasm from learners, the absence of a

<sup>31</sup> Robert Yin, *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th Ed.). SAGE Publications, 2018.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Stake, *Multiple case study analysis*. New York: Guilford Press, 2006.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Odekunle & Tayo Fagbemi, Disrupting tradition: The role of young academics in digital pedagogy. *West African Journal of Educational Transformation* 18, no.4, (2021): 59-75.

<sup>34</sup> Isaac Chukwu & Uwabo Nwafor, Student-led learning in Nigerian universities: Innovations in participatory pedagogy. *Journal of Higher Education Pedagogy* 7, no.2, (2023): 63-78.

university-wide framework supporting innovation meant that these junior academics had to rely on personal resources and informal peer collaboration to sustain their practice.<sup>35</sup>

Institutional culture in Nigerian HEIs is often hierarchical, with junior academics occupying the lowest rungs in decision-making processes. Their agency is frequently mediated by bureaucratic protocols and seniority-based gatekeeping, which can impede their ability to lead transformative initiatives. Yet, junior faculty members often find creative ways to circumvent or reshape these power structures, especially in areas that are less scrutinized by top management. In a private university in South-West Nigeria, early-career academics in the Sciences leveraged student research groups to explore interdisciplinary teaching methods that emphasized inquiry-based learning.<sup>36</sup> Although these methods were not officially embedded into the curriculum, they were implemented informally through course projects and tutorial sessions. These grassroots-level strategies allowed junior staff to experiment with transformative practices in ways that avoided institutional friction while still impacting student learning.<sup>37</sup>

Many junior academics express an internalized expectation to act as change agents, especially given their exposure to contemporary educational theories and digital tools during postgraduate training. However, this aspirational identity is often undermined by insufficient professional development opportunities, lack of structured mentorship, and inconsistent institutional encouragement for innovation.<sup>38</sup> The absence of formal platforms for showcasing or scaling

transformative efforts further alienates junior staff who may be pioneering impactful educational reforms. At a state university in Northern Nigeria, a cluster of early-career faculty members from the Department of Political Science attempted to introduce simulation-based learning in governance courses.<sup>39</sup> Although the initiative was positively received by students, the academics lacked access to teaching grants or institutional forums to disseminate their work. Over time, the project stagnated due to exhaustion and perceived lack of recognition from university leadership.<sup>40</sup>

The experiences of junior academic staff reflect a duality of promise and frustration. On one hand, their practices often demonstrate creativity, responsiveness to student needs, and alignment with global educational trends. On the other, their capacity to scale these innovations is continually undermined by outdated policies, rigid administrative structures, and lack of rewards for pedagogical excellence.<sup>41</sup> For example, in a newly established federal university, early-career faculty across departments collaborated on a faculty development seminar series titled "*Reimagining Teaching for the 21st Century*",<sup>42</sup> the seminars focused on decolonizing the curriculum, adopting constructivist pedagogies, and fostering inclusive classrooms. While the initiative gained momentum among peers, institutional leadership offered limited endorsement, relegating the seminars to extra-curricular status.<sup>43</sup> This lack of recognition illustrates how even progressive academic cultures can be hampered by managerial ambivalence.<sup>44</sup> The dynamics of transformative education, as experienced by junior academics in Nigerian HEIs, reveal a tension between aspiration and reality. While there is demonstrable commitment to

<sup>35</sup> Temitope Ajayi & Folusho Oladipo, Junior academics and the quest for pedagogical transformation in Nigerian public universities. *Journal of Higher Education Reform* 6, no.1, (2022): 45-60.

<sup>36</sup> Awodiji Afolayan & Yakub Musa, Leadership without position: Peer-led transformation among early-career academics in Nigerian HEIs. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Administration* 13, no.1, (2023): 24-39.

<sup>37</sup> Chidi Ezeanya & Chukwuma Okoli, Grassroots innovation in Nigerian HEIs: A case of informal learning reform. *African Journal of Education and Technology* 12, no.3, (2020): 104-117.

<sup>38</sup> Bayero Ibrahim & Chike Nwankwo, Flipped classrooms in resource-constrained contexts: Insights from Nigeria. *West African Journal of Instructional Innovation* 5, no.1, (2023): 33-48.

<sup>39</sup> Lawal Mohammed and Abubakar Bello, Equity and technology in Nigerian higher education: The case of SMS-based micro-learning. *Journal of Inclusive Education in Africa* 6, no. 3, (2023): 90-105.

<sup>40</sup> Ibrahim Garba & Murtala Tanko, Barriers to academic innovation in Northern Nigerian universities: Voices from early-career faculty. *Nigerian Journal of Political and Administrative Studies* 9, no.2, (2021): 88-101.

<sup>41</sup> Obiskwe Ekanem & Johnbosco Oboh, Curricular rigidity and innovation fatigue in Nigerian HEIs. *Journal of Curriculum Studies in Africa* 5, no.1, (2023): 21-36.

<sup>42</sup> Awodiji Afolayan & Yakub Musa, Leadership without position: Peer-led transformation among early-career academics in Nigerian HEIs. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Administration* 13, no.1, (2023): 24-39.

<sup>43</sup> Isaac Chukwu & Uwabo Nwafor, Student-led learning in Nigerian universities: Innovations in participatory pedagogy. *Journal of Higher Education Pedagogy* 7, no.2, (2023): 63-78.

<sup>44</sup> Obasi, E. & Nkereuwem, A. (2022). Institutional inertia and educational reform: A study of faculty-led innovation in Nigerian HEIs. *Journal of Policy and Curriculum Studies*, 14(1), 66-79.

innovation, inclusion, and reflective pedagogy among early-career faculty, these efforts are too often isolated and under-resourced.<sup>45</sup> A critical insight is that transformation is not impeded by lack of ideas or motivation, but by systemic rigidity and institutional conservatism. Therefore, any attempt to institutionalize transformative education must prioritize structural reform, professional support systems, and the inclusion of junior academic voices in policy development.

### *Theoretical Context of Learning, Leadership, and Technology in Nigerian Higher Education*

Understanding how junior academic staff members in Nigerian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) engage with transformative education requires a nuanced theoretical exploration of the interlinked dimensions of learning, leadership, and technology. These elements form the bedrock of transformative pedagogy and are deeply influenced by socio-political contexts, institutional legacies, and global academic trends.<sup>46</sup> In the Global South particularly Nigeria, these domains intersect with acute structural challenges, which shape the lived experiences and pedagogical choices of early-career academics.

At the heart of transformative education is the shift from passive, rote memorization models to constructivist and critical pedagogical approaches, which prioritize learner autonomy, reflection, and social relevance.<sup>47</sup> These theories advocate that knowledge is co-constructed and embedded in socio-cultural realities an idea increasingly championed by junior faculty who seek to make learning more participatory and contextually grounded. In a federal university in South-East Nigeria, junior lecturers in the Faculty of Education adopted a project-based learning approach to teacher training, requiring students to design lesson plans in collaboration with

rural schools.<sup>48</sup> This model encouraged contextual understanding of pedagogical theory while fostering social responsibility. Despite its success, the initiative received limited institutional funding, forcing the academics to rely on external donor support.<sup>49</sup>

While leadership in Nigerian HEIs has traditionally been hierarchical, emerging models particularly transformational leadership and distributed leadership provide a framework for understanding how junior academics contribute to institutional innovation and change.<sup>50</sup> These models emphasize empowerment, shared decision-making, and collaboration over positional authority. Junior faculty members often practise informal leadership through mentorship of students, curriculum redesign, and faculty development initiatives, despite lacking formal power.<sup>51</sup> Their leadership is not rooted in rank but in influence, commitment to reform, and capacity to galvanize peers around progressive educational ideals. For example, at a state university in North-Central Nigeria, early-career academics formed a peer network, the *Emerging Educators Collective*, to share resources, conduct pedagogical workshops, and co-author publications on teaching practices.<sup>52</sup> Though unofficial, the group gained institutional recognition and was later consulted in the university's review of its teaching policy.<sup>53</sup>

The role of technology in transformative education is increasingly conceptualized through frameworks such as the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge model,<sup>54</sup> which emphasizes the interplay between content expertise, pedagogical strategies, and technology. In Nigerian HEIs, this integration is uneven, shaped by infrastructural limitations, digital divides, and inconsistent institutional commitment to e-learning

<sup>45</sup> Tade Ibikunle & John Nduka, Mentorship and academic isolation among junior faculty in Nigerian universities. *African Journal of Teacher Development* 7, no.4, (2022): 87-102.

<sup>46</sup> Funso Adebayo & Adama Musa, Strategic visions vs. ground realities: Technology and pedagogy in Nigerian universities. *Higher Education in Africa* 11, no.2, (2022): 55-70

<sup>47</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th Anniversary ed.). Houston: Continuum Press, 2005; Lev Vygotsky, *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press, 1978.

<sup>48</sup> Isaac Chukwu & Uwabo Nwafor, Student-led learning in Nigerian universities: Innovations in participatory pedagogy. *Journal of Higher Education Pedagogy* 7, no.2, (2023): 63-78.

<sup>49</sup> Maduke Nnamani & Lawson Uzochukwu, Transformative teacher education in Nigeria: A community-based approach. *Journal of Educational Practice in Africa* 11, no.3, (2022): 55-69.

<sup>50</sup> Bernard Bass & Bruce Avolio, (1994). *Improving organizational effectiveness through transformational leadership*. Sage, 1994; James Spillane, *Distributed leadership*. Jossey-Bass, 2006.

<sup>51</sup> Maruf Adesina & Christian Okonkwo, Hierarchies and the suppression of innovation in Nigerian university departments. *Journal of Critical Education Studies* 10, no.2, (2021): 44-59.

<sup>52</sup> Bayero Ibrahim & Chike Nwankwo, Flipped classrooms in resource-constrained contexts: Insights from Nigeria. *West African Journal of Instructional Innovation* 5, no.1, (2023): 33-48.

<sup>53</sup> Awodiji Afolayan & Yakub Musa, Leadership without position: Peer-led transformation among early-career academics in Nigerian HEIs. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Administration* 13, no.1, (2023): 24-39.

<sup>54</sup> Punya Mishra & Matthew Koehler, Technological pedagogical content knowledge: A framework for teacher knowledge. *Teachers College Record* 108, no.6, (2006): 1017-1054.

strategies.<sup>55</sup> Early-career academics are often more digitally literate and open to experimenting with tools such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), Open Educational Resources (OERs), and mobile learning platforms. However, without adequate technical support and policy coherence, these efforts remain fragmented.<sup>56</sup> In a private university in South-West Nigeria, junior lecturers in the Computer Science department initiated a digital micro-credential program where students earned badges for mastering specific programming skills.<sup>57</sup> While the program improved student engagement and employability outcomes, lack of institutional integration into the main academic transcript system limited its wider adoption.<sup>58</sup>

The engagement of junior academics with transformative pedagogies must also be understood through the lens of critical institutional theory, which interrogates how power, hierarchy, and historical inequities shape organizational behavior.<sup>59</sup> Structural issues such as underfunding, politicized university governance and unequal access to resources reinforce resistance to educational reform and limit the scope of innovation. In a federal university in Northern Nigeria, an attempt by a group of early-career academics to introduce culturally responsive curricula in the humanities was stifled by senior faculty citing "curricular tradition" and "lack of national policy alignment".<sup>60</sup> This highlights how institutional conservatism and centralization in curriculum decisions obstruct transformative possibilities, especially for those without positional power.<sup>61</sup>

The engagement of junior academic staff with transformative pedagogies in Nigerian HEIs is framed by ambitious pedagogical visions and complex institutional constraints. While grounded in progressive theories of learning, leadership, and technological integration, their efforts frequently collide with resource scarcities, bureaucratic rigidity, and structural inequalities.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, the persistence of these

academics often through informal leadership, collaborative networks, and technology adoption demonstrates a resilient commitment to educational transformation. The theoretical lens thus reveals that transformation is not only a matter of innovation but also one of contestation, negotiation, and adaptive resistance. To realize the full potential of transformative education, institutions must recognize and support the theoretical grounding and practical ingenuity of their junior faculty.

### *Struggles of Junior Academics within Institutional Cultures in Nigerian Higher Education*

Institutional culture refers to the underlying norms, values, beliefs, and practices that characterize an organization's operations. In Nigerian HEIs, these cultures are often deeply rooted in hierarchical traditions, bureaucratic inertia, and resistance to pedagogical and structural reform. For junior academic staff, those typically within the first decade of their academic careers, this institutional landscape presents a complex web of challenges that obstruct, delay, or disincentivise engagement with transformative educational practices.

One of the most significant institutional hurdles faced by junior academics is the entrenched hierarchy that governs most Nigerian universities. Senior faculty and management often wield disproportionate influence over teaching methods, research direction, and curriculum development. Junior staff members are expected to conform rather than critique; and replicate rather than innovate. In similar fashion to how innovate pedagogy approaches or use of technology referred to above faced resistance, at a federal university in South-West Nigeria, junior lecturers in the Faculty of Arts proposed introducing new electives focusing on African

<sup>55</sup> Toyin Ogunleye & Mojola Ajibola, Interdisciplinary teaching and collaborative pedagogy: Lessons from Nigerian HEIs. *Journal of Educational Innovation in Africa* 8, no.1, (2023): 51-66.

<sup>56</sup> Samuel Oladele & Temitayo Akinyemi, Teaching through Telegram: Mobile learning in Nigerian public universities during crises. *African Journal of Mobile Education* 3, no.4, (2022): 54-72.

<sup>57</sup> Chris Nwachukwu & Kelvin Edeh, Administrative bottlenecks and digital fatigue: Challenges of academic innovation in Nigerian HEIs. *Journal of Educational Management and Technology* 5, no.3, (2022): 71-85.

<sup>58</sup> Segun Oyetola & Tolani Adebajo, Micro-credentials in Nigerian private universities: Emerging opportunities and challenges. *Journal of Digital Education in Africa* 5, no.1, (2022): 33-48.

<sup>59</sup> Paul DiMaggio & Walter Powell, The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review* 48, no.2, (1983): 147-160.

<sup>60</sup> Maruf Adesina & Christian Okonkwo, Hierarchies and the suppression of innovation in Nigerian university departments. *Journal of Critical Education Studies* 10, no.2, (2021): 44-59.

<sup>61</sup> Ahmed Danladi & Sheu Adamu, Curriculum politics and cultural responsiveness in Nigerian higher education. *African Curriculum Studies Journal* 9, no.2, (2021): 66-80.

<sup>62</sup> Funso Adebayo & Adama Musa, Strategic visions vs. ground realities: Technology and pedagogy in Nigerian universities. *Higher Education in Africa* 11, no.2, (2022): 55-70

feminism and contemporary critical theory.<sup>63</sup> Despite student demand and curricular relevance, the proposal was sidelined by a departmental committee dominated by professors who favored "traditional" canonical texts. The juniors' ideas were viewed as "too radical," reflecting the gatekeeping power of institutional elders.<sup>64</sup>

Institutional innovation in many Nigerian HEIs is frequently stifled by cumbersome administrative procedures. For junior academics, even minor reform initiatives, such as modifying assessment methods or proposing new learning tools must pass through multiple layers of approval, discouraging experimentation and timely adaptation. In a state university in South-East Nigeria, a group of early-career lecturers attempted to digitize attendance and grading systems using open-source platforms.<sup>65</sup> After more than a year of departmental and faculty-level reviews, their proposal remained in limbo due to lack of "official guidelines" for software approval. This prolonged process led to disillusionment among the lecturers and the eventual abandonment of the project.<sup>66</sup>

A notable cultural challenge lies in the intergenerational divide between early-career academics and senior faculty. While junior staff members tend to be more globally connected, digitally literate, and pedagogically progressive, their ideas are often dismissed as fads or distractions from the "serious business" of academia.<sup>67</sup> This creates a culture of discouragement and epistemic marginalization. For example, at a private university in North-Central Nigeria, a young academic who introduced podcasts and video content as supplementary material for his history class faced reprimand during departmental review for "diluting

academic rigor".<sup>68</sup> The reaction reflects a broader institutional skepticism towards non-traditional forms of teaching and a reluctance to embrace evolving knowledge systems.<sup>69</sup>

Although junior academics are central to the delivery of teaching and student engagement, their voices are often excluded from critical institutional conversations. Most decision-making bodies, such as academic boards and policy committees, are reserved for senior staff, reinforcing a culture where policy is formulated without input from those most affected by its implementation.<sup>70</sup> To support this, federal university in Northern Nigeria, changes to the general education curriculum were made without consultations with junior faculty, despite their role in delivering over 70% of the courses.<sup>71</sup> This exclusion led to mismatched expectations between curricular objectives and teaching realities, thereby undermining effective implementation.<sup>72</sup>

Effective mentorship is a key element of institutional culture that shapes junior academic growth. In many Nigerian HEIs, however, structured mentorship systems are weak or non-existent, leaving early-career academics to navigate complex institutional terrain alone.<sup>73</sup> This lack of guidance exacerbates feelings of professional isolation and undermines opportunities for transformative collaboration. To buttress this, at a university of education in South-South Nigeria, a needs assessment conducted by junior lecturers revealed that over 65% had never received formal mentorship in curriculum development or research grant writing.<sup>74</sup> Many expressed uncertainty about institutional

<sup>63</sup> Awodiji Afolayan & Yakub Musa, Leadership without position: Peer-led transformation among early-career academics in Nigerian HEIs. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Administration* 13, no.1, (2023): 24–39.

<sup>64</sup> Maruf Adesina & Christian Okonkwo, Hierarchies and the suppression of innovation in Nigerian university departments. *Journal of Critical Education Studies* 10, no.2, (2021): 44–59.

<sup>65</sup> Isaac Chukwu & Uwabo Nwafor, Student-led learning in Nigerian universities: Innovations in participatory pedagogy. *Journal of Higher Education Pedagogy* 7, no.2, (2023): 63–78.

<sup>66</sup> Veronica Nwachukwu & Rabiu Sulaiman, Teaching load and role conflict in Nigerian public universities. *Journal of Educational Workload and Equity* 3, no.2, (2022): 44–60.

<sup>67</sup> Obiskwe Ekanem & Johnbosco Oboh, Curricular rigidity and innovation fatigue in Nigerian HEIs. *Journal of Curriculum Studies in Africa* 5, no.1, (2023): 21–36.

<sup>68</sup> Bayero Ibrahim & Chike Nwankwo, Flipped classrooms in resource-constrained contexts: Insights from Nigeria. *West African Journal of Instructional Innovation* 5, no.1, (2023): 33–48.

<sup>69</sup> Idris Usman & Olutimilehin Adeyeye, Generational tensions in pedagogy: Technology resistance in Nigerian higher education.

*West African Journal of Educational Studies* 14, no.1, (2023): 61–77.

<sup>70</sup> Tade Ibikunle & John Nduka, Mentorship and academic isolation among junior faculty in Nigerian universities. *African Journal of Teacher Development* 7, no.4, (2022): 87–102.

<sup>71</sup> Lawal Mohammed and Abubakar Bello, Equity and technology in Nigerian higher education: The case of SMS-based micro-learning. *Journal of Inclusive Education in Africa* 6, no. 3, (2023): 90–105.

<sup>72</sup> Akeen Aliyu & Mohammed Garba, Exclusion in curriculum reform: Voices of junior academics in Nigerian HEIs. *Nigerian Journal of Higher Education Policy* 8, no.1, (2021): 28–43.

<sup>73</sup> Chris Nwachukwu & Kelvin Edeh, Administrative bottlenecks and digital fatigue: Challenges of academic innovation in Nigerian HEIs. *Journal of Educational Management and Technology* 5, no.3, (2022): 71–85.

<sup>74</sup> Tayo Ogunleye & Mujeeb Ajibola, Interdisciplinary teaching and collaborative pedagogy: Lessons from Nigerian HEIs. *Journal of Educational Innovation in Africa* 8, no.1, (2023): 51–66.

expectations and a lack of access to professional growth opportunities.<sup>75</sup>

The institutional cultures of Nigerian HEIs pose persistent challenges to junior academics seeking to enact transformative education. These cultures are often marked by rigidity, hierarchy, and exclusion, which collectively discourage innovation and limit professional agency.<sup>76</sup> Despite their exposure to progressive pedagogical frameworks and digital competencies, junior faculty often find themselves working against an institutional tide that resists change and undervalues their contributions. To shift this dynamic, there is a need for a deliberate reconfiguration of institutional cultures moving from top-down, status-quo-preserving bureaucracies toward inclusive, adaptive, and innovation-driven environments.<sup>77</sup> This involves rethinking mentorship, decentralizing decision-making, incentivizing experimentation, and revaluing junior academic voices not as subordinates, but as co-architects of educational transformation.

#### 4. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: LEADERSHIP AND INNOVATION

Leadership in pedagogy among junior academic staff is often invisible within formal university hierarchies, yet their actions and agency play a pivotal role in transforming educational experiences. Despite structural challenges, many early-career academics in Nigerian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are demonstrating notable leadership through innovative pedagogical practices, curriculum redesign, and community engagement. These actions reflect a form of transformational leadership one that is value-driven, collaborative, and student-centered.<sup>78</sup> This section explores how junior faculty members are taking the initiative to lead change, often without positional authority

##### *Demonstrating Leadership in Pedagogical Innovation*

<sup>75</sup> Tade Ibikunle & John Nduka, Mentorship and academic isolation among junior faculty in Nigerian universities. *African Journal of Teacher Development* 7, no.4, (2022): 87–102.

<sup>76</sup> Samuel Oladele & Temitayo Akinyemi, Teaching through Telegram: Mobile learning in Nigerian public universities during crises. *African Journal of Mobile Education* 3, no.4, (2022): 54–72.

<sup>77</sup> Lukman Usman & Hafiz Danjuma, Mentorship in crisis: An analysis of early-career faculty development in Nigeria. *West African Journal of Higher Education Leadership* 4, no.3, (2023): 58–74.

<sup>78</sup> Bernard Bass & Ronald Riggio, *Transformational leadership* (2nd ed.). United Kingdom: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006.

Junior academics are increasingly using collaborative teaching models, peer mentoring, and interdisciplinary approaches to enhance learning outcomes. These innovations not only foster teamwork but also model inclusive leadership that moves away from traditional silos and competition. At a federal university in South-West Nigeria, a team of junior lecturers from the Departments of Sociology and Education collaborated to create an interdisciplinary course titled "*Youth, Culture, and Development*".<sup>79</sup> Drawing on both social theory and pedagogical frameworks, the course integrated fieldwork, digital storytelling, and group projects. Their initiative gained wide recognition from students and was adopted into the university's elective course offerings.<sup>80</sup>

Many junior academics are spearheading contextualized curriculum development designing content that reflects Nigerian realities while engaging global discourses. This bottom-up innovation is often in response to perceived irrelevance in existing curricula dominated by colonial-era syllabi or disconnected Western models. In a state university in North-East Nigeria, an early-career academic in Environmental Science redesigned a core course "*Environmental Sustainability in African Contexts*".<sup>81</sup> The updated syllabus emphasized indigenous knowledge systems, local case studies, and participatory action research. This curriculum innovation was later adopted by the university's Centre for Sustainable Development as a flagship course.<sup>82</sup> Transformative pedagogical approaches often involve a shift from teacher-centered models to student-led learning, where learners take responsibility for their own academic journeys. Junior academics are increasingly integrating practices like flipped classrooms, reflective journals, and peer assessments to

<sup>79</sup> Idris Usman & Olutimilehin Adeyeye, Generational tensions in pedagogy: Technology resistance in Nigerian higher education. *West African Journal of Educational Studies* 14, no.1, (2023): 61–77.

<sup>80</sup> Tayo Ogunleye & Mujeeb Ajibola, Interdisciplinary teaching and collaborative pedagogy: Lessons from Nigerian HEIs. *Journal of Educational Innovation in Africa* 8, no.1, (2023): 51–66.

<sup>81</sup> Maruf Adesina & Christian Okonkwo, Hierarchies and the suppression of innovation in Nigerian university departments. *Journal of Critical Education Studies* 10, no.2, (2021): 44–59.

<sup>82</sup> Sodiq Yahaya & David Okoli, Contextualizing curriculum in environmental science: Local responses to global challenges. *Nigerian Environmental Education Review* 4, no.2, (2022): 74–88.

empower students.<sup>83</sup> In a federal university in South-East Nigeria, a group of young lecturers introduced a “Learning Lab” series in the Faculty of Arts, where students led seminars on selected course themes, facilitated peer-to-peer workshops, and co-developed assignments with lecturers.<sup>84</sup> The initiative was linked to increased student performance and engagement, and received commendation during accreditation reviews.<sup>85</sup>

Though not always recognized in formal evaluations, some junior academics are pushing boundaries by advocating for institutional change in teaching policy and quality assurance frameworks.<sup>86</sup> Their voices, often channeled through teaching and learning committees or student support initiatives, are gradually reshaping institutional attitudes toward pedagogy. At a university of education in North-Central Nigeria, early-career academics in the Faculty of Education successfully lobbied for the inclusion of a “Pedagogical Innovation Award” in the university’s annual staff evaluation process.<sup>87</sup> This formal recognition of teaching excellence helped shift institutional focus toward educational leadership not just research output.<sup>88</sup>

Despite being located in structurally unequal and often under-resourced systems, junior academics in Nigerian HEIs are emerging as critical pedagogical leaders not through formal authority, but through innovation, collaboration, and courage.<sup>89</sup> Their efforts exemplify transformational and distributed leadership, rooted in empathy, critical consciousness, and responsiveness to local educational needs. This leadership is bottom-up and practice-driven, challenging conventional power dynamics within the academy.<sup>90</sup> It signals a growing movement among early-career academics who are not

content with simply inheriting outdated pedagogical models, but are instead reimagining education from within, often with minimal institutional support.

### *Incorporating Technology in Teaching and Learning: Examples in Nigerian Higher Education*

In the digital era, technology has become a central driver of transformative education globally.<sup>91</sup> However, in the Nigerian Higher Education context, the integration of educational technologies presents a complex mix of potential and limitations. Junior academic staff members are at the forefront of this evolving landscape, often leading efforts to embed digital tools into teaching and learning processes despite systemic constraints such as inadequate infrastructure, institutional inertia, and limited professional development support.

While digital pedagogies have gained global traction, Nigerian HEIs still contend with unreliable internet connectivity, power supply issues, and limited access to institutional e-learning platforms.<sup>92</sup> Nonetheless, junior lecturers are increasingly adopting alternative platforms and tools to enhance student learning, often at their own expense or initiative. For instance, at a public university in South-West Nigeria, junior academics in the Faculty of Business Administration resorted to using WhatsApp and Telegram groups to conduct classes during extended strikes and shutdowns.<sup>93</sup> These platforms allowed them to share lecture materials, host discussions, and manage assignments, offering a low-

<sup>83</sup> Obiskwe Ekanem & Johnbosco Oboh, Curricular rigidity and innovation fatigue in Nigerian HEIs. *Journal of Curriculum Studies in Africa* 5, no.1, (2023): 21–36.

<sup>84</sup> Awodiji Afolayan & Yakub Musa, Leadership without position: Peer-led transformation among early-career academics in Nigerian HEIs. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Administration* 13, no.1, (2023): 24–39.

<sup>85</sup> Isaac Chukwu & Uwabo Nwafor, Student-led learning in Nigerian universities: Innovations in participatory pedagogy. *Journal of Higher Education Pedagogy* 7, no.2, (2023): 63–78.

<sup>86</sup> Bayero Ibrahim & Chike Nwankwo, Flipped classrooms in resource-constrained contexts: Insights from Nigeria. *West African Journal of Instructional Innovation* 5, no.1, (2023): 33–48.

<sup>87</sup> Lawal Mohammed and Abubakar Bello, Equity and technology in Nigerian higher education: The case of SMS-based micro-learning. *Journal of Inclusive Education in Africa* 6, no. 3, (2023): 90–105.

<sup>88</sup> Oluwatumji Adewale & Kabir Bello, Teaching excellence and policy advocacy among early-career academics in Nigeria.

*Nigerian Journal of Educational Development* 9, no.1, (2023): 29–42.

<sup>89</sup> Veronica Nwachukwu & Rabiul Sulaiman, Teaching load and role conflict in Nigerian public universities. *Journal of Educational Workload and Equity* 3, no.2, (2022): 44–60.

<sup>90</sup> Tayo Ogunleye & Mujeeb Ajibola, Interdisciplinary teaching and collaborative pedagogy: Lessons from Nigerian HEIs. *Journal of Educational Innovation in Africa* 8, no.1, (2023): 51–66.

<sup>91</sup> Samuel Oladele & Temitayo Akinyemi, Teaching through Telegram: Mobile learning in Nigerian public universities during crises. *African Journal of Mobile Education* 3, no.4, (2022): 54–72.

<sup>92</sup> Lukman Usman & Hafiz Danjuma, Mentorship in crisis: An analysis of early-career faculty development in Nigeria. *West African Journal of Higher Education Leadership* 4, no.3, (2023): 58–74.

<sup>93</sup> Tayo Ogunleye & Mujeeb Ajibola, Interdisciplinary teaching and collaborative pedagogy: Lessons from Nigerian HEIs. *Journal of Educational Innovation in Africa* 8, no.1, (2023): 51–66.

cost, mobile-friendly solution to keep students engaged.<sup>94</sup>

Despite the limitations in institutional Learning Management Systems (LMS), several junior academics have pioneered blended learning approaches combining traditional face-to-face instruction with asynchronous online engagement. This approach has proven effective in improving learner flexibility, reducing lecture congestion, and fostering continuous learning outside the classroom.<sup>95</sup> For better understanding, at a federal university in North-Central Nigeria, a group of junior lecturers in Education introduced a flipped classroom model where students accessed pre-recorded lectures via YouTube and used in-class sessions for collaborative problem-solving.<sup>96</sup> Students reported improved comprehension and participation, especially in large undergraduate classes.<sup>97</sup>

Junior academics have taken the initiative to develop localized educational technologies and content that reflects both curriculum needs and cultural context.<sup>98</sup> These include podcast series, interactive videos, mobile-friendly modules, and web-based assessments designed for low-bandwidth environments. In a state university in South-East Nigeria, a young academic created an audio-based revision series for rural students preparing for end-of-semester examinations.<sup>99</sup> The series was distributed via mobile memory cards and WhatsApp voice notes, significantly increasing revision participation among students in low-internet-access regions.

While junior staff members are innovating on their own, many institutions still lack structured support systems for educational technology integration. There's often no formal training, technical assistance, or reward systems for digital teaching excellence.<sup>100</sup> This leads to a sense of digital burnout and disconnect between institutional aspirations and practical implementation. A typical example is that of a federal university in South-South Nigeria, a survey of junior academics revealed that over 75% had never received any formal training in e-learning pedagogy, despite being expected to use institutional LMS platforms like Moodle. Many reported having to troubleshoot technical issues independently, leading to frustration and reduced usage over time.<sup>101</sup> Technology integration also highlights digital equity issues, especially between urban and rural campuses, private and public institutions, and even among students themselves.<sup>102</sup> Junior academics are often caught in the tension between pedagogical innovation and the socioeconomic realities of their students, many of whom lack access to smartphones, data, or steady electricity. At a university of education in North-East Nigeria, efforts by a team of early-career staff to introduce an app-based learning platform for science students faced setbacks when over 40% of the student population reported not owning smartphones or facing data affordability issues.<sup>103</sup> This digital divide ultimately limited the program's success and led to a redesign toward SMS-based micro-learning.<sup>104</sup>

The incorporation of technology in teaching and learning in Nigerian HEIs is a story of resilience, innovation, and improvisation, largely led by junior academic staff.<sup>105</sup> These educators are demonstrating

<sup>94</sup> Allan Collins & Richard Halverson, *Rethinking education in the age of technology: The digital revolution and schooling in America*. Teachers College Press, 2018.

<sup>95</sup> Funso Adebayo & Adama Musa, *Strategic visions vs. ground realities: Technology and pedagogy in Nigerian universities*. *Higher Education in Africa* 11, no.2, (2022): 55-70

<sup>96</sup> Idris Usman & Olutimilehin Adeyeye, *Generational tensions in pedagogy: Technology resistance in Nigerian higher education*. *West African Journal of Educational Studies* 14, no.1, (2023): 61-77.

<sup>97</sup> Bayero Ibrahim & Chike Nwankwo, *Flipped classrooms in resource-constrained contexts: Insights from Nigeria*. *West African Journal of Instructional Innovation* 5, no.1, (2023): 33-48.

<sup>98</sup> Maruf Adesina & Christian Okonkwo, *Hierarchies and the suppression of innovation in Nigerian university departments*. *Journal of Critical Education Studies* 10, no.2, (2021): 44-59.

<sup>99</sup> Isiah Nnaji & Chukwu Okoro, *Localized audio learning in rural Nigerian universities: A low-tech pedagogical innovation*. *Nigerian Journal of Open and Distance Learning* 4, no.2, (2022): 67-80.

<sup>100</sup> Femi Adebayo and Oduolowo Akinola, *Challenges of academic staff development in Nigerian public universities:*

*Implications for educational transformation*. *Journal of Education and Practice* 12, no. 14, (2021): 10-17.

<sup>101</sup> Hassan Abubakar and Emma Essien, *Digital challenges in Nigerian higher education: Voices from early-career faculty*. *Journal of Educational Technology and Policy* 7, no. 2, (2021): 45-61.

<sup>102</sup> Awodiji Afolayan & Yakub Musa, *Leadership without position: Peer-led transformation among early-career academics in Nigerian HEIs*. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Administration* 13, no.1, (2023): 24-39.

<sup>103</sup> Obiskwe Ekanem & Johnbosco Oboh, *Curricular rigidity and innovation fatigue in Nigerian HEIs*. *Journal of Curriculum Studies in Africa* 5, no.1, (2023): 21-36.

<sup>104</sup> Lawal Mohammed and Abubakar Bello, *Equity and technology in Nigerian higher education: The case of SMS-based micro-learning*. *Journal of Inclusive Education in Africa* 6, no. 3, (2023): 90-105.

<sup>105</sup> Obasi, E. & Nkereuwem, A. (2022). *Institutional inertia and educational reform: A study of faculty-led innovation in Nigerian HEIs*. *Journal of Policy and Curriculum Studies*, 14(1), 66-79.

adaptability and creativity in using digital tools often in resource-poor contexts to drive student engagement and curriculum relevance. However, without adequate institutional support, these efforts remain fragile and unsustainable.

### *Conflict between Institutional Goals and Academic Staff Members' Daily Reality in Nigerian Higher Education*

Transformative education in theory is underpinned by ideals such as innovation, inclusivity, and continuous learning. However, in practice, junior academic staff members in Nigerian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) frequently encounter a deep misalignment between institutional goals and the realities of their professional lives.<sup>106</sup> These disconnections are often rooted in systemic challenges such as bureaucratic rigidity, poor mentorship, limited autonomy, and digital inequality.

Institutional strategic plans in many Nigerian universities are replete with ambitious language about 21st-century education, digital transformation, and global competitiveness.<sup>107</sup> Yet, these visions often fail to trickle down into actual classroom practices or support systems for junior staff. In a study involving four public universities across South-West Nigeria, it was found that while institutional frameworks promised “digitally enabled pedagogy” and “student-centered learning,” junior lecturers reported that outdated chalk-and-board teaching was still dominant, with little institutional investment in digital tools or training.<sup>108</sup> These gaps leave early career academics disillusioned, as they are expected to align with transformative goals but are not provided with the resources or structural support to do so.

Mentorship is a critical component of professional development for early-career academics, yet in many

Nigerian HEIs, structured mentoring systems are either non-existent or ineffective. This lack of guidance hinders junior academics from fully exploring and embedding transformative pedagogical approaches.<sup>109</sup> At three universities in Northern Nigeria, junior staff indicated in interviews that mentorship was “informal and inaccessible,” often dependent on the personal disposition of senior colleagues rather than being part of a structured academic development plan.<sup>110</sup> As a result, many junior academics expressed uncertainty about how to navigate academic publishing, teaching innovation, or institutional leadership pathways.<sup>111</sup>

The national push toward digital education has not been accompanied by equitable access to resources, leaving many junior academics and their students disadvantaged. Disparities are particularly evident across regions (urban vs. rural), institution types (public vs. private), and among staff of differing socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>112</sup> A comparative study of three institutions, one federal, one state, and one private showed stark difference in technology access. While the private institution had high-speed internet, digital whiteboards, and institutional Zoom accounts, the public universities relied on outdated desktops, no LMS training, and frequent blackouts. Junior lecturers in public HEIs were often forced to use personal funds to run online classes or access journals.<sup>113</sup>

Despite rhetoric around academic freedom, many junior academics operate in restrictive environments where decision-making power is concentrated in senior management. Curriculum updates, research directions, and pedagogical innovations often require cumbersome approvals, discouraging creativity.<sup>114</sup> In South-South Nigeria, a junior lecturer attempted to introduce an interdisciplinary module combining arts and digital media but was denied approval due to “lack of alignment with departmental tradition.” Such incidents highlight how rigid institutional cultures can stifle

<sup>106</sup> Tade Ibikunle & John Nduka, Mentorship and academic isolation among junior faculty in Nigerian universities. *African Journal of Teacher Development* 7, no.4, (2022): 87-102.

<sup>107</sup> Audu Ibrahim & Paul Eze, Gamification in higher education: A case study from South-South Nigeria. *African Journal of Digital Learning* 6, no.3, (2022): 85-97.

<sup>108</sup> Hassan Abubakar and Emma Essien, Digital challenges in Nigerian higher education: Voices from early-career faculty. *Journal of Educational Technology and Policy* 7, no. 2, (2021): 45-61.

<sup>109</sup> Veronica Nwachukwu & Rabiul Sulaiman, Teaching load and role conflict in Nigerian public universities. *Journal of Educational Workload and Equity* 3, no.2, (2022): 44-60.

<sup>110</sup> Peter Ololube, Obi Uriah, & Kpolovie Egbezor, (2019). Education policies and teachers' professional development in

Nigeria: Myths and realities. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 8(3), 204-212.

<sup>111</sup> Alao Olowu & Zubair Ibrahim, The promise and paradox of inclusive education in Nigerian universities. *Nigerian Journal of Inclusive Education* 4, no.1, (2022): 66-84.

<sup>112</sup> Kolade Ogunyemi & Praise Edeh, Digital disparities across Nigerian tertiary institutions: Implications for equity. *Journal of ICT and Education Policy* 8, no.1, (2022): 87-103.

<sup>113</sup> Ahmed Danladi & Sheu Adamu, Curriculum politics and cultural responsiveness in Nigerian higher education. *African Curriculum Studies Journal* 9, no.2, (2021): 66-80.

<sup>114</sup> Akeen Aliyu & Mohammed Garba, Exclusion in curriculum reform: Voices of junior academics in Nigerian HEIs. *Nigerian Journal of Higher Education Policy* 8, no.1, (2021): 28-43.

experimentation and responsiveness to contemporary educational needs.<sup>115</sup> Junior academics are often burdened with administrative tasks, large teaching loads, and service responsibilities that dilute their focus on teaching innovation or research. This workload pressure directly contradicts the transformative education agenda, which requires time, reflection, and iterative engagement.<sup>116</sup> For example, across five universities surveyed, junior lecturers reported handling over 400 undergraduate students per semester, sometimes across multiple courses, with limited teaching assistants.<sup>117</sup> In such conditions, it becomes nearly impossible to integrate reflective, inclusive, or technology-rich pedagogies.<sup>118</sup>

## 5. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underscore the nuanced realities that shape how transformative education is understood, practised and challenged among junior academic staff in Nigerian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). While transformative education offers a compelling vision centered on critical thinking, social justice, technological innovation, and inclusive learning the journey toward its actualization is anything but linear in the Global South. For Nigerian junior academics, the pursuit of educational transformation is marked by a paradox: deep commitment amid profound constraints.

The empirical insights presented in this paper drawn from multi-institutional cases across regions, institution types, and disciplines reveal the depth of institutional complexity that early-career academics must navigate. These include misaligned policy expectations, outdated administrative cultures, digital inequity, lack of mentorship, and overwhelming workloads. Yet, within these challenges lie powerful examples of grassroots creativity, leadership in pedagogical innovation, and resilient adaptation, driven largely by junior academics' passion for change. Therefore, the sustainability and scalability of transformative education in Nigerian HEIs depend on a deliberate restructuring of institutional ecosystems. This means shifting from abstract policy

declarations to actionable, context-sensitive strategies that support and empower early-career educators.

To bridge the gap between transformative ideals and practical realities in higher education, a series of strategic policy and institutional interventions are recommended. First, there is a pressing need to establish structured, cross-generational mentorship programs aimed at fostering innovation in teaching, enhancing research productivity, and building leadership capacity among academic staff. These initiatives should be complemented by well-funded professional development workshops tailored specifically for junior academics. Such workshops should focus on digital pedagogy, inclusive education practices, and critical thinking approaches to equip early-career scholars with the tools needed to thrive in a rapidly evolving academic landscape. Second, policies must be designed and implemented to formally recognize and institutionalize the contributions of early-career academics. This includes ensuring their meaningful representation in curriculum development and governance reforms. At the same time, flexible, bottom-up innovation frameworks should be encouraged, enabling junior staff to initiate, pilot, and scale educational models that are contextually relevant and responsive to local needs.

Third, infrastructure investment should be prioritized. This includes ensuring reliable campus-wide Wi-Fi, consistent power supply, and access to modern digital learning platforms. In tandem, dedicated Educational Technology (EdTech) innovation units should be established. These units would provide technical support, seed grants, and collaborative workspaces to support the creation and dissemination of digital teaching resources. Fourth, decentralizing certain aspects of academic decision-making is essential to empower innovation. This is particularly relevant in areas such as course design and pedagogical experimentation, where junior academics can play a transformative role. To support these efforts, rapid-response funding mechanisms should be established to finance small-scale, high-impact innovation projects led by early-career faculty members. Finally, targeted initiatives are needed to bridge the digital divide and

<sup>115</sup> Obiskwe Ekanem & Johnbosco Oboh, Curricular rigidity and innovation fatigue in Nigerian HEIs. *Journal of Curriculum Studies in Africa* 5, no.1, (2023): 21–36.

<sup>116</sup> Tade Ibikunle & John Nduka, Mentorship and academic isolation among junior faculty in Nigerian universities. *African Journal of Teacher Development* 7, no.4, (2022): 87–102.

<sup>117</sup> Obiskwe Ekanem & Johnbosco Oboh, Curricular rigidity and innovation fatigue in Nigerian HEIs. *Journal of Curriculum Studies in Africa* 5, no.1, (2023): 21–36.

<sup>118</sup> Veronica Nwachukwu & Rabi Sulaiman, Teaching load and role conflict in Nigerian public universities. *Journal of Educational Workload and Equity* 3, no.2, (2022): 44–60.

promote equity in access to education. These may include device lending schemes, the development of mobile-based and offline-compatible learning platforms, and the creation of regional EdTech hubs. Such hubs would be instrumental in supporting rural or under-resourced institutions and improving accessibility for marginalized student populations.

This study is exploratory and desktop-based work, and further field work or longitudinal studies would be welcome in these areas. However, collectively, these recommendations are well grounded and backed by solid available data. They aim to create a more inclusive, dynamic, and innovation-friendly academic environment that fully leverages the potential of early-career academics while addressing systemic barriers to transformation. In the long run, for transformative education to move beyond rhetoric in Nigerian HEIs, it must be grounded in the realities, voices, and agency of junior academic staff. These educators are not just implementers of policy; they are agents of change, capable of redefining teaching and learning within structurally constrained environments. Empowering them requires a shift in both perspective and practice: from top-down mandates to collaborative, inclusive, and context-responsive innovation ecosystems. If the higher education sector in Nigeria is serious about transformative change, then supporting its youngest and most dynamic educators is not optional but it is essential.

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