East African Scholars Journal of Education, Humanities and Literature
Abbreviated Key Title: East African Scholars J Edu Humanit Lit
ISSN: 2617-443X (Print) & ISSN: 2617-7250 (Online)
Published By East African Scholars Publisher, Kenya
Volume-9 | Issue-4 | Apr- 2026 | DOI: https://doi.org/10.36349/easjehl.2026.v09i04.004

OPEN ACCESS

Review Article

Reimagining Innovative Learning in Nigerian Universities: The Role of Canva as an Emerging Instructional Technology Tool

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Article History
Received: 04.02.2026
Accepted: 26.03.2026
Published: 10.04.2026

Journal homepage:
https://www.easpublisher.com

Quick Response Code

Abstract: This paper examined the potential of Canva as an emerging instructional technology capable of fostering innovative learning practices in Nigerian universities. The growing demand for digitally mediated and student-centred learning environments has necessitated the exploration of accessible technological tools that can enhance creativity, engagement, and knowledge construction among university students. Against the backdrop of persistent reliance on traditional lecture-centred pedagogy in many higher education institutions, the paper argues that the integration of Canva offers a practical pathway for transforming instructional practices and supporting the development of twenty-first-century skills. Drawing on contemporary literature on educational technology and innovative pedagogy, the paper conceptualises innovative learning within higher education and examines the instructional features of Canva that make it suitable for academic environments. Particular attention is given to its capacity to promote visual literacy, collaborative learning, creative knowledge representation, and improved student engagement through multimodal instructional design. The discussion also identifies key contextual challenges that may hinder the effective adoption of such technologies in Nigerian universities, including inadequate digital infrastructure, limited digital pedagogical competence among lecturers, and issues related to technological accessibility and academic rigour. To address these concerns, the paper proposes strategic institutional approaches involving curriculum integration, professional development for lecturers, infrastructural investment, and supportive educational policies that encourage technology-enhanced learning environments. It concludes that while Canva alone cannot resolve systemic pedagogical challenges within higher education, its deliberate and structured incorporation into teaching practices can significantly contribute to the modernisation of university pedagogy and the advancement of innovative learning in Nigeria's higher education system.

Keywords: Innovation, Innovative Learning, Technology, Instructional Technology Tool, Canva.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary higher education landscape has increasingly been subjected to the pressures of technological transformation and global competitiveness, resulting in the gradual erosion of traditional lecture-centred pedagogical arrangements that once dominated university classrooms. Within many universities, including those operating in Nigeria, the teaching–learning process has historically been organised around passive knowledge transmission, whereby students function primarily as recipients of pre-packaged information rather than as active constructors of knowledge. Such a paradigm has been widely criticised by contemporary educational scholars for its inability to cultivate creativity, critical thinking, and collaborative problem-solving competencies required in the twenty-first century knowledge economy. In response, a noticeable shift towards digitally mediated and innovative learning environments has begun to emerge, emphasising learner engagement, experiential

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activities, and technology-enhanced knowledge construction. Scholars have argued that educational innovation now depends largely on the strategic adoption of digital technologies capable of transforming classroom practices and fostering interactive pedagogical cultures (Shree, 2022).

Within this evolving educational ecosystem, particular attention has been drawn to the utilisation of digital content-creation platforms that simplify the production of visual learning materials. Among such platforms is Canva, a web-based graphic design application that allows users to generate presentations, infographics, posters, videos, and other visual artefacts through user-friendly templates and collaborative editing features. The increasing accessibility of such tools has begun to alter how academic information is presented, communicated, and internalised by learners. Studies conducted in educational settings demonstrate that learners often perceive the integration of visual design tools such as Canva as both engaging and supportive of comprehension, particularly when assignments involve the creation of infographics or visual summaries of academic content (Zahroh & Febrianingrum, 2023).

Despite the global proliferation of educational technologies, their systematic integration within Nigerian universities remains uneven. The persistence of infrastructure limitations, limited pedagogical training in educational technology, and institutional resistance to pedagogical innovation continue to constrain the full exploitation of digital instructional tools. Consequently, the instructional potential of platforms such as Canva has remained relatively underexplored within the Nigerian higher education context, even though such tools possess the capacity to support innovative learning practices that align with contemporary educational goals. It is within this context that this opinion paper advances the argument that the deliberate and strategic incorporation of Canva into university teaching practices can serve as a catalyst for innovative learning by stimulating creativity, enhancing visual literacy, and fostering collaborative knowledge construction among students.

Conceptualising Innovative Learning in Higher Education

Innovative learning has gradually emerged as a central concept within contemporary educational discourse, largely because traditional modes of instruction are increasingly regarded as insufficient for preparing students for complex societal and professional challenges. Within the higher education context, innovative learning may be broadly understood as a pedagogical orientation that emphasises creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and technology-mediated knowledge construction. Rather than positioning learners as passive recipients of information, innovative learning environments reconfigure students as active participants who generate knowledge through exploration, problem-solving, and collaborative engagement. This transformation reflects a broader shift in educational philosophy, whereby learning is conceptualised not merely as the memorisation of information but as a dynamic process of intellectual interaction between learners, instructors, and digital resources.

The growing prominence of digital technologies within higher education has further accelerated this transformation. The integration of cloud-based tools, collaborative platforms, and adaptive learning systems has created opportunities for more personalised and interactive learning experiences. For instance, cloud-supported educational systems enable students to access learning resources, collaborate on assignments, and communicate with instructors regardless of geographical constraints, thereby expanding the spatial and temporal boundaries of learning environments (Marienko *et al*., 2020).

From a pedagogical perspective, innovative learning also involves the deliberate utilisation of diverse instructional strategies designed to cultivate higher-order thinking skills. Such strategies include project-based learning, digital storytelling, multimedia presentations, and visual knowledge representation. These approaches emphasise learner autonomy and encourage students to synthesise information through creative expression rather than merely reproducing theoretical content. As Shree (2022) argues, the transformation of higher education pedagogy towards interactive and learner-centred methods is essential for nurturing durable and employable skills among students in an increasingly complex global economy.

Within this evolving pedagogical landscape, visual communication technologies have gained increasing relevance, particularly because contemporary learners are immersed in digitally mediated environments dominated by visual information. The ability to design and interpret visual representations of knowledge has therefore become an essential academic competence. Consequently, tools that facilitate visual content creation are gradually being incorporated into teaching practices as instruments for promoting innovative learning experiences.

Overview of Canva as an Instructional Technology Tool

The emergence of accessible digital design platforms has significantly transformed the ways in which educational materials are produced and disseminated. Among the most widely utilised platforms is Canva, a cloud-based graphic design application that allows users to create a wide variety of visual artefacts through an intuitive drag-and-drop interface. Unlike traditional design software that often requires specialised technical expertise, Canva has been designed to accommodate users with minimal graphic design experience, thereby democratising the process of visual

content creation. Through its extensive repository of templates, icons, fonts, and collaborative editing features, the platform enables users to design presentations, infographics, educational posters, animated videos, and social media graphics with relative ease.

The educational relevance of Canva lies primarily in its capacity to support the development of visually rich instructional materials capable of enhancing learner engagement. Researchers have observed that the platform's extensive template library and customisable design elements enable educators to transform abstract academic concepts into visually compelling learning resources (Armilah *et al*., 2023). The simplicity of the interface further allows students themselves to participate in the creation of learning materials, thereby shifting them from passive consumers of information to active producers of knowledge artefacts.

Furthermore, Canva's cloud-based architecture facilitates collaborative learning activities by enabling multiple users to simultaneously edit and contribute to a shared design project. Such collaborative capabilities align with contemporary pedagogical principles that emphasise teamwork and peer-to-peer knowledge exchange. In addition, the platform's compatibility with various multimedia formats—including images, audio, video, and animations—enables instructors to design multimodal learning materials capable of addressing diverse learning preferences among students.

Given these capabilities, it becomes increasingly evident that the pedagogical value of Canva extends beyond mere aesthetic enhancement of teaching materials. Rather, the platform represents a potential instructional technology tool capable of facilitating innovative learning practices that emphasise creativity, collaboration, and visual knowledge representation.

Potential Contributions of Canva to Innovative Learning

The pedagogical integration of Canva within higher education environments has increasingly been interpreted as a mechanism through which innovative learning practices may be operationalised. Within many contemporary classrooms, learning activities have gradually been reconfigured to emphasise creativity, interaction, and knowledge production rather than mere knowledge reception. In such contexts, digital design platforms function not simply as auxiliary technological tools but as environments through which the process of knowledge construction becomes visually mediated and collaboratively negotiated. When utilised within structured instructional frameworks, Canva facilitates the transformation of traditional assignments into design-oriented learning tasks in which students are compelled to translate theoretical ideas into visually structured artefacts such as infographics, concept maps, and multimedia presentations. Such processes inevitably require the reorganisation, interpretation, and synthesis of academic information, thereby reinforcing deeper cognitive engagement with course content. Empirical investigations have demonstrated that the incorporation of visual design tasks within instructional activities can significantly improve students' conceptual understanding and learning outcomes because visual representation enhances the organisation and retention of complex information (Efendi *et al*., 2023).

Beyond cognitive reinforcement, the utilisation of Canva within instructional activities also contributes to the cultivation of creative competencies among university students. Creativity, widely recognised as a fundamental skill in the contemporary knowledge economy, is increasingly expected to be nurtured within higher education institutions. However, conventional pedagogical models often provide limited opportunities for creative expression due to their emphasis on standardised textual assessments. When students are required to produce visually designed academic outputs through platforms such as Canva, the learning process becomes inherently creative because students must make decisions regarding layout, symbolism, colour hierarchy, and information flow. These design decisions necessitate interpretative thinking and imaginative engagement with subject matter. Research conducted on digital learning media indicates that the integration of design-based tools encourages students to experiment with innovative ways of communicating knowledge, thereby strengthening both creativity and visual literacy skills (Gurning *et al*., 2024).

In addition to fostering creativity, Canva contributes significantly to the promotion of collaborative learning environments. The platform's cloud-based collaborative features allow multiple users to simultaneously edit and comment on shared design projects, thereby facilitating peer interaction and cooperative problem-solving. Such collaborative dynamics are consistent with contemporary pedagogical theories that conceptualise learning as a socially mediated process. When students work collectively on the design of educational materials, the process of negotiation, feedback exchange, and shared responsibility emerges as an integral component of the learning experience. Consequently, knowledge production becomes distributed among participants rather than concentrated within the authority of the instructor. These collaborative interactions not only reinforce conceptual understanding but also cultivate interpersonal competencies such as teamwork, communication, and conflict resolution, all of which are highly valued in professional environments.

Canva's capacity to support multimodal communication significantly enhances student engagement with academic content. Traditional textual forms of instruction frequently fail to capture the attention of students who are increasingly accustomed to

visually rich digital environments. By integrating images, animations, charts, icons, and videos within academic presentations, instructors are able to create visually stimulating learning materials that align with contemporary students' digital literacy practices. This multimodal approach to learning allows complex ideas to be communicated through multiple sensory channels, thereby increasing comprehension and retention. Studies investigating the use of visual learning media have shown that students often demonstrate higher levels of motivation and participation when instructional materials incorporate engaging visual elements (Armilah *et al*., 2023).

The utilisation of Canva contributes to the development of digital competence among university students. As digital communication increasingly dominates professional and academic environments, the ability to design and present information effectively through visual media has become a critical skill. Through repeated engagement with design platforms, students gradually acquire competencies in visual communication, digital content creation, and information design. These competencies extend beyond the confines of the classroom and are directly transferable to professional contexts in which presentations, reports, and marketing materials are frequently produced through digital platforms. Thus, the integration of Canva within university instruction may be interpreted not merely as a pedagogical innovation but also as a strategy for preparing students to navigate digitally mediated professional environments.

Challenges and Concerns in Integrating Canva in Nigerian Universities

Despite the numerous pedagogical advantages associated with the use of digital design platforms in higher education, the effective integration of Canva within Nigerian universities cannot be assumed to occur without significant challenges. The Nigerian higher education system continues to confront structural and infrastructural limitations that frequently constrain the adoption of advanced educational technologies. One of the most persistent barriers relates to inadequate digital infrastructure within many institutions. Unstable internet connectivity, insufficient bandwidth capacity, and limited access to modern computing devices collectively create an environment in which the consistent utilisation of cloud-based learning platforms becomes difficult to sustain. Because Canva operates primarily as an online platform that requires stable internet access for collaborative editing and template retrieval, such infrastructural deficiencies inevitably limit its widespread adoption in resource-constrained educational environments.

Another challenge emerges from the limited digital pedagogical competence among university lecturers. Although many instructors possess strong disciplinary knowledge, familiarity with innovative instructional technologies remains uneven across institutions. Consequently, the potential pedagogical benefits of Canva may remain unrealised if educators lack the necessary training to integrate the platform into course design effectively. The successful utilisation of digital instructional tools requires more than technical familiarity; it demands pedagogical creativity in designing assignments that leverage technological affordances to achieve meaningful learning outcomes. Without structured professional development programmes focusing on digital pedagogy, instructors may either avoid adopting such tools altogether or employ them superficially without transforming underlying teaching practices.

Financial barriers also constitute a significant concern. Although Canva offers a free version with substantial functionality, access to premium educational features and advanced design resources often requires institutional subscriptions. For students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, the cost of reliable internet data packages required for continuous platform access may also present an additional burden. These economic considerations highlight the broader issue of digital inequality within higher education systems, where access to technological resources remains unevenly distributed among students. Such inequalities risk reinforcing educational disparities if innovative digital learning tools become accessible primarily to those with sufficient technological resources.

A further concern relates to the potential overemphasis on visual aesthetics at the expense of academic rigour. While visually appealing designs can enhance engagement, there exists the possibility that students may prioritise decorative presentation elements over substantive intellectual content. In such circumstances, assignments created through design platforms may become visually sophisticated yet academically superficial. This risk underscores the necessity of carefully structured assessment criteria that emphasise conceptual accuracy, analytical depth, and intellectual coherence rather than purely aesthetic qualities.

Thus, while the integration of Canva holds considerable promise for enhancing innovative learning, its implementation within Nigerian universities must be approached with careful consideration of infrastructural, pedagogical, and socio-economic constraints. Without addressing these contextual challenges, the transformative potential of digital instructional technologies may remain only partially realised.

Strategic Approaches for Effective Integration

In order for the pedagogical benefits of Canva to be fully realised within Nigerian higher education, deliberate and systematic integration strategies must be developed at both institutional and instructional levels.

The first strategic approach involves embedding Canva-based activities directly into course design rather than treating the platform as an optional supplementary tool. When incorporated within structured assignments—such as infographic development, visual research summaries, or collaborative presentation design—students are encouraged to interact with academic content through creative visual synthesis. Such integration transforms Canva from a mere presentation tool into a learning environment through which conceptual understanding is constructed.

Another crucial strategy involves the implementation of professional development programmes designed to enhance lecturers' digital pedagogical competence. Universities must recognise that the effective utilisation of instructional technologies requires continuous training and capacity building among academic staff. Workshops, seminars, and peer mentoring initiatives can provide instructors with practical guidance on designing Canva-based assignments, facilitating collaborative design projects, and assessing visually produced academic artefacts. Through such initiatives, lecturers gradually acquire the confidence and expertise required to integrate digital design tools into their teaching practices.

Institutional support also plays a critical role in facilitating the successful adoption of educational technologies. Universities should consider establishing digital learning centres or instructional technology units responsible for supporting lecturers and students in the use of innovative teaching tools. These units can provide technical assistance, curate educational templates, and develop institutional guidelines for integrating digital media within academic coursework. In addition, partnerships with technology providers could enable universities to obtain educational subscriptions that expand access to advanced platform features for both lecturers and students.

Equally important is the development of assessment frameworks that appropriately evaluate Canva-based academic outputs. Instructors must ensure that assignments involving digital design platforms are evaluated according to clearly defined criteria that prioritise conceptual clarity, research quality, and analytical reasoning. Visual design elements should complement rather than overshadow the intellectual substance of student work. By establishing balanced assessment frameworks, educators can encourage students to maintain academic rigour while simultaneously exploring creative forms of knowledge representation. Through the combination of curriculum integration, staff training, institutional support structures, and well-designed assessment strategies, the use of Canva can gradually become embedded within the pedagogical culture of Nigerian universities. Such systematic integration would enable the platform to function as a catalyst for broader instructional innovation rather than merely as a technological novelty.

Implications for Teaching, Learning, and Educational Policy

The pedagogical adoption of digital design platforms within university classrooms carries significant implications for teaching practices, learning experiences, and broader educational policy frameworks. At the level of classroom instruction, the integration of Canva encourages a transition from teacher-dominated instructional models towards more student-centred learning environments. When students are required to design visual representations of academic concepts, they actively participate in the construction of knowledge rather than passively receiving information from lecturers. This shift redefines the role of the instructor from that of a knowledge transmitter to that of a facilitator who guides students through processes of inquiry, exploration, and creative synthesis.

For students, the use of Canva introduces new modes of engagement with academic content. Rather than relying exclusively on textual essays or examinations, learners are provided opportunities to demonstrate understanding through visually structured outputs that require analytical thinking and conceptual organisation. Such diversity in assessment methods accommodates varied learning styles and encourages students to explore innovative approaches to communicating knowledge. As a result, the learning process becomes more inclusive and responsive to the needs of digitally oriented learners.

At the institutional level, the growing relevance of digital instructional technologies underscores the need for educational policies that prioritise technological innovation within higher education systems. Universities must develop comprehensive digital learning strategies that address issues such as infrastructure development, digital literacy training, and the integration of emerging educational technologies into academic programmes. Policymakers within national education ministries also have a critical role to play in supporting universities through funding initiatives and policy frameworks that encourage technology-enhanced learning environments.

In the broader context of global educational transformation, the adoption of tools such as Canva positions Nigerian universities within an evolving digital knowledge ecosystem where visual communication and multimedia literacy are increasingly valued. By embracing such technologies, institutions can enhance the competitiveness of their graduates in international academic and professional arenas. Thus, the integration of Canva extends beyond immediate classroom benefits and contributes to the broader modernisation of higher education systems.

CONCLUSION

The rapid expansion of digital technologies within contemporary society has fundamentally altered the ways in which knowledge is produced, communicated, and internalised. Within the higher education context, these transformations have prompted increasing calls for innovative pedagogical approaches capable of cultivating creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking among students. This opinion paper has argued that the integration of Canva into university teaching practices represents a promising pathway for advancing innovative learning within Nigerian universities. Through its accessible design interface, collaborative features, and multimodal communication capabilities, the platform enables students to engage with academic content through creative visual synthesis, thereby fostering deeper cognitive engagement and enhanced learning outcomes.

However, the successful realisation of these benefits is contingent upon addressing several contextual challenges, including infrastructural limitations, uneven digital pedagogical competence among lecturers, and issues of digital inequality. Without deliberate institutional strategies aimed at overcoming these barriers, the adoption of innovative instructional technologies may remain fragmented and limited in impact. Consequently, universities must pursue systematic integration strategies involving curriculum redesign, professional development initiatives, and supportive institutional policies.

Ultimately, the incorporation of Canva into higher education pedagogy should not be interpreted merely as a technological upgrade but as part of a broader transformation in the philosophy of teaching and learning. By encouraging students to construct knowledge through visual design, collaboration, and creative exploration, universities can cultivate learning environments that align more closely with the demands of the digital age. Such transformation is essential if Nigerian higher education institutions are to remain responsive to global educational developments and to prepare graduates capable of thriving within increasingly complex and technologically mediated professional landscapes.

Suggestions

1) University management and national education regulators should invest in reliable digital infrastructure, including high-speed campus internet and modern computer laboratories, to enable the effective use of cloud-based instructional technologies.
2) University authorities should institute continuous professional development programmes that train lecturers in digital pedagogy and the instructional integration of tools such as Canva.
3) Curriculum planners and academic departments should formally embed technology-supported creative assignments (e.g., infographics, digital presentations, and visual research summaries) into course assessment frameworks.
4) Educational policymakers and university administrators should establish institutional subscriptions and partnerships that provide students and lecturers with full educational access to digital learning platforms.
5) Regulatory bodies and university quality-assurance units should develop clear guidelines ensuring that the pedagogical use of visual design platforms strengthens academic rigour while promoting creativity and digital literacy.

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Cite This Article: Abe, Ezinne Chidinma & Ibanga Anthony Patrick (2026). Reimagining Innovative Learning in Nigerian Universities: The Role of Canva as an Emerging Instructional Technology Tool. *East African Scholars J Edu Humanit Lit, 9*(4), 137-142.