

EVOLUTION AND REVOLUTION OF ADULT LEARNING: EXPOSITION OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: The educational system has witnessed a number of laudable programs since inception in both formal and non-formal systems of education programs that were set up to empower adult educational skills, knowledge, decision- making processes. Correspondence education transformed into distance education which--with the advent of information and communication technology--is being referred to as Open and Distance Learning. The study looked at some of the existing Distance Learning Institute initiatives and other programmes in Nigeria. The programmes include National Teacher Institute (NTI) and Degree programme through Open and Distance Learning (OPL) in some universities including National Open University (NOUN) degree programmes. The researcher used descriptive survey to examine the institutions involved in Open and Distance Learning in Nigeria. The following were examined: their goals, scopes, successes, failures and challenges. The researcher recommended among other matters, that there should be academic collaboration between Nigerian Federal Universities and Open and Distance Learning Institutions in Nigeria.

Keywords: Correspondence, Open and Distance Learning, Information and Communication Technology

Adult education in Nigeria, having experienced a comeback following the independence and increasing prosperity of many Nigerian states, poses specific requirements on policy makers and planners to take into consideration indigenous cultural traits and characteristics. With a moderate backlash against western ideals and educational traditions, many universities and other institutes of higher education take it upon themselves to develop a new approach to adult and higher education. Non-formal education no doubt plays complementary and supplementary roles to the formal school system. The higher premium placed by government on formal basic education without commensurate attention to non-formal education is likely to inhibit the achievement of the desired results of the goals of education for all (EFA) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In essence, adequate attention has to be paid to non-formal basic education considering the large population of non-literate Nigerians that it is meant to serve.

The central position of Non-Formal Education (NFE) in the development of individual and society accounts for the conception of distance learning. It entails an in-depth discourse of policies and practices of non-formal education in Nigeria. Huge numbers of individuals need quickly to be provided with Basic Education especially through the Non-Formal Education system. Providing this type of Basic Education will ensure the useful knowledge necessary to lead and acquire productive, healthy and dignified lives.

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Open and distance learning (ODL), according to UNESCO, (1997) is the most remarkable development in the field of education and training of recent years. The history of distance Education started when the university extension movement, or what another school of thought regarded as University Extra Mural Non-Formal Education, was founded. The goal of James Stuarts was to bridge the gap between the ivory tower represented by the British Universities and workers, including the masses of the then British Society. James Stuarts and his group members experimented with correspondence education for women who were marginalised in Britain in the 19th century, which coincided with the period societies were organising correspondence education for women in England and United States of America. The correspondence Education later transformed into distance education and with the advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is now known as Open Distance Learning (ODL). Open Distance Learning has become increasingly popular with the emergence of radio, television and information and communication technology and communication technology for education instructions.

Open and distance learning is therefore a form of non-formal education through which organised learning activities and opportunities are provided to learners who study individually. Peters (2001) who developed one of the university's acknowledged theories of Distance Education called the "Theory of Industrialisation" Submitted that Distance Education is a form of didactic conversation made up of postulates including well developed self-instructional resources, trained facilitators, promotion of intellectual pleasure, unambiguous language and friendly environment.

Methodology of the Study

The researcher used descriptive survey to examine the institutions involved in Open and Distance Learning in Nigeria. Furthermore, descriptive survey was used to trace historical antecedent of Open and Distance Learning in Nigeria.

The Study of Distance Education

It is the development of distance education as an academic discipline that will have the most profound effect on its practice in the future.

Eric Gough, 1984

The generation from 1970 to 2000 in Nigeria witnessed a rapid development of the whole field of distance education that paralleled the success and achievements of the Open University. There has been a remarkable change in the quality, the quantity, the status and the influence of distance education provision. This change was linked to a world-wide shift from private to public provision. From 1870 to 1970, most of the systems were proprietary and the field was known as 'correspondence study' or 'home study' or 'external studies' (Keegan, 1996).

The first practical work in the area of distance education in Nigeria was carried out in the 1920s. Mr. Ogunlesi was the first indigenous Nigerian that got involved in the work of Open and Distance Education in the country beginning from the 1940s. By the close of the 1960s, many correspondence colleges had sprung up in Nigeria, which have helped many young people to pass secondary school level examinations for the purpose of gaining access into higher institutions (Omolewa, 2008).

The Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programme has been considered as one of the most important educational innovations in Nigeria. Open and Distance Learning has provided opportunities for those who could not afford to leave their job to attend to fulltime conventional education. UNESCO (2002) stated that in effort to meet the new and challenging demands for education and training, open and distance learning may be seen as an approach that is at least complementary and under certain circumstances an appropriate substitute for the face-to-face methods that still dominate most educational systems. Open and distance learning has offered access to many people who would have previously been denied access to educational opportunities based on where they live and work, poor-economic circumstances, social status, among other reasons. Open and distance learning remains the primary mechanism for the information-driven age, a tool that has bridged the gap between developed and developing communities across the world.

The provision of quality education to millions has been one of the challenges facing developing countries such as Nigeria (Jimoh, 2013). Experiences locally and globally have shown tremendously that conventional or formal education is enormously hard-pressed to meet the demands of the 21st century socio-educational milieu, especially for developing countries like Nigeria. As noted in a keynote address made in 2007 to the 3rd convocation of Covenant University (Okebukola, as cited in Jimoh, 2013) made some suggestions towards the way forward in solving the problem of over-population in universities as follows:

1. Re-introduction of the Higher School Certificate (H.S.C).
2. Qualified Polytechnics and Colleges of Education be given degree-awarding status.
3. The National Open University of Nigeria should be strengthened to take in more prospective undergraduates.

The federal government of Nigeria, early this year 2015, upgraded about three Colleges of Education to degree-awarding status and also naming them Universities of Education. However, open and distance education has, historically, been advanced as both a major means of up-grading the quality of education and succour for those who missed access to conventional schools. The revised National policy on education (2014) listed the goals of distance education as follows:

- Provide access to quality education and equity in education opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied;
- Meet special needs of employers by mounting special certificate courses for their employees at their work place.

- Encourage internationalisation especially of the tertiary education curricula.
- Ameliorate the effect of internal and external brain-drain in the tertiary institutions by utilizing Nigerian experts as teachers regardless of their locations or places of work.

The Concept of Open and Distance Learning

Open and Distance Learning can be defined in different ways: As in any developing economy, the sub-Saharan African countries think of education for all as a major impetus behind fundamental change or transformation. In 2000, following the Millennium Summit of the United Nations – the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were launched. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit on 25 September 2015, to finish the job of the MDGs. This may explain the three key emphases of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs):

1. Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger.
2. Achievement of universal primary education
3. Promotion of gender equality and women empowerment.

The term Open and Distance Learning reflects both the fact that all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in time and space from the learners, and that the mission aims to include greater dimension of openness and flexibility, whether in terms of access, curriculum or other elements of structure (UNESCO, 2002).

There are several approaches to defining the term Open and Distance Learning. Adebayo (2007, as cited in Jimoh, 2013), defined Open and Distance Learning as the type of education that takes place outside the conventional school system, it is imparted without necessarily having personal interaction with students or learners.

Creed (2001), defined distance learning as an education process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone far removed in space and/or time from the learners.

There is extensive overlap between the use of the term open education and distance education. Open learning is an imprecise phrase to which a range of meanings can be. But as an inscription to be carried in procession on a banner, gathering adherents and enthusiasms, it has great potential. For its very imprecision enables it to accommodate many different ideas and aims.

Distance education is all arrangements for providing instruction through print or electronic communication media to person engaged in planned learning in a place or time different from that of the instructor or instructor (Moore, 1990, as cited in Keegan, 1996, p. 43).

According to UNESCO (2002), Open and Distance Learning is one of the most rapidly growing fields of education, and its potential impact on all education delivery systems has been greatly accentuated through the development of Internet-based information technologies and in particular the World Wide Web presenting approaches that focus on opening access to education and training provision, freeing learners from the constraints of time and place and offering flexible learning opportunities to individuals and groups of learners. The Federal Ministry of Education defines Open and Distance Learning as any form of learning in which the provider enables individual learners to exercise choices over any one or more of a number of aspects of learning and distance learning as an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space/or in time from the learner.

“It is natural for man to desire to know, Aristotle (323BC)” (as cited in Keegan, 1996, p. 33).

The ‘open’ nature of education that is mediated by electronic or printed technologies might be formally institutionalised in such policies as open end admissions, freedom of selection with regard to what, when and where to learn. This approach involves helping learners take responsibility of aspects such as what they learn, how they learn, where they learn, how quickly they learn, who to turn to for help and whether, when and where to have the learning assessed.

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has been defined in different ways and at different points in time; According to the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), ODL is a learner’s-oriented system that allows greater flexibility in learning while students continue with their regular work. In the words of the former Vice-Chancellor, National Open University of Nigeria, Jegede (2009), ODL provides education for all, promotes lifelong learning and improves on the economies of scale in education management. These definitions have three things in common; flexibility, cost-effectiveness and learner-centred. Open and Distance Learning can be defined as flexible, cost-effective and learners-centred educational system.

The Exposition of Open and Distance Learning in Nigeria

In Nigeria as well as in other countries education is perceived as a tool for socio-economic and political developments and as such it is accorded the necessary attention. This position on education is simplified in the Nigerian National Policy on Education, which stated that education is an instrument ‘par excellence’ for effecting national development (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004). The perception of education as a tool for development by the Nigerian government dates back to 1959. As a prelude towards independence the Federal Ministry of Education set up the Ashby commission to examine the needs of Nigeria in the area of post-secondary school certification in higher education from 1960 – 1980. Part of the recommendations of the report of this commission submitted in 1960 was the establishment of the University of Lagos considering the concentration of people and the higher demand for university education. It included as one of the features that “associated with the University (but preferably

under a Dean or Director with special knowledge of correspondence education) there should be a department of correspondence courses". Ashby believed that such institutions in Nigeria will be very popular and would encourage large numbers of men and women in employment to improve their education and fit them for more responsible posts. Therefore, the official recognition of correspondence education at the University of Lagos marked the beginning of an attempt to make distance education an integral part of the Nigerian University system.

This event was the first conscious attempt made to establish distance education unit as part of a university in this country. This was in line with one of the objectives of the University of Lagos from inception that is provision of facilities for part-time studies in areas such as business administration, law and education through correspondence and distance learning techniques. Correspondence and Open Studies Institutes (COSIT). COSIT has since undergone a lot of restructuring to ensure that the frequency of study centre meetings are reduced to barest minimum, leaving only meetings for tutorials, informal group studies while the institute provides the support learning materials, such as course texts, audio and video cassettes. COSIT has since been changed to Distance Learning Institute with an enhanced status of a College that has its own academic board management and it is empowered to formulate policies, employ its staff and be responsible for academic programme, examinations as well as supervise its day-to-day activities. Some other universities in Nigeria including University of Ibadan, Ahmadu Bello University, University of Nigeria, Nsukka were providing extension course to farmers so as to acquire new skills in order to introduce them to new farming methods. The Ahmadu Bello University's Institute of Education also introduced the Teacher In-service education programme to raise the quality and quantity of teachers in northern Nigeria. later when National Council of Education ruled that the National certificate of Education (NCE) should be the minimum qualification of teaching at primary level, Ahmadu Bello University's Institute of Education, started the NCE by correspondence programme. When in 1976, the Universal Primary Education was introduced to provide equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels of education both inside formal and outside the formal school system; one of the challenge was that of inadequate teaching personnel to cope with the demand of the programme. Distance education was considered the best means of supplying the required number of teachers. This led to the establishment of the National Teachers Institute (NTI) as the first institute specially established by the Federal Government of Nigeria to provide distance education courses to upgrade under-qualified and unqualified teachers. In line with the minimum qualification directive for teaching in primary schools, the NTI also introduced the NCE by distance learning in 1990.

An attempt was made to establish an Open University in Abuja; it was truncated and was replaced with a dual-mode institution established as the University of Abuja. Within University of Abuja the Centre for Distance Learning and Continuing Education (CDLCE) was established and mandated to provide distance education component of every course that the University would provide.

However, the strong commitment of the Federal Government to distance education finally led to the emergence of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) in 2002. The establishment of the National Open University of Nigeria is traceable to the National Policy on Education by the Federal Government which has as its major objective, “to make life-long education the basis for the nation’s educational policies, that at any stage of the educational process after primary education, an individual will be able to choose between continuing his full-time studies, combining work with study or embarking on full time employment without excluding the prospect studies later”(Educomm Asia, 2004, p. 2).

Current Status of Distance Education in Nigeria

The high demand for education and the inability of existing institutions to meet such demand encouraged most universities in Nigeria to start new distance learning programmes initially at satellite campuses, study centres and outreach centres around the country. But the National University Commission (NUC) proscribed it. The mode of operation is to recruit tutors from the locality where the distance education centre is located, in order to organise face-to-face contacts with students. These centres replicate academic programmes in parent universities. These outreach centres cannot be regarded as distance education when viewed from international perspective. It was observed that the primary motive behind their establishment is often to generate income. The poor quality of education offered through these outreach centres was considered generally low and uncoordinated. Thus, the Federal Government decided in 2001 to limit the activities of these centres within 200 kilometres radius of the parent university. In addition, such centres must not be cited in a town or city where another Federal or state university exists.

However, the increasing importance of distance education must have informed the position of the federal government on distance education as articulated in the National Policy on Education. As at the end of 2012, the National Universities Commission has approved the following Universities as dual mode institutions; they are; University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre, University of Lagos Distance Learning Institute, University of Abuja Centre for Distance Learning, Obafemi Awolowo University Centre for Distance Learning, University of Maiduguri Centre for Distance Learning, Federal University of Technology, Yola. The dual mode institutions combine both conventional and distance education programmes.

The National Open University of Nigeria and Sandwich programmes were offered by Universities and other institutions. The Sandwich programmes were established in the mid-80s and run by some Nigerian Universities and College of Education. The Sandwich programmes were originally designed to run during the school long vacations to create opportunities for participation by workers, especially teachers. These programmes are open to all categories of learners with varied entry qualifications ranging from primary school certificate, attempted school certificate, school certificate holders, TC II teachers, NCE and first degree holders. More women enrolled in this programme. This was to

create access for those who are not able to make it to the conventional schools because of time and other factors.

Although Open and Distance Learning was introduced to the university education system in Nigeria in 1983, it only became functional in 2002. It is a timely and phenomenal evolution in the history of Nigerian higher education. It provides access to young, elderly and disadvantaged groups who are interested in the acquisition of university education, anytime and anywhere.

The emergence of the system of Open and Distance Learning is an inevitable and unparalleled advancement in the history of educational development in Nigeria and internationally. Unlike the formal system of education which has its inherent limitations with regard to expansion, provision of access, the growth of Open and Distance mode of education has now made education flexible by providing increased educational opportunities to a larger population in different situations and needs. Thus, Nigeria is moving from an exclusive, closed system, mode of “privileged” access to education towards a more inclusive educational model, which supports and is reflective of UNESCO’s goal of education for the 21st century.

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) was first launched in 1983. However, it was suspended in 1985 by the military government. It was re-launched in 2001. NOUN now provides instruction for over 100,000 students (Hundred thousand). The re-launching of National Open University of Nigeria in 2001, was to prove that Open and Distance Learning is not only cost-effective, but also the most appropriate avenue for widening access to education. NOUN is the first full-fledged university that operates in an exclusively Open and Distance Learning.

The practice of ODL in Nigeria takes various forms, which include correspondence study education, distance learning (Sandwich programmes), Part-Time Teachers training programme (PT – TP) Open University, weekend programmes, National Teachers Institute (NTI) and e-learning. From the beginning of correspondence courses during the first half of the 19th century to the modern conception of Open and Distance Learning, students have been provided with useful knowledge, skills attitudes and abilities. The features of Open and Distance Learning can be summaries as follows:

- Separation of learner and teacher in the time and space.
- Flexibility in the use of multimedia devices and entry requirements for increased access and equity.
- Availability of programmes to learners at their chosen locations.
- Learner-centred
- Openness with regards to access, duration, age, sex, goals and knowledge delivery technique.
- Allowances for a two-way communication between the teacher and the learners.

According to Holmberg (1995), De Wolf (1994), and Rumble (1992), Open and Distance Learning has been used to give students a second chance at education, and this opportunity seems to have been particularly the case in teacher development programmes in Nigeria.

According to Nwaocha and Iyiama (2008), the relevance of Open and Distance Learning to Nigeria education include the following:

Access

Open and Distance Learning increases people's access to education. People who would have found it impossible to attend the conventional school system benefit from Open and Distance Learning. Many stakeholders in the education sector are interested in Open and Distance Learning because it allows greater access to educational opportunities. This advance is in keeping with the stated objectives of the National Policy on Education that, 'Maximum efforts shall be made to enable those who can benefit from higher education to be given access to it. Such access may be through universities or correspondence courses or open universities or part-time, e-learning and work study programmes (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004).

Social Enhancement

Open and Distance Learning schemes hold a number of potential benefits for various stakeholders in the education and development process. To the learners, ODL means more freedom of access as well as a wider range of opportunities for learning and qualifications, thereby improving their social status.

Economic Growth

It is often said that Open and Distance Learning is more cost-efficient than other forms of education. ODL therefore, is an avenue for institutions to improve their internally Generated Revenue (IGR). It is also an avenue for people to become learned and be better workers in any profession they are currently engaged. Students are allowed to read up to whatever level they want hence contributing to the economic growth of the nation through better performance. Open and Distance Learning is often the most cost-effective means, for the government and educational policy makers, the system is a panacea for the perennial problem of providing equitable and accessible education in an affordable and cost effective way. The government incurs little cost on the training but develops the manpower to improve the economic situation of the nation. Nigerian prisoners or inmates enjoy distance learning programmes, so as to be useful to the nation by contributing their quota to the development and economic growth of the nation during and after release.

Calvert (1986) asserts that distance education helps extend the market for education to clientele who have not been previously served. The problem of unsatisfied demand for education versus actual supply of education services contributed to the acceptance, growth and implementation of distance education programme in Nigeria.

The Challenges of Open and Distance Learning in Nigeria

In spite of the benefits of Open and Distance education, the challenges of the programme are over-whelming. ODL is facing a number of challenges ranging from:

- Decay of infrastructure
- Inadequacies of facilities, currently militating against a successful implementation of the ODL programme in the country.
- Poor funding. It is common knowledge that education is poorly funded in Nigeria.
- It is very expensive to get some of the software because they are not produced locally; this is a major impediment. According to Yusuf (2006), success in any educational policy is contingent on the involvement of all stakeholders and the sponsorship of funding agencies.
- Power supply: The problem of power instability in Nigeria is perennial and has been a major setback for our technological development. Most ODL students that reside in the rural areas towns and cities are faced with the problem of epileptic supply of power.
- Lack of skills in designing courseware: Institutional delivery in ODL is greatly affected by some facilitators' lack of knowledge and skills in designing and delivering course in electronic format. This scenario is a fall out of the non ICT-compliant status of the facilitators.
- Poverty and poor ICT penetration: statistics reveal that many Nigerians live in poverty. The result of this situation is that the cost of computers and other ICT resources are far beyond their reach.
- Internet connectivity: statistics has shown that there is low level of internet connectivity in Nigeria. the cost of accessing internet is still very high in Nigeria. Most ODL students make use of cyber cafes where they are made to pay so much on hourly basis despite the poor services and slow rate of the servers.
- Low teledensity: Access to unhindered use of ICT tools such as telephone and internet has been very low (Asogwa, 2007). The evolution of the global system of mobile (GSM) telecommunication, the use of ICT resources for educational purposes in general and Open and Distance Learning is still very low.
- Technophobia: most of the ODL learners have no computer literacy background, hence they are afraid of using one.

- School curriculum: Some of the students admitted having no information technology/computer literacy knowledge because it was not entrenched in the curriculum at their primary and secondary education level.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

Open and Distance Education is gaining recognition both nationally and internationally as a credible alternative to traditional or conventional mode of education. It also makes education accessible and reduces cost while maintaining quality. The use of Open and Distance Learning makes for equity of educational opportunities and services. It has become fully integrated into the Nigerian higher education system. It is however observed that the potential of distance education as a means of improving access has not been explored at the Universal Basic Education level. However, despite the innumerable advantages accruing from the aims and objectives of Open and Distance Learning, achieving these can only be made possible when the problems of low teledensity, electricity, inconsistency in programme and policy implementation, poor economy, absence of trained teachers, poor postal system, bad public image, are no longer prevalent in the system.

Recommendations

The following recommendations need to be implemented in order to improve the situation within the area of Open and Distance Learning:

- There should be academic collaboration between Nigerian Federal Universities and Open and Distance Learning institutions in Nigeria.
- Provision of the enabling environment and adequate ODL facilitates for successful and effective ODL service delivery.
- Management should admit students in line with the available resources on the ground and make the criteria for admission of students to be in line with conventional institutions.
- The enthusiasm shown by government and steps taken so far can only be sustainable with the involvement of all stakeholders (government, business groups, community leaders, teachers, students, conventional institutions, UNESCO and grassroots citizens).
- Provision of adequate power supply: The government should subsidize ODL programme and improve the electricity supply to the nation.

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