

# OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING AS A CATALYST FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

By  
Ige ayodeji ogunniyi ebenezer  
School of Law  
National Open University of Nigeria  
Ajadi timothy olugbenga  
School of Education

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In a lecture given as part of the ceremonies toward the award of the Nigerian National Merit Award to him 20 years ago, the late jurist and eminent scholar, Justice (Dr.) Taslim Olawale Elias reviewed the contribution of Nigerian lawyers to the development of legal and educational systems of their countries. In the lecture titled “Nigeria and Legal Development of Emergent Africa”, Elias said :

*“ We ,must endeavour to seriously correct the mistakes of the past and plan with greater resolve and steadier vision to forge ahead. In order to be greater still in the days that lies ahead Nigeria needs men and women dedicated to the achievement of the high objective of unity and faith in the future greatness of our fatherland, a great deal depends upon quality and motivation of individual Nigerians”.*

The emphasis of the late jurist was on the need to correct past mistakes, plan with vision, and to produce qualitative Nigerians such as those people who had contributed to the development of the Legal and Educational Systems of other countries. The first step towards realizing this objective would of course be to give the right education.

Dr Waziri Junaid another eminent scholar who gave a lecture as part of the same award ceremonies in 1979 said such education must be “any type of training aimed at the balanced growth of the total personality of man through the training of Man’s spirit, intellect, rational self, feelings and bodily senses. Although Dr. Junaid canvassed all round education comprising spiritual as well as secular education, the focus of the organizers of this conference was education such ‘genre’ that would produce the caliber of men and women which Elias referred to in his lecture. It is in the light of this that the role of the National Open University of Nigeria is being considered as a catalyst for growth and development in Nigeria.

The topic of this paper encompasses issues such as how education has been or has not been a catalyst for development in the context of Nigeria as well as how education is enabling or limited in being such a catalyst. Given this wide breadth, it will be impossible to discuss

all the issues and perspectives entailed. Thus, we state at the onset that the main thrust of this paper is to analyse how access to education has been used in Nigeria to influence social, economic aspects of society for human development.

The paper starts off with an examination of the concepts of open education and human development. It follows on this with an examination of issues in the socio-economic and health spheres in relation to human development and in doing this, addresses the role of law. Specifically, it case studies, education, labour and employment as well as the environment and highlights the contexts of marginalized and vulnerable groups of society..

## **2.0 CONCEPTS OF EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

### **2.1 The Concept of Education**

As a force contributing to social and economic development, open and distance learning has grown and has been accepted as an indispensable part of the mainstream of educational system globally. The growth was stimulated in part by the interest among educators and trainers in the use of new technological-based method of teaching (i.e. the use of internet, multi-media, micro-fiche etc), and also by the recognition that the traditional/conventional way of education needs adjustment/support by innovative methods, if the Education For All people will be realized.

The globalization of distance education provides many benefits for developing countries for the realization of their educational goals as at when stated. Two main factors have led people to be more interested in distance education; the government call for regular improvement in workers skills, workers re-training, and the technological development that have made it possible to teach more subjects and students at a distance.

There has been various scholars who have various conception about distance education as well as open and distance education. Butcher (2000) defines distance education as a set of teaching and learning strategies (or education methods) that can be used to overcome spatial and temporal separation between educators and learners. These strategies or methods can be integrated into any education programme and potentially used in any combination with any other teaching and learning strategies in the provision of education (including those strategies which demand that learners and educators be together at the same time and/or place).

UNESCO (2003) opined that distance education is any educational process in which all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner, with the effect that all or most of the communication between teachers and learners is through an artificial medium, either electronic or print. In distance education, the normal or principal means of communication is through technology. While teachers in conventional system , may adopt technology as a supplement to their teaching.

National Policy on Education (1981) defined distance education as an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner. This definition covers most of the traditional approaches to distance education, although it does not reflect that the learners are also usually dispersed in space and/or time. This is as a result of the evolving variation of learning environments and patterns of communication.

Distance education involves the use both for presentation of information and for, communication between participants of a range of media, such as print, written correspondence; audio, video and computer based media and networks as well as multi-media facilities.

The rationale for distance education from its inception has been to provide equal opportunities for learners to study without any barriers whatsoever. The open nature of education mediated by electronic technologies has been formally institutionalized in open policies of admissions, freedom of selection what to learn, where and when to learn. The openness of distance education is also seen in relatively flexible organization structures, delivery and communication pattern and the use of various technologies to support learning.

Open learning is a term with no universally agreed definition. To some scholars 'open' will indicate open entry and access to learning opportunities, and the removal of barriers to learning opportunities. To other scholar, 'open' may include aspects of methods and organization, with consequence that 'open learning' may sometimes be substituted by flexible learning.

Distance education in most cases shares the concern for openness and flexibility, but definitions tend to focus on the possibility of communication between participants in the learning process across time and/or space, particularly as brought about by old and new technologies.

Open and distance education has the tendency to expand access to education at any point in time. Children, Youths, and adults who are excluded from conventional institutions because of age, work, family bottlenecks, geographical distance/quota problem/catchments policy, insecurity or poor quality or insufficient before the learning experience may be able to learn through open and distance education.

In term, of war, Children and Youth may be cut-off from formal schooling activities as a result of conflict and insecurity. Open and distance educational may be used to provide educational opportunities at the secondary and tertiary levels for refugees and displaced people and other non-migrant nationals it may be the option for youths and adults who have to work to continue learning, so also those who have no access to employment may also benefit from open and distance initiatives, such as tertiary or professional/short term training/course that may pave way for better employment in the future.

It is not a gainsaying that open and distance education has the potential to reach large numbers of people irrespective of their locations, age, statutes, or background. In developing economy, there are significant challenges associated with the implementation of open and distance learning. Foremost among the problems is the lack of financial resources. Resources available for knowledge development are not evenly distributed. Open and distance learning programme requires a huge amount of money to start the operation and regular investments in the development and revision of course materials. Lack of resources in developing countries is obvious and becomes more acute as demographic trends increase the need to expand education provision. Open and distance learning programme rely heavily on technology, this make it imperative for initial heavy financial resources for the acquisition of equipment such as computers television and radio transmitter as well as for the training and re-training of personnel, so also money ill be needed for maintenance and operating cost. Huge amount of money is also needed to provide support services to students by a trained and experienced student's counselor who is expected to monitor, correct and give them the necessary support to make their studies interesting.

## **2.2 SUSTAINABLE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

Ordianrily, it would seem unnecessary to pursue any clarification of this concept that we all are familiar with. After all, are we not reminded daily of the meaning of this term by the famous appellations used for our countries on the African continent? Inherent in the concept of development is its antonym underdevelopment so that a discussion around development usually entails a comparison of sorts or measurement with a definer-standard. By a pervasive sleight of hand and through unrelenting promotion, this term has become etched into the consciousness of the entire world as one describing a universally desirable condition that has the same meaning everywhere and without which any peoples must be adjudged damned.