

Open Learning For Development: Towards Empowerment and Transformation



*Seventh Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning
Opening Ceremony*

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Introduction

Let me join others in welcoming you all to Nigeria for the 7th Pan Commonwealth Forum (PCF7) taking place in our Federal Capital City of Abuja. Knowing that the decision to hold it in Nigeria was almost marred by security threats and challenges that have bedeviled some parts of our country, I am even more excited that it has drawn such a large attendance from all over the world, especially from the Commonwealth.

Personally, it is an honour for me to be asked by the Organising Committee to give the inaugural keynote address at my own turf – a familiar terrain for me. I wish to express my immense gratitude to my sister, friend and colleague, Professor Asha Kanwar, the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Commonwealth of Learning for accepting the suggestion by the Organising Committee to invite me to be the Inaugural Keynote Speaker. I have watched with admiration and have noticed the acceptance by the global professional bodies of ODL, the exceptionally successful manner you have piloted the Commonwealth of Learning since you assumed the leadership of the great organisation. I could see ODL moving into new vistas and vortex, blazing new trails to chart the course of open learning in the world. I have no doubt in my mind that the whole world will be the better for it by the time you complete your term as President.

Your choice to be in Nigeria for this round of the Forum is not misplaced; it is both encouraging and prophetic in the sense that the immeasurable potentials of open learning are only just the tip of the iceberg. The exciting indications are that very soon the growth of open learning in Nigeria would soon

overtake that of all of Europe combined and would triple what obtains in the USA. This is being made possible through the unprecedented entry and expansion of telecommunication merging with computer technology. At the moment the data we have is that 2 out of every 3 Nigerians own mobile devices, and with the astronomical sales being made by the telecommunication companies, it would not be long before close to 170 million people are connected! Needless to say how this will boost open learning and the education of people outside of the mainstream formal schooling system.

Historical Vignettes of Pan Commonwealth Forum

The idea of Pan Commonwealth Forum began very modestly about 14 years ago when the thought of celebrating ten years of existence of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) emerged. The decision was to hold a major Forum in open and distance learning which will bring everyone from the Commonwealth to celebrate COL as well as the ODL movement. From the 1-5 March, 1999 we all gathered in Brunei Darussalam to hold the First Pan Commonwealth Forum.

I remember very clearly that the theme of the First PCF was **Empowerment through Knowledge and Technology**. The keynote speakers and plenary presenters included His Excellency Chief Emeka Anyaoku, Commonwealth Secretary-General; The Honourable Mia Amor Mottley, Minister of Education, Youth Affairs and Culture, Barbados; The Right Honourable Clare Short, Secretary of State for International Development, Britain; The Honourable Maurice Strong, Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General; Mr. Noah A. Samara, Chairman/Chief Executive Officer, WorldSpace Corporation; and Dato' Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, Chairman/Chief Executive Officer, WorldSpace Corporation. The Asa Briggs Lecture was delivered by Professor Wang Gungwu. I could recall how Professor Raj Dhanarajan worked very hard to convince the world that it was time to celebrate ODL and shout it from the roof top, ensuring that those that matter in the highest echelon of administration in the Commonwealth took notice, especially as many of them were not only skeptical but did not fully understand what ODL meant at that time. I dare say that even now, the skepticism persists in some circle and surprisingly even within academia. But the credit must go to Dato Raj for his painstaking effort, resilience and commitment to taking ODL through to the 53 Commonwealth countries and beyond.

The success of the Brunei PCF1 and the huge impact it made in the Commonwealth, and indeed in the ODL world then, were the strong foundation laid in establishing the PCF and its growth from strength to strength each successive holding of the PCF. Five other PCFs have since held in Durban, South Africa 2002 (PCF2); Dunedin, New Zealand 2004 (PCF3); Ocho Rios, Jamaica 2006 (PCF4), London, UK 2008 (PCF5), Kochi, India 2010 (PCF6). Today, the Pan Commonwealth Forum has come of age with the Seventh holding in Nigeria, and making it the second on the African continent.

I am humbled by the fact that, like a few of the old brigade of the ODL stalwarts here in this room, I have been fortunate to have attended all of the Pan Commonwealth Forums. PCF1, made ODL more global and invited all sectors, all levels and all groups and communities to partake and own ODL. It show-cased ODL as an unstoppable force moving to consume the world of education. It also laid the foundation for two major issues: **Empowerment** and **Technology** which have become veritable threads that have woven all, the ideas we have discussed through all the succeeding PCFs and have caught on in the world like

wild fire. I shall expatiate on these two issues later in the conversation I plan to hold with the ODL world through this presentation.

Focus and Themes for PCF7

As has been announced and publicised, this Forum will focus on **Open Learning for Development: Towards Empowerment and Transformation** through five themes: "**Girls' and Women's Education**", "**Skills Development**", "**Promoting Open Educational Resources (OER)**", "**Innovation and Technology**" and "**Institutional Development**". As the inaugural keynote Speaker, who is expected to set the tone for the Forum through a provocative identification of issues to be examined, I feel a very heavy burden thrust upon my small shoulders knowing the implication of my assignment, especially in the midst of a global assemblage of the shakers and movers of ODL, for whom I have profound respect and admiration.

All I can do therefore, especially within the constraint of time available, is to identify a few major issues for us to focus on at this Forum, while ensuring that the various themes, which are quite topical and make the discussion of the main agenda comprehensive, are given some serious mention as we go along in this presentation. It is my hope that other keynote speakers and the various theme presenters would address areas I am unable to. I am also of the view that as the world is experiencing significant and novel developments in open and distance learning, the emerging issues especially in innovation and technology will be highlighted for further conversation and debate with a view to situating and further develop ODL.

Open Learning for Development: Towards Empowerment and Transformation

The main agenda for discussion at this Forum draws attention to the use of open learning for development. It further explicates the issue by focusing on its use for empowerment and transformation. Please recall my reference earlier to the Theme for the PCF1 which was Empowerment and Technology. When we examine this alongside the agenda for PCF7, one question that comes to mind is whether anything has changed since 14 years ago. Doesn't it look like we are recycling ideas? On the surface, it might seem so, but a thorough examination of the tremendous development in ODL and in education generally would inform us that a lot has changed. For instance, more than ever before, ODL has gained global acceptance and governments, especially in the developing world, now see it as sine qua non for development. Second, there is undoubtedly a growing importance of ODL at all levels, sectors and communities of education. At the moment it appears that the romance between ODL and higher education is in full bloom! Third, because the world can no more ignore ODL, this mode of instruction has now been mainstreamed and indeed, many face-to-face institutions have now embraced ODL for a variety of reasons. Fourth, the flexibility of ODL as a mode of instruction has made it the preferred mode of reaching people in many non-formal circumstances. Fifth, the integration of technology into ODL and its continuous development has made ODL a viable and rewarding business.

Indeed, Nigeria's search for justification for embracing ODL are captured very succinctly in the words of the *Communiqué of the National Workshop on Distance Education in Nigeria* held in September 2000 at

Abuja, which states that it ‘can enhance education as a form of human resource development, and satisfy the exceptionally large demand for education by our huge and rapidly expanding population which is still mainly rural, remote, under-represented, and marginalised through resources, location, economic and other reasons. Distance education will enable Nigeria to provide access for all and achieve equitable representation by taking the distance out of education’.

With regard to ODL and empowerment, examples abound in copious quantity on its use to empower different categories of people, especially women, children and youths all over the world. ODL as empowerment has been used to address poverty, illiteracy, ill health, ignorance, unemployment, marginalisation, unreached, disadvantaged, politically powerless, social segregation in the sharing, distribution and redistribution of power in Africa (Olakulehin & Ojo, 2009), India (Chakrapani, (2009), West Indies (Thomas & Soares, 2009).

ODL has been and can be used to transform society, community, teaching and learning, curriculum, institution, knowledge, information and learner support systems to mention but a few (Kvavik & Handberg, 2000; Tait, 2000; Thorpe, 2003; Brindley & Paul, 2003). A good example of how ODL has transformed societies is how Asian countries, especially the Asian tigers have used ODL to fast track development and raised the literacy and education development of the people. This, in turn, has affected other sectors of the economy including trade, manufacturing, small scale business development, etc.

The Advent of ODL

Open and Distance Learning began as correspondence education with the use of print technology and the postal service to reach learners far removed from the teacher. Directed towards adult learners who were unable to engage in formal schooling, correspondence education was tailored towards learning new skills for particular jobs. In 1873, Anna Ticknor created the society to encourage studies at home for the purpose of educational opportunities for women of all classes in the society. This volunteer effort which was based in Boston provided correspondence instruction to 10,000 members over a 24-year period despite its resolutely low profile (Ticknor, 1891). Printed materials sent through the mail were the main way of communication, teaching, and learning. In 1883 a Correspondence University headquartered at Cornell University was established, but never got off the ground (Gerrity, 1976). The first official recognition of education by correspondence came from 1883 to 1891 by Chautauqua College of Liberal Arts. This college was authorized by the state of New York to grant academic degrees to students who successfully completed work at the Summer institutes and by correspondence during the academic year (Watkins, 1991). Watkins (1991) in her book cited that Vincent (1885) wrote,

the day is coming when the work done by correspondence will be greater in amount than that done in the classrooms of our academics and colleges; when the students who shall recite by correspondence will far outnumber those who make oral recitations.

Vincent’s prediction has come to pass as the heavy social and economic dimensions of providing education through the traditional means of face-to-face classroom mode, and the compelling need to provide education for all irrespective of environmental, social or cultural circumstances have driven

countries to seek for appropriate and cost effective means to respond adequately to the huge unmet demand for education.

Given the astronomical numbers to deal with, especially in developing countries, the diverse nature of the unmet demands, the constraints of resources, the need for flexible tailor-made delivery of instruction with little disruption in the national, family and individual circumstances; and taking advantages of emerging information communication technologies (ICTs), the most logical pathway is by the distance education method. Distance education has been tested by almost all countries of the world as the most viable, robust, reliable, efficient, effective and cost-beneficial manner to provide massive and equitable access to education. Once put in place, distance education method is versatile enough to form a significant aspect of a nation's educational infrastructure capable of use by almost all sectors of economy and amenable to special national circumstances.

Many nations, especially in the Commonwealth, have used distance education as the basic foundation for national development (see Figure 1), poverty eradication, capacity building, boosting rural economy and eliminating illiteracy, and boosting technological and computer literacy.

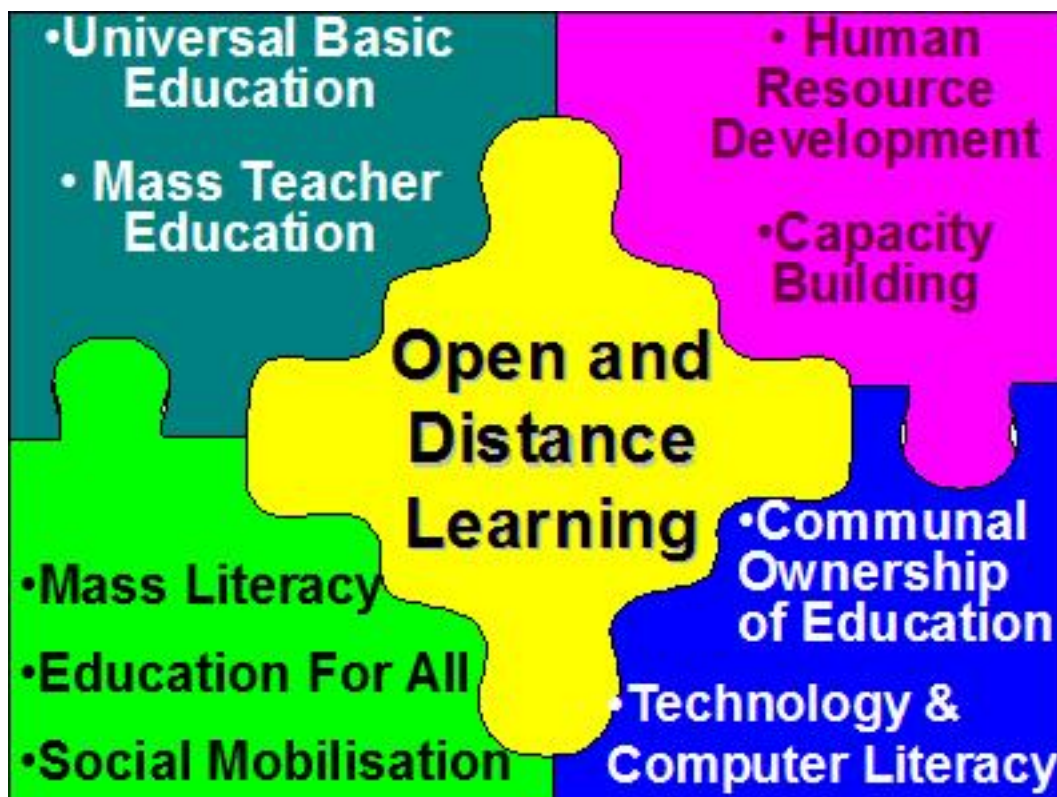


Figure 1: Use of Open and Distance Learning as Foundation for National Development

The continuing global educational and economic realities have also forced changes in the way nations view education. For instance the emerging concept of education has

- changed from an elitist-based to mass higher education.
- recognised the exponential growth in knowledge with reduced half-life.
- embraced the shift from an industrial-based to information-based global economy.
- accepted the emergence and consequent effect on education for all of a postmodern view of knowledge generation.

These changes have pointed to the need for a comprehensive search for educational solutions, which include open and distance education as a central focus. As a result, all nations of the world, especially the developing countries, desirous of a cost-effective, convenient, conducive, efficient and comprehensive way to educate all its citizens have embraced open and distance learning. ODL has become mainstream activity and Nigeria had no choice but to latch on to it, considering our population, socio-economic needs, and all current development indicators. The versatility of ODL allows it to cater for a variety of learning situation including fulltime, part-time and mixed modes which can be undergraduate, post graduate, work place and professional training or continuing education. Any or all of these can be pitched at the primary, secondary or tertiary levels.

ODL accommodates diverse learning styles, provides access to remote and normally inaccessible under-represented groups (such as women in or out of purdah, persons in rural and remote locations, migrant fishermen, and nomadic cattle herders) and tailored to meet the specific and special needs of a variety of learners (including those in employment, with family responsibilities, older or and retired people) wishing to embark on professional, and leisure or personal studies.

The growing demand for ODL in many countries of the Commonwealth has necessitated the use of institutional outlets which include Open University, Open Polytechnic and Open School and other specialised or targeted ODL organisations, provisions and outlets. The United Kingdom's Britain's Open University brought a new dimension to ODL and played a major role in the development of research in distance learning. The UK Open University, which is regarded as the most innovative tertiary ODL educational organisation in the world, brought the needed respect and credibility to correspondence programme around the world. The tremendous success of Britain's Open University was the major catalyst for the establishment of open universities in other Commonwealth countries. We now have hundreds of such universities in the world.

The Defining Role of Technology in ODL

It is interesting to note that the experimental use of the print technology in 1873 by Anna Ticknor has now become the strategic agent for empowerment and transformation in all areas related to ODL. From Moses (as recorded in the Holy Bible) who is widely regarded as the first known ODL student when he received God's message via tablets of stone as the medium of instruction, to today's millions of students who now routinely use the emerging sophisticated technologies, including social media, for learning, technology has had a defining and controlling influence on ODL. The range of technologies that have gained entry into ODL include print, broadcast television and radio, audiotapes, videotapes, computer-

based learning packages, interactive video (disk and tape), CDTV, audio-teleconferencing, audiographic communication systems (e.g. Smart 2000), video conferencing and The Web, enhanced by computer communications networks. Since correspondence education through print and postal service became an accepted part of mass public education systems, the society has over the years embraced any and every technology as medium of instruction. Indeed, technology cannot be separated from ODL, even though as we always say in ODL technology is only the medium, the message/ content is supreme and the main focus. James Taylor (1995) has identified the various communication technologies, which came after Print, as follows:

- **Audio** (Radio AM/FM, Audiotape, Packet Radio, Compact Disk, Talkback Radio, 2-way Radio, Mobilsat, Telephone, Answering Machine, Voice Mail, Audio-conference),
- **Audio Visual/Video** (Slides/Still Video, Videotape, Television, Teletext, Talkback TV, Videodisc, CD TV, VCD, DVD Videoconference, Audiographic),
- **Data & Computing** (File Transfer/Storage, Stand-alone PC, Electronic Mail, CAL, CMI, CD-ROM, WWW, Computer Conference),
- **Image** (Electronic Whiteboard, Facsimile, Imaging), Text/Print/Communications (Cable Network - Local, Cable Network Wide area, Cable Network International, Satellite), and
- **Multimedia** (etc VCD, DVD, Mobile Computing, Wireless communication, Satellite Technology, mobile telephony)

Taylor (1995, 2001) has neatly categorised the presence and use of these technologies in ODL into generational models as shown in Table 1 below:

Models of Distance Education and Associated Delivery Technologies	Characteristics of Delivery Technologies					
	Flexibility			Highly Refined Materials	Advanced Interactive Delivery	Institutional Variable Costs Approaching Zero
	Time	Place	Pace			
FIRST GENERATION - The Correspondence Model Print	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
SECOND GENERATION - The Multi-media Model Print Audiotape Videotape Computer-based learning (eg CML/CAL/IMM) Interactive video (disk and tape)	Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes	No No No Yes Yes	No No No No No
THIRD GENERATION - The Telelearning Model Audioteleconferencing Videoconferencing Audiographic Communication Broadcast TV/Radio and Audioteleconferencing	No No No No	No No No No	No No No No	No No Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes Yes	No No No No
FOURTH GENERATION - The Flexible Learning Model • Interactive multimedia (IMM) online • Internet-based access to WWW resources • Computer mediated communication	Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes No
FIFTH GENERATION - The Intelligent Flexible Learning Model • Interactive multimedia (IMM) online • Internet-based access to WWW resources • Computer mediated communication, using automated response systems • Campus portal access to institutional processes and resources	Yes Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes Yes

Table 1: Models of Distance Education: A Conceptual Framework

Although, Professor Taylor has since updated his chronological groupings of technologies in ODL, what is emerging indicates that the ubiquity and versatility of technology and its use in ODL are becoming boundless and impossible to control.

While the Social media, e.g Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Tumblr, Pinterest, Google+, Instagram, LinkedIn etc may now constitute the 6th or 7th generation of models of technology in ODL, two technologies for instruction which have significantly changed the face and practice of ODL in recent

times are the Open Educational Resources (OER) and the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) (see Figure 2). I would like to spend the major part of the rest of the paper to address these technologies as they now have strategic and defining influence on the learning and communication technologies in ODL today.



Figure 2: Emerging Social Media

Open Education Resources

The Open Education Resources (OER) movement which emerged within the past decade is changing the face of education globally with regard to previously held traditions of the production and availability of learning materials. Several descriptions and definitions of OER abound but the most frequently cited is the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation which defines OER as:

"teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use and re-purposing by others".

The Commonwealth of Learning has adopted the widest definition of Open Educational Resources (OER) as:

‘materials offered freely and openly to use and adapt for teaching, learning, development and research’.

Open educational resources include full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software, and any other tools, materials, or techniques used to support access to knowledge."

Three major global events have contributed to shaping the development and propagation of OER. They are

- the OpenEd Conference held in the United States, the 2013 edition is billed for Park City, Utah from 6-8 November.
- the Open Educational Resources conference held in the United Kingdom.

- The OpenCourseWare Consortium Global Conference, the 2013 edition held in Bali, Indonesia , Bali Ayodya Resort, from 8-10 May, and
- the World Open Educational Resources Congress held by UNESCO in 2012 (see Figure 3).

World Open Educational Resources Congress

Wednesday 20 – Friday 22 June, 2012

UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, France

Adoption of the 2012 Paris OER Declaration



The **2012 Paris OER Declaration** was formally adopted at the 2012 World Open Educational Resources (OER) Congress held at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris from 20 – 22 June 2012.

Déclaration de Paris des REL 2012 (*French*)

Declaración de París de 2012 sobre los REA (*Spanish*)

إعلان باريس لعام 2012 بشأن الموارد التعليمية المفتوحة (*Arabic*)

2012年开放式教育资源巴黎宣言 (*Chinese*)

ПАРИЖСКАЯ ДЕКЛАРАЦИЯ ПО ООР 2012 Г (*Russian*)

Figure 3: The Paris Declaration of OER at UNESCO, Paris in 2012

There is now a Global Directory with a comprehensive list of worldwide OER initiatives. There are over 400 entries at the moment and as the KC Platform is available in 7 languages, teachers and learners from more than 50 countries can easily search for, or add new OER initiatives in the different categories.

The transformative and empowering features of OER rest mainly in the desire to curtail the commodification of knowledge and massively provide materials to students especially those who cannot afford the astronomical prices of learning materials available in the market. The features of OER which make it very attractive to the world include the fact that it: (i) is available for free or at a very low cost, (ii) provides open access to knowledge (iii) can be reused, adapted, adopted and shared without the chains of copyright or intellectual copyrights, (iv) promotes peer collaboration, and (v) accepts all types of learning resources.

OER gained acceptability globally through The [MIT OpenCourseWare](#) project which put MIT's entire course catalog online and launched it as a project in 2002.

Africa's participation in the global movement of OER has largely been through two organisations. [South African Institute for Distance Education \(SAIDE\)](#) through OER Africa has massively promoted OER across all education sectors on the African continent. As a matter of fact, one of the first institutions to sign an MoU with OER Africa is the National Open University of Nigeria in 2006. The second African organisation to promote OER is the African Virtual University (AVU) which released 73 modules of its Teacher Education Programmes as Open Education Resources to make the courses freely available for all in 2006. In 2010, the AVU again developed the OER Repository which has contributed to increasing the number of Africans that use, contextualise, share and disseminate the existing as well as future academic content.

The OER Commons, now with over 50,000 members, tools and training facilities, has emerged as a worldwide learning network of shared teaching and learning materials made freely available online. They are grouped by subject area, grade level and type. OER Commons began in 2007 'as a nonprofit education research institute dedicated to innovation in open education content and practices, as a way to aggregate, share, and promote open educational resources to educators, administrators, parents, and students.' What is commendable about the OER Commons are its regulatory and quality assurance roles in ensuring that providers and developers of OER as much as possible adhere to some common standards.

Issues of concern about OER

Like any other innovative activity, the OER had come under criticism with regard to a number of issues. These include accreditation, assessment and doubts on the [altruistic](#) motives claimed by OERs, the imperialist tendency of the movement with regard to its the economic, political, and cultural dominance of the less-developed countries by the highly industrialised ones. Other issues such as whether, in the real sense, we can claim that OER is actually completely free, and the claim by researchers and philosophers like Stephen Downes, that "in the final analysis, we cannot produce knowledge for people. Period. The people who are benefiting from these open education resource initiatives are the people who are producing these resources."

In spite of these criticisms, OER has the potential to support open and distance learning in a bid to create and support higher education institutions, especially in developing countries, which contribute to the growth of social and economic development as well as capacity building through free and open development and sharing of common intellectual capital.

The Emergence of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC)

If OERs have opened the gate of open education to the world, the recently burgeoning of, and astronomical rise in the popularity of open pedagogy through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) has got the potential to transform higher education and empower learners in an unprecedented way never experienced in the history of open education (Maharaj, 2012). The phenomenon which is popularly known as MOOCs was coined in 2011 by Stanford University teachers, Dave Cornier and Bryan

Alexander, with the distinguishing feature being the ability to capture massive free participation online by thousands and millions of learners.

MOOC, which is a type of OER, is also labelled as **DistRibuted Open Online Learning (DROOL)** that ‘welcomes any and all enrollees, free of charge, amassing rosters that reach several hundred to several hundred thousand participants. Information flows into, around, and out of MOOC environments through instructor-selected and -generated materials, participant-selected and -generated materials, and instructor-participant and peer-to-peer communication.’ MOOCs got the worldwide publicity limelight through the launching, by Stanford University of, a set of free online courses when Sebastian Thrun, one of the MOOC pioneers at Stanford, created the artificial intelligence course that attracted more than 160,000 users. Sebastian has now founded Udacity, a for-profit MOOCs start-up with the goal of making an entire computer science course available at no cost.

Thrun’s Stanford colleagues, Daphne Koller and Andrew Ng, also participated in the first round of Stanford MOOCs and subsequently established Coursera, another for-profit start-up, which aims to provide a platform for other universities to host similar online courses. The emergence of MOOCs, enhanced by the publicity by major internationally respected education periodicals, has caught on quite rapidly and widely to an extent that the *MIT Review*, claimed that they were “the most important education technology in 200 years.” Time, in a cover story, labelled MOOCs as a major factor that was “reinventing college”. While the *New York Times* declared 2012 as the “Year of the MOOC”. The MOOC phenomenon has also been featured by several educational and news media including *The Guardian* and the *Times Educational Supplement*, among numerous other.

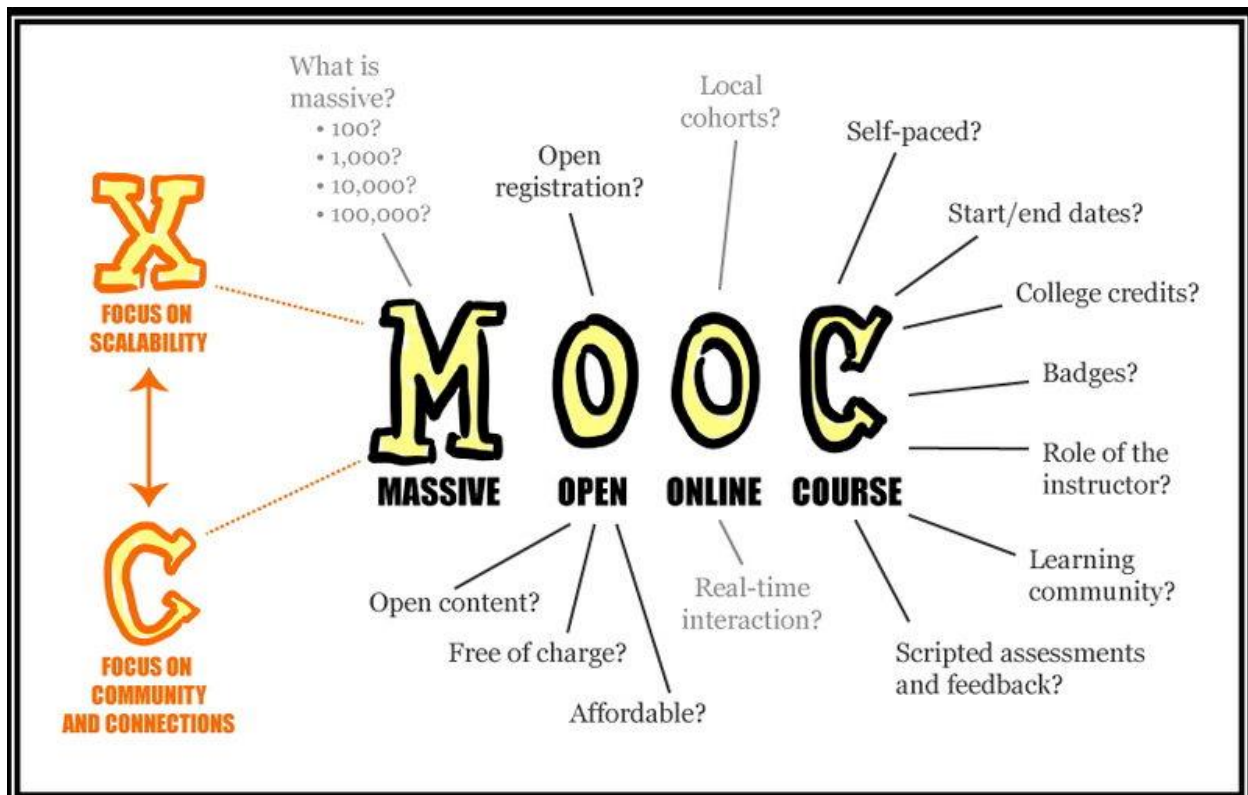


Figure 4: Scalability and focus on community

MOOCs are characterised by the following:

1. They promote open content encouraging academics to share their high quality teaching materials with other colleagues online. One argument for MOOCs is that its emergence will solve the problem of lack of enough subject matter experts allowing sharing, and peer-to-peer interaction,
2. It has changed the mode of assessment in higher education. MOOCs use non- traditional mode of assessment which include time on site, number of posts and word counts of responses. Meaningful assessment of learning remains a very big concern MOOCs.
3. While the world is still grappling with the issue of quality assurance of online courses, recognition of learning and certification are emerging issues for MOOCs. MOOCs such as P2PU and the Mozilla Foundation are collaborating on the development of an ‘open badges’ architecture, a system that will allow any open education programme to offer badges recognising learning accomplishments. Many MOOC programmes are experimenting with awarding non-credit certificates. For the next few years to come, assessment and certification will be controversial in the world of higher education. Proponents of MOOCs believe that online learning portfolios will provide the magic response to degrees and certificates.
4. MOOCs will help to propagate the new thinking in continuing lifelong learning through open learning systems. There is the potential that MOOCs will trigger life-long learning that is dictated and paced by advances in technology and scientific knowledge. As argued by one reviewer, “like athletes, learners will not just learn once, but will maintain a level of performance ability in their chosen field through ongoing study and participation in learning communities.”
5. MOOCs are providing the platform for interaction with subject matter experts that has never happened before. All of a sudden, even the most indigent student in the most remote institution in the most deprived community in a developing country can be exposed to the best experts in the top ranked world class universities of the world through their courses which are freely accessible online.
6. Some say that MOOCs allow academics to have their educational cake and eat it too, by being the sage on a huge stage while also being a guide who remains closely by the student’s side – through the power of open and social technologies.

Most of the MOOCs providers were established within the past 18 months and they include: Coursera, EdX, Class2Go, Carnegie Mellon University Open learning Initiative, FutureLearn Inc, Institute des Mines – Telecom, and Iversity. While this convergence in open education holds great promise for higher education, it also directs attention to many questions regarding the future of MOOCs.

21st Century Social Media



Figure 5: An artistic compendium of 21st Century Social Media

As gleaned from the literature, MOOCs have the potential to create unprecedented levels of access to quality higher education on a global scale, building richly diverse learning communities. Furthermore, MOOCs provide opportunities to upset traditional pedagogies, using technology to enhance creativity and collaboration while enabling research and development around best practices in online teaching and learning.

Issues to be debated as part of the PCF7 Conversation

I wish to direct attention to issues which need to be addressed, debated and considered at this Forum and hopefully beyond, in order to place the traditional justification for open and distance learning in perspective, so as not lose the focus.

Technology

While solving a lot of problems, technology also creates many more which include digital divide, pedagogical divide, development divide and all other forms of divide which need to be revisited in more realistic terms. Technology and open and distance learning have always worked hand-in glove. Technology has always advanced the provision of distance education to reach the mass of students who

have been neglected and in order to answer the unmet demand for education. So, from one perspective the questions some would be asking are ‘what is new’ and ‘why the noise about the emerging technologies and platforms being adopted to suit instruction at a distance?’

Viewed from this perspective, the modern technologies of the Web/Internet and the delivery platforms they have brought, including OERs and MOOCs, seem to be a natural progression in the different stages of the development of open and distance learning. Beginning with correspondence courses, open and distance learning, online learning and more recently OERs and MOOCs, we are just at another phase of using technology to open up access to education. Current technologies are democratising education and transforming pedagogy and should impact on learning outcomes. But we still have not solved the problem of the digital divides being created by the use of technology in ODL.

I have the hunch that social media, because of their characteristics of being able to carry everyone along; will become the most dominant technology for ODL especially in facilitate learning such as in: tutoring, discussion groups, chats etc. While most people are getting carried away with the amazing innovations and inventions in technology, we must not forget the old dictum which still sounds as true today as centuries ago, that ‘the medium is not the message’. ODL practitioners of all persuasions must show more concern about what is taught rather than how and with what is taught. Innovations in technology are generally regarded as ‘moving targets’ (Valdez et al., 1999). In other words, even as researchers begin to describe empirical evidence supporting the effects a particular technology may have on an educational practice that technology itself is changing and in some cases even becoming obsolete. In addition, the evolving nature of educational technologies precludes any efforts to predict the success of, and establish guidelines for, subsequent educational practices. According to Leu (2000), "As newer technologies of information and communication continually appear, they raise concerns about the generalisability of findings from earlier technologies," It must be noted that technology contains different contexts and resources for constructing meanings and requires somewhat different strategies for doing so. The rule of thumb in using technology is that it must be simple and cost-effective taking cognisance of the location and type of students the institution caters for. Institutions must review usage and policy of technology for instruction regularly and also must develop new training regime for the incorporation of the emerging technologies in education.

The objectives, theories and philosophies behind the practice of ODL.

There is no question that contemporary developments in ODL are only helping to tremendously advance the justification for the need to democratise learning and make the uptake of instruction scalable. ODL is meeting the need of the neglected and to empower the disadvantaged as well as transform education, learning and the delivery of instruction. It is to provide girls and women and others with skills necessary to live a fruitful life with provisions for life-long learning. Interestingly, the first use of ODL by Anna Ticknor in 1873 was to instruct women at a distance especially how to use short hand to develop and acquire skills. The transformative and empowerment characteristics of ODL which had been noted several years ago are being realised in big scales now. Indeed, as noted by Reverend Joseph H. Odell (1910) in his address titled *The New Era in Education: A Study of the Psychology of Correspondence Methods of*

Instruction delivered in November of 1910 at the dedication of the instruction building of the International Correspondence Schools in Scranton Pennsylvania said:

“I do not know any innovation upon existing methods more radical and revolutionary than this.”

Regarding the empowerment and transformation roles of ODL, aiming at the ordinary person as the common denominator, Edelson and Pittman (2001) stated:

‘Correspondence study, a system that allowed—even encouraged—the common man or woman to take charge of his or her own learning, and guaranteed access to all who desired it, ..’

One is quite pleased to see therefore, that creating access and massifying education with heavy reliance on economies of scale (through open content, open education, open resources, open pedagogy) have come to the centre stage in the 21st century offering of ODL.

However, the next issue which pertains to the worldwide neglect and disregard of the consideration of the theories which drive ODL in favour of blind practice and the ignorant application of the gains of ODL without reflections is of concern to me.

As Randy Garisson (2000) reviewed by Jegede (2009) has alluded to, the theoretical foundations of a field describe and inform the practice and provide the primary means to guide future development. The power of ideas, as represented in our theories influences practice directly by focusing perspectives, revealing knowledge and suggesting alternatives.

The study, practice and foundations of open and distance learning in the 19th and 20th centuries have been primarily based on distance constraints and approaches that bridged geographical constraints by way of organisational strategies such as mass production and delivery of learning packages through flexible mode of operations.

The need for life-long learning, life-wide learning, education for all, inclusive education, the need to democratise education and enhance access to flexible learning have all coalesced to focus on the use of education as a strong instrument for national, community and individual development. All these, together with an unprecedented development in information and communication technologies have propelled the practice and use of open and distance learning to the forefront of educational practice and use by nations and progressive communities. The advent of new terminologies, new technologies, new audiences, new programme demands, and new players coupled with the need to use ODL in a hurry to develop nations and people have tended to lead to what is now commonly referred to as conceptual confusion in the practice of ODL. Whereas these may constitute the achievements for the 20th century of the practice of ODL, they have the potential to become the challenges for the 21st century and therefore the next decade of ODL in the Commonwealth and the world at large. One is happy that the theory of connectivism is coming to the ODL environment and hope that many more would come in the next decade. However, it does appear that while the theories which guided organisational practice of ODL in the 20th century had been adequate and instrumental to a whole range of development, practitioners and scholars must begin to tinker with the need to search for new theories and philosophies to guide the future practice of ODL.

Quality of content and instruction and the design of instruction.

Instructional and resource materials development are being placed on the web every minute with utter disregard for the use of appropriate learning and instructional strategies. For the greater part of the 21st century, Web-based communication for instructional purposes will continue to dominate ODL. It will mean a shift in the paradigm of instructional design. Instruction must consider the type and time frame of web-based communication and judiciously combine educational theories and computing/communication strategies to present materials on the web. The use of webagogy, a new guiding principle for designing instruction for online web-based instruction is most suited. The use of Webagogy will ensure that all materials designed for whatever platform, whether OER, or MOOCs or indeed Social Media, must come with the minimum standards accepted as quality online learning.

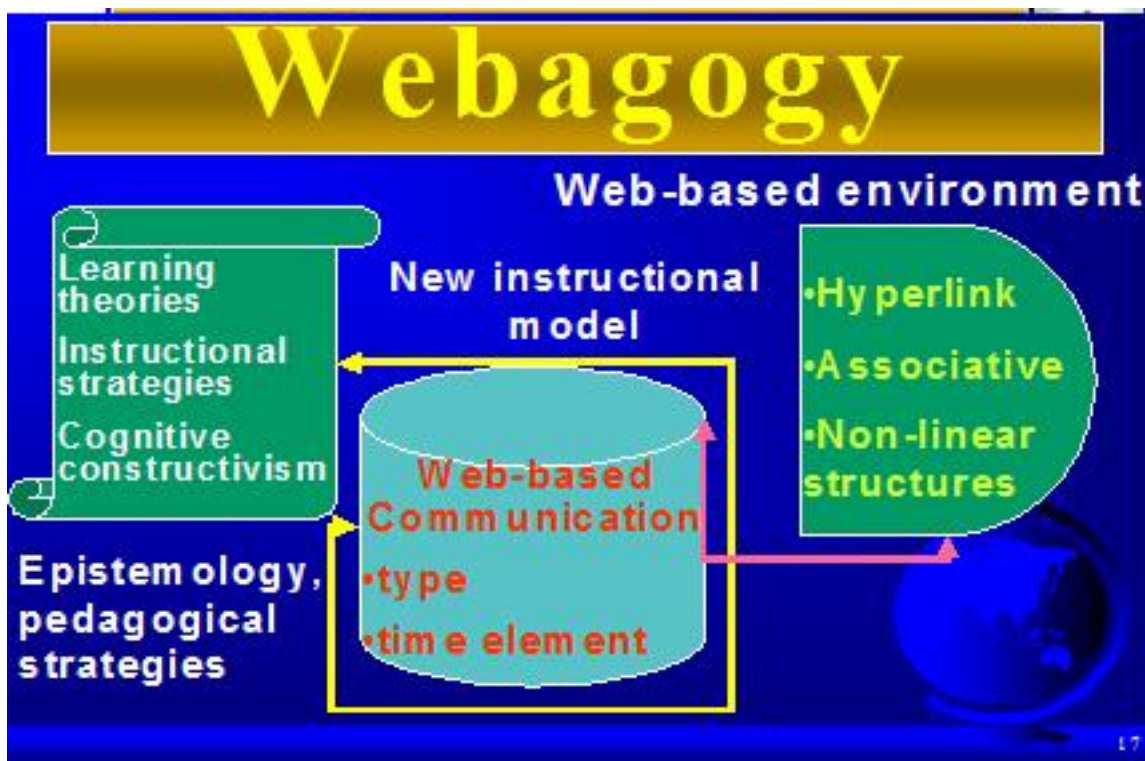


Figure 6: Webagogy: The principle for designing instruction for web-based delivery

Learner Support System

There is a need to overhaul our learner support system. The 21st century learner is a very unique and an enigmatic animal requiring both academic and non-academic support. The latter will include administrative, psychological, physical infrastructural and communal support which must be comprehensive and reflective of latest developments in the society. In addition, the 21st century ODL must rethink the training of teachers and instructors to be more effective. They must understand the new type of learners we have now as well as ensure that they raise their game of pedagogical content knowledge in ODL. All these can be addressed through the new principle of Webagogy, which I have proposed.

Accreditation, Standards and Assessment in 21st century ODL.

The last but the least issue I wish to draw attention to in this Forum is that of Accreditation, Standards and Assessment in 21st century ODL. Contemporary developments in ODL are challenging and reshaping the boundaries of traditional mode of accreditation, standards and assessments as we know them. The demography of our learners, the type of platforms they now learn through and the new directions in instruction necessitate that we review accreditation, standards and assessment in ODL. We need to rethink who regulate and accredit courses and programmes offered online. We must also take cognizance of the fact that instructions are crossing borders and therefore addressing millions of students at all the corners of the globe. The days are gone when national regulatory bodies are local champions. Our thinking and offering must transcend borders and be comprehensive and robust enough to meet the demands of the emerging new crop of learners. With this consideration, matters relating to standards must therefore also become universal. Assessment cannot remain the way they have been if everything in ODL is changing as rapidly as we are witnessing now. Learners may now have more opportunity to be involved in their assessment while the use of learner portfolios will become more dominant. What a student does with the knowledge acquired as opposed to regurgitating what he has learned will become the driving force in assessment of the future. Learners will now be assessed on the breadth and depth of knowledge, inquiry and critical thinking, personal and social responsibility, civic learning, global knowledge and skills, and particularly, integrative and applied learning. Learners will be expected to integrate and apply disciplinary and cross-disciplinary learning in every day search to solve real life problems at their workplace and in the larger society.

All these will necessarily affect certification for degrees and diplomas in the 21st Century and we might witness a rise in the joint or collaborative award of certificates across the globe. It will no more be a matter of fail or pass in assessment, it will instead be a matter of the extent of learner's understanding and how everyone in a community of learners could be assisted to earn the highest proficiency.

The Future

Given the manner in which open and distance learning is developing faster than the speed of light and considering its seemingly uncharted, unstructured and spontaneous emergence of course and programmes in new platforms, talking about the future is like blowing hot air. For instance, who could ever had

guessed that Stanford, MIT, Harvard and the likes top universities of the world would dream of, let alone physically (or should I say, virtually) engage in ODL? However, with the increase in the enthusiasm for the uptake of ODL by all and sundry, especially those who would ordinarily not give any consideration to ODL, it may be helpful to hazard a guess about future developments from the emerging issues.

Let me briefly touch on four areas.

Technology: It is no secret to posit that technology development, innovation, use and uptake in learning and teaching will be on the continual increase and dominance. It does appear that given the way the Social Media is developing and enveloping the whole world and all types, groups and communities of learners, it would not be too long when this mode of interaction would take over the centre stage in ODL. But we must be guided by the truism that technology is always a moving target and therefore, new and yet to be familiar territories in technology will emerge to supplant the current ones within the next decade.

ODL Communities: The communities continue to move and grow by the day. It is in order to be optimistic to say that in due course, ODL via the dictates of technology will soon take over the whole world. It is expected that the business of education through ODL will supplant the formal face-to-face as the mainstream mode of teaching and learning. The demography of learners will change, the line between learners and teachers will blur and interaction will increase. Learners will get more from peer group learning than from instructor-led learning. Individuals will be in control of his or her learning and age, time and focus of learning will change remarkably.

Mass Education redefined: If, as predicted, the uptake of ODL will change in due course, it is only fair to suggest that continuing education will be redefined along the lines of life-long and life-wide learning directed at skill development, and vocational development, in an environment where all members of a household will be learners and the dining table becomes a location for facilitation and socially-directed learning and interaction. It will promote collaborative learning and facilitation to a newer height. Scalability and meeting the needs of larger communities of learners will be major determinants of course delivery. The business of education will gross in more money than natural resources and solid minerals, and the role of knowledge economy will assume a more aggressive dimension.

Progressing into Learning Analytics

The world of ODL will progress into the emerging environment of Learner Analytics in which the new system of providing instruction will depend on predictive intervention and support for individual learners. Tailor-made instruction on specially designed courses and programmes will take over group instruction. Learner analytics will be based on data about individuals progressively obtained using all manner of databases or sharing of information on networks allowing for individual, course, and programme-based performance to be looked at holistically. All these would be linked to all areas related to studying at a distance such as support services, course development, assessment, etc. As explained in the 2011 Horizon Report, learning analytics can help define pathways to improve performance for a student at an individual level and improve retention, achievement, and graduation rates at an institutional level.

Learning Analytics, referred to as the “third wave” of transforming the student experience, is an improved form of individualized learning which emerged in the 60s now requiring great coordination, collaboration, and security to be effective as shown in the figure 7 below.

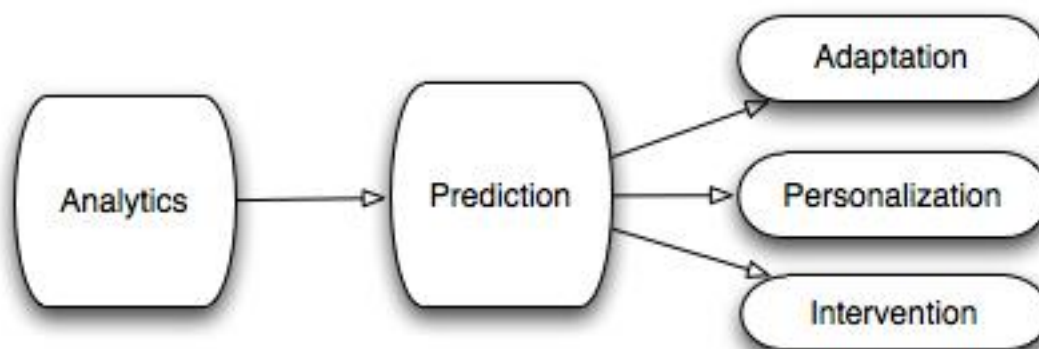


Figure 7: Components of Learner Analytics

Issues such as teaching and learning, non-conventional communication modes, new perspectives in instructional development and delivery, changing profile of students, massive uptake of ODL by organisations and nations, and the central focus of ODL for enhanced access and accelerated development will become dominant in 21st century educational transformation.

We may therefore wish to begin to interrogate ourselves and seek answers to the question as to whether ODL, as a field of practice and study, possess the synthesis of the principles and concepts capable of explaining and predicting development in ODL in the next decade or indeed the 21st century.

I am sure that this keynote address, if it will not give you all the ingredients you are looking for in a roadmap into the future of ODL as a tool for empowerment and transformation, I am sure that what other speakers will present later on throughout the Conference will provide very rich food for thought. The PCF7 may indeed not provide the time or the full orientation to address all the issues. However, it certainly should lurk at the background of all our considerations and in your minds as you go back home renewed to address the challenges of ODL in your own specific or specialised communities.

Thank you and God bless you all.

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