

NEW PARADIGM IN ACCESS TO EDUCATION: THE UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN DISTANCE LEARNING CENTRE'S EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

The University of Ibadan established in 1948 to promote higher education has always been conscious of ensuring that its gate remained open to many prospective learners rather than few. This perhaps informed its decision in 1988 to establish a unit that will further provide access to those who for reasons of geographical location, occupation and time constraint among others could not afford to attend the conventional system. Since the establishment of the Distance Learning Centre (DLC), student population has been very low until recently when there was a noticeable increase in the enrolment. The increase in enrolment became obvious during the last two students matriculation when it jumped from hundreds to thousands of students. Reasons for this have not been empirically established. The purpose of this paper was to find out among others, factors responsible for the sudden upsurge in student enrolment, the reaction of the entire university community, the fears and expectations of the students and mechanisms put in place by the university to cope with the large enrolment without jeopardizing quality and interest of the conventional programmes vis-à-vis the distance learning mode. The paper further investigates the role of ICT embraced by the Centre as against the heavy reliance on professional teachers in the line post. The instruments used to obtain data for this study were: interview schedule, management information provider and student response questionnaires, and the review of essential literature and related documents. The paper was concluded with recommendations that promote inclusive learning rather than exclusive learning without necessarily sacrificing the quality of the various programmes of the Centre.

Key word: Access, Factors, Student, Conventional, Dual Mode, Quality

The Emergence of Open Distance Learning in Nigeria

An intensive survey of literature on Nigeria educational history revealed how Nigerians benefited from the British Educational System. Omolewa (1976) reported how a handful of Nigerians, as far back as 1887, enrolled for the first time in the University of London

Matriculation Examination as external students studying through correspondence without enjoying any established formal ties with the educational institution. Similarly, Omolewa (1982) noted that, in 1925, several Nigerians, among them Eyo-Ita and H. O. Davies, passed the London Matriculation Examination. Later, both E. O. Ajayi and Alvan Ikoku obtained the University of London degrees in philosophy in 1927 and 1929 respectively; while J. S. Ogunlesi obtained a degree in Philosophy in 1933. The access to such educational opportunities, at a distance, contributed immensely to these individuals productivity which resulted in the innovations they subsequently demonstrated in their teaching methodology at the St. Andrew's Teachers College, Oyo (Aderinoye, 1995). Besides these individuals, a significant number of Nigeria's early educated elites were products of the British correspondence/distance education system. In spite of the establishment of a University College in Ibadan in 1948, many of its academic staff still passed through the higher degree programmes of the University of London as distance learners. This enabled them to combine work with study. Through this process they acquired the advanced skills and knowledge needed for teaching and research at a time when the College was introducing its own higher degree programmes.

With the emergence of many conventional higher institutions in Nigeria, most of which were once based on purely correspondence modalities, distance education still constitutes an integral part of these institution's educational offerings (Aderinoye, 1992). Institutions in Nigeria that offer educational programme through the distance education mode include:

- Ahmadu Bello University offers a special training programme called: "The Correspondence Teachers' In-service Programmes (TISEP) which was established in 1976 to prepare middle level teachers for Nigeria's primary schools.
- The Correspondence and Open Studies Unit (COSU), now called Distance Learning Institute, was established in 1974 by the University of Lagos to produce university graduates in disciplines necessary to meet national labour needs (e.g. Accountancy, teachers, nurses, etc).
- The first independent institution dedicated solely to distance education, the National Teachers' Institute (NTI), was officially established in 1976 to upgrade unqualified teachers in the nation's primary schools and to accelerate the preparation of qualified teachers needed for the implementation of the Universal Primary Education programme introduced in 1976 and the Universal Basic Education programme introduced in 1999.
- To offer similar programmes, the University of Abuja established its Centre for Distance Learning and Continuing Education in 1992.
- The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) suspended in 1984 was re-opened in 2001.
- The Distance Learning Centre of the University of Ibadan, which is the focus of this presentation, was equally established in 1988.

Open Distance in Perspective

Let me at this juncture, refresh our memory of what Open Distance Learning is and the achievement it had recorded in some other countries. It is a well known fact that, in spite

of the marriage between ‘distance education’ and ‘open learning’ which started at the ICDE Conference in 1995 at Birmingham and which resulted into the popular name we now use-open and distance learning, it has continued to defy a universally acceptable definition as it is known by variety of names such as Keegan (1986) states the characteristics of distance education as; quasi permanent separation of teacher and learner throughout the length of learning process, two way communication, quasi – permanent absence of a learning group and the presence of more industrialized features than in conventional education. Khan (2006) states that Open Distance Learning (ODL) system is often cited as an example of an innovative ‘business unusual’ approaches in learning and educational services. It employs multimedia approach of delivering educational services. Perraton (2001) had earlier taken a broader look at ODL and stated that distance education has been defined 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. Open learning, in turn, is an organised educational activity, based on the use of teaching materials, in which constraints on study are minimized in terms of either access of time, place, pace, and method of study, or any combination of these. The term open and distance learning is used as an umbrella term to cover educational approaches of this kind that reach teachers in their schools, provide learning resources for them, or enable them to qualify without attending college in person, or opening of new opportunity for them to have up-to-date knowledge no matter where or when they want to study.

The flexibility inherent in open and distance learning, and the fact that it can be combined with a full or near full-time job, makes it particularly appropriate for the often widely-distributed work force of teachers and school managers. Some open and distance learning programmes lead to a qualification others do not. Some are addressed to individuals and others to groups. Some are tightly organised and others are essentially organised as a way of making learning resources available to teachers.

The major concern of ODL has been explained by many scholars but I will restrict myself to a few of these concerns. Khan (2006) states that ODL is popular for ensuring access equity and quality education in a cost-effective manner. Similar, Dikshit (2006), while providing the background information on Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), state that the most innovative and flexible systems capable of providing quality education to a large target group of learners in reasonable neighbourhood of their dwellings and to suit their requirements and expectations is Open Distance Learning. On ability to provide access to those denied by the conventional institutions, Louw and Engelbrecht (2006) state that University of South Africa serves over 200,000 students including 14,000 from Africa and other countries. It delivers 5,000 different courses through 70 teaching departments while learners can take examinations at approximately 600 centres worldwide. And for India, Dikshit (2006) states that open universities in our community have registered a phenomenal increase in enrolment with the current average growth rate being around 24% per year. He concluded that IGNOU is currently providing education to nearly 1.3 million students. The 1995 Institutional Statistics quoted by Egbokhare (2007), revealed the population of large Open Distance Learning at take off

Table 1: Large Distance Learning System

Serial No	Country	Name of Institution	Enrolment	Foundation
1	China	CCTVU Network	852,000	1997
2	Turkey	Anadolu University	600,000	1982
3	France	CNED	350,000	1939
4	Indonesia	University of Terbuka	353,000	1984
5	Thailand	Sukothai Thamairat OU	350,000	1978
6	India	Indira Gandhi Open University(IGNOU)	242,000	1985
7	Korea	National Open University	200,000	1972
8	United Kingdom	OpenUniversity	200,000	1969
9	Spain	UNED	140,000	1972
10	South Africa	UNISA	130,000	1949
11	Nigeria	University of Ibadan	7,000	1986

Source: Institutional Statistics 1995

The question now is to what extent as the Distance Learning Centre of University of Ibadan been able to justify its existence as an open distance learning institution? How has it been able to absorb those denied admission by the conventional universities in Nigeria? To what extent has it been able to have as many courses as expected of an open distance learning institution? How has it been able to increase its initial few courses to many and what is the current status of the Centre?

In an attempt to provide answers to these questions, a study using in-depth interview analysis, was conducted and it was discovered that the Centre has a new image. Before I discuss this new image of the Centre, let me quickly provide background information of DLC, University in Ibadan.

The first University in Nigeria – the University of Ibadan – was established in 1948 and it started as a College of the University of London to provide opportunity for Nigerians to have access to university education. In doing this, the Extra Mural Studies Unit which provided opportunity for students qualifications to gain admission into the university was established a year later, 1949. This unit, which has since transformed into the Department of Adult Education, justified its relevance when in 1986, for the third time, presented a proposal for the establishment of an External Studies Programme (ESP) to the Senate of the University.

The Senate, realising the importance of the proposal and the relief it will bring to many Nigerians in the face of the unsatisfied demands higher education approved the proposal. The university authority sought for the approval of the External Studies Programme (ESP) from the National Universities Commission (NUC) on September 25, 1986 and was subsequently approved on the condition that the programme would be self-financing (Bajah, Odejide, Akin- Ova, Ayoade, Hussain, 1995).

The Centre finally took off during the 1988/1989 session with academic programmes in three departments: Department of Adult Education, Department of Guidance and Counselling and Department of Teacher Education with a total student population of 1,122 (Aderinoye, 1995, Eghokhare, 2006). The cumulative students intake of the Centre between 1988 and 2003 was 6306.

The Beginning of the New Paradigm

Summarising their findings on a study of the Centre (Ayodele, Araromi, Emeke and Adegbile (2006) reported, among others, that:

whereas distance learning programme in several other countries are known for the large number of students, our own experiment with distance learning still has very few students. During the first fifteen year of its existence, the University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre has fewer than 7,000 students. As Against this situation, the Open University in Britain registered 24,000 students in its first year and graduated more than 100,000 students during its second decade.

The study also revealed that students had a problem in relating with their course tutors. A major conclusion of the study was that courses available were too few and too narrow to justify the name Distance Learning Programme.

In spite of all these, the study reported a pleasant aspect of the programme thus:

from the results thus far, it is particularly pleasing that most students emerged with brilliant degree results. The ratio of students in the various class of degrees (first class, second class upper, second class lower, third class and pass) are quite comparable to those obtained in the regular degree programmes. Besides, the fact that some of the graduates have registered for, and obtained higher degree is particularly encouraging.

These findings served as an opener and impetus to the Director of the Centre – Professor Francis Egbokhare – who came-up with proposals that have changed the fortune of the Centre. He anchored his proposals on the vision of the university: “to expand the frontiers of knowledge and transform society through innovation. He there after submitted that the DLC must be restructured along this vision. He identified the challenges facing the DLC as follows:

- i) Unpopular programmes,
- ii) Stiff competition from other institutions,
- iii) Unrealistic regulatory environment,

iv) Poor access due to face-to-face mode of delivery among others. (Egbokhare, 2006).

To reverse the above staged challenges, he sets in motion a plan of action to achieve the following:

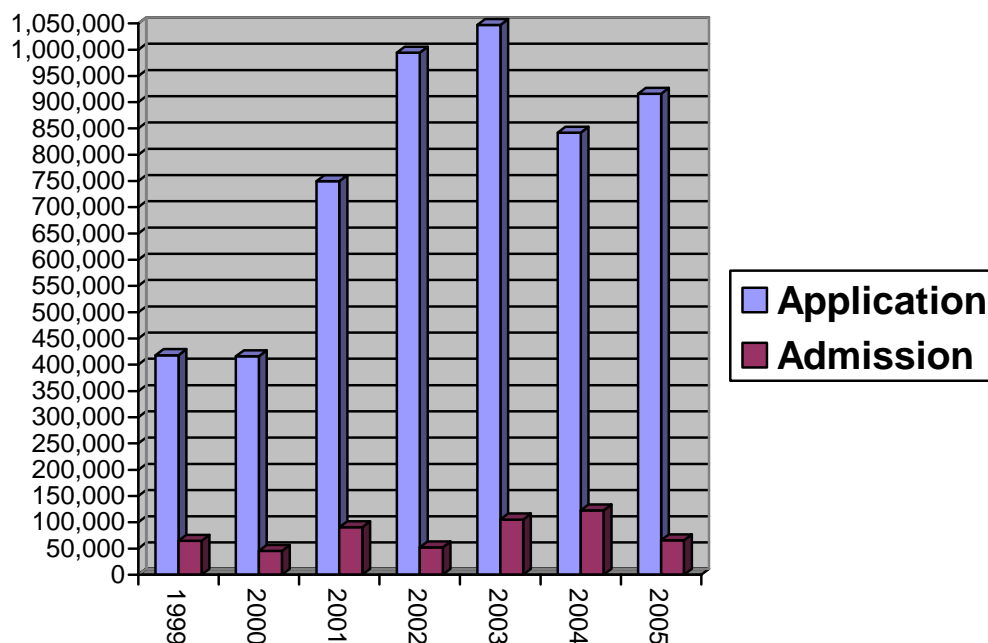
- Increase student enrolment to at least, 30,000 within the next three years.
- Become the primary source of intellectual resources in the West Africa sub-region.
- Increase the number of programmes available in the centre.

The determination to increase enrolment and courses must have been informed by the continuous downtrend in the number of students admitted by the conventional universities. The records of Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) (the body responsible for admitting students into Nigerian Universities) revealed a high degree of unsatisfied admission demand into Nigerian University as displayed by the table below:

Table 2: Degree of Unsatisfied Admission Demand into Nigerian University

Year	Application	Admission	Admission as % of Application
1999	418,292	64,368	15.35
2000	416,318	45,766	11
2001	749,419	90,769	12.12
2002	994,380	51,845	5.22
2003	1,046,950	105,157	10.05
2004	841,878	122,492	14.55
2005	916,371	65,609	7.1

JAMB Students Admission



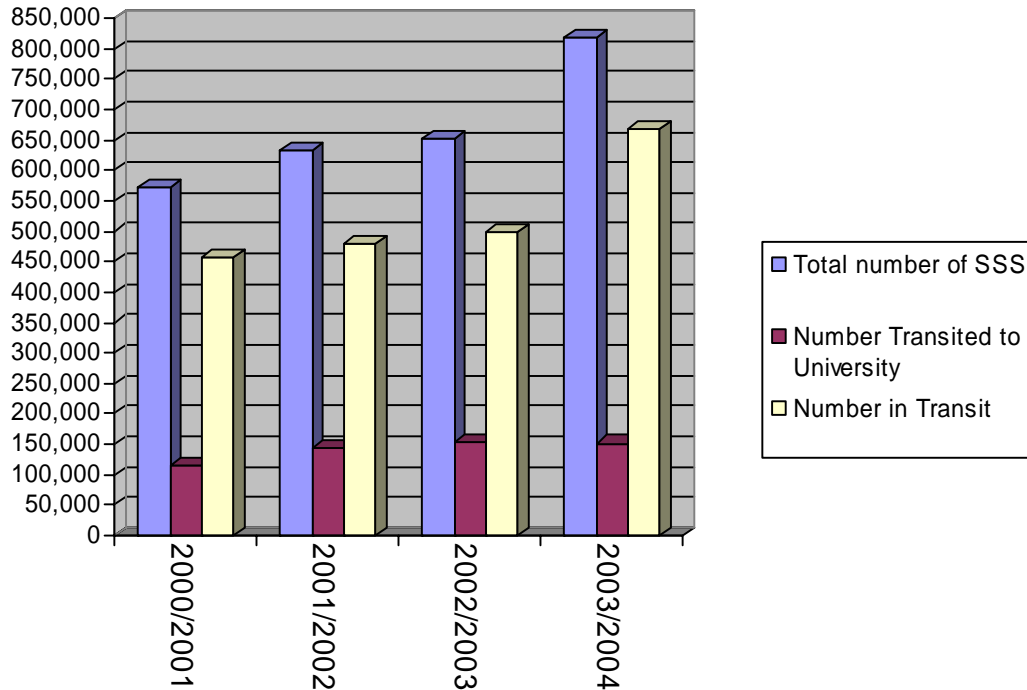
A worst scenario was the transition from senior secondary school to university as displayed by the table below:

Table 3: Transition from Senior Secondary School to University

Year	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/4
Total No of SSS	571,089	632,248	652,987	818,572
No Transited to University	113,756	142,614	153,226	151,526
No in transit	457,333	479,634	499,761	667,047

FME Statistics of Education in Nigeria (1999 – 2005).

Transition from Senior Secondary to University



From the two tables presented above, we can imagine the high wastage ratio in the number of prospective candidates who would have been left behind in terms of addition into the conventional universities if alternative access was not created which is Open-Distance Learning.

The questions now are: how has the DLC helped in absorbing a percentage of these students irrespective of the fraction? How has the DLC been repositioned to accommodate some of these students? What mechanisms are put in place to actualise the 30,000 enrolment figure within the three years as specified in the action plan?.

Faced with these challenges, the Board of the DLC mandated the Director to implement the following:

- 1) Chart a new course for the DLC by reviewing courses with a view to introducing not only new but attractive courses to prospective students,
- 2) Re-orientate stakeholders on the roles of the DLC in the educational development of the country,
- 3) Make the admission requirements more open,
- 4) Integrate learner support services, into a more purposive practical activity of the Centre, and
- 5) Establish resource centre where learners will have access to computer and the internet.

In response to the Board's mandate, the Director mobilised all the major stakeholders in the university community through a re-orientation seminar where all were further enlightened on the roles, relevance, and essence of the DLC.

At the end of the seminar, a robust work plan for the centre was developed. This tremendously assisted the Director in packaging and development of new courses which have radically increased the number of courses and the enrolments figure. The first step taken by the director was the presentation of the newly developed courses to the senate of the university and were eventually approved. The senate's approval of the courses was based on the fact that the university staff shown commitment to fully participate in the Centre's activities and the Centres have readiness to open its gate to many rather than few prospective students.

The diploma courses approved, in addition to the existing ones, were:

They are;

- 1) Diploma in Industrial Relations and Trade Unionism
- 2) Diploma in Adult and Community Development
- 3) Diploma in Human Kinetics and Health Education
- 4) Diploma in Librarianship
- 5) Professional Diploma in Educational Management
- 6) Diploma in Teacher Education
- 7) Diploma in Theatre Arts (on stage, radio, film, TV, video)
- 8) Diploma in Statistics
- 9) Diploma in Social Work
- 10) Diploma in HIV/AIDS/STIs Education
- 11) Diploma in School Media Programme
- 12) Diploma in History and Diplomatic Studies
- 13) Diploma in Applied Psychology

The new degree courses approved in the faculties of Arts and Social sciences were

B.A. Communication and Language Arts

B.Sc Psychology

B.Sc Economics

This is in addition to the already existing courses in the Faculty of Education

1. Library, Archival and Information Studies
2. Adult Education
3. Educational Management
4. Guidance and Counselling
5. Human Kinetics and Health Education
6. Special Education
7. Teacher Education
8. Pre-Primary and Primary Education

The University Senate has since approved many new courses for the DLC as listed below in different departments and faculties.

Faculty of Arts

1. B. A. Communication and English
2. B. A. Communication and French
3. B. A. French
4. B. A. French and Linguistics
5. B. A. English and French
6. B. A. English
7. B. A. French and English
8. B. A. French and Communication Arts
9. B. A. French and Yoruba
10. B. A. French and Linguistics
11. B. A. Linguistics
12. B. A. Linguistics and Communication Arts
13. B. A. Linguistics and English Language
14. B.A. Linguistics and Yoruba

Faculty of Agriculture:

- Agriculture
- Forest Resource Management
- Wildlife Management
- Fisheries Management

Faculty of Social Sciences (4 years Degree)

1. B.Sc Economics
2. B.Sc Political Science

Faculty of Science (4 years Degree)

- B.Sc Statistics

Faculty of Education (5 years Degree)

- Guidance and Counselling
- Teacher Education

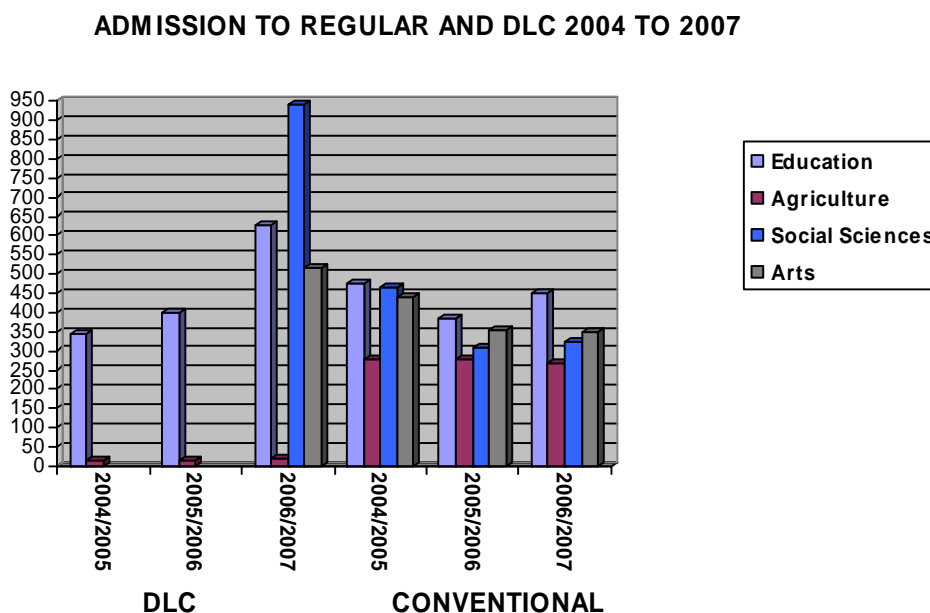
The approval of these courses has tremendously changed the fortune of the Centre because the enrolment figure compared with the past, has astronomically increased. In fact, a comparison in the admission rate between the convention and DLC in the following faculty showed a great difference:

Table 4: Admission Rate between the Convention and DLC

Faculty	DLC			Conventional		
	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007
Education	345	398	627	474	385	451
Agric	16	15	18	279	277	266

Social Sci.	-	-	940	463	309	324
Arts	-	-	515	440	352	350

Source: Admission offices of DLC and the Conventional University of Ibadan (2007)



From the above table, it can be observed that the total DLC students' enrolment in the faculty of education for 2005/2006 was 627 while that of the Conventional was 451. The B.Sc Psychology in the programme Faculty of Social Sciences has shown that the DLC has actually widened access to university education. The DLC admission for 2006/2007 session for the programme was 940 while that of the Conventional regular admission was 342. Similarly, in the Faculty of Arts, DLC admission for 2006/2007 session was 515 while that of the regular was 350.

Other Mechanisms to Facilitate and Sustain Mass Enrolment of Prospective Students

In meeting the challenges that are emerging as a result of the increase in enrolment figure the DLC is focusing on the following:

- Developing the capacity of all its administrative staff through on-the-job training and leave of absence to undertake courses in advanced Open Learning Institutions in other part of the world as well as the development of new staff handbook where other incentives are clearly spelt-out.
- Proposal for holders of ordinary and higher national diploma who were all along denied admission into DLC programmes is before the senate of the university for approval.
- Recruitment of tutorial assistants to assist in tutorial and students assignments.

- Appointment of student counsellors to help in counselling students before and after admission.
- Inauguration of new committees such as student support, tutorial, administration, technology, and learning resources development to facilitate smooth running of the programmes.

Establishment of a resource centre with more than 40 computers connected to the internet for an effective integration of on-line services for all the students. This will provide opportunity for students and tutors to have direct access to the internet thereby enhancing tutor to student and student to student on line communication.

It has also become part of the Centre's policy to have the telephone numbers of both students and course tutors so that students can have direct access to course tutors on issues relating to assignments and fixing of time for occasional face-to-face. This will assist students to call their course tutor(s) or tutorial assistant(s) when it is desirable to do so.

The Centre has also imbibed the culture of occasional re-training of its entire participating academic staff with a view of updating their knowledge and keeping them abreast of latest developments about the Centre in particular and about Open-Distance Learning in general.

In conclusion, it is expected that Professor Egbokhare dream of a 30,000 enrolment figure, within the next three years, becomes a reality soonest.

Please join me to congratulate the Director that has revolutionised the DLC within the first term of his administration. Here is Professor Francis Egbokhare



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