

Open and Distance Learning for Skill Development in Nigeria

*Ladipo M.K & **Adelana S.O

***Department of Mechanical Engineering,*

Department of Polymer & Textile Technology

**, * *Yaba College of Technology, Lagos, Nigeria*

Corresponding author's email: samdelano1@gmail, kudiladipo@yahoo.ca

Abstract

The access to knowledge and skills to all people regardless of gender, age, race or location is enormously important. Education and training must be all-inclusive and reflect the vastly diversified present economy and various fields of human-power needs. The universalization of education and its worldwide acceptance as a continuous or lifelong undertaking, coupled with concerns about educational access and equity, as well as the prevailing level of poverty necessitates the use of various education delivery approaches to enable all citizens to benefit from this public good. A variety of skills are taught in formal or traditional classroom settings and many others are taught in the societies or village communities and settings. The primary aim of this paper is to look into the roles of Open Distance Learning (ODL) in the dissemination of skills to the Nigerian population and also to discuss how ODL has expanded the educational opportunities at various levels.

Keywords: Open Distance Learning, human-power, skills gender.

Introduction

Distance education (sometimes referred to as 'distributed learning' or 'distance learning') is any educational process in which all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone geographically removed from the learner, with all or most of the communication between teachers and learners being conducted through electronic or print mediums

A dynamic nation needs a strong educational system. Therefore, providing quality education to millions has been one of the struggles facing developing countries such as Nigeria. A skill based society is one that will help it to move forward and progress in development. Skills come hand in hand with knowledge – i.e. new skills are always needed to complement new knowledge acquired. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is a relatively new concept in Nigeria as it is a developing country. Open and distance learning (ODL) has as its main objective, attaining of mass literacy and providing opportunities for those who could not gain admission through designated entrance examination agencies as well as those who could not afford to leave their job to attend a fulltime educational programme. Open and distance learning seeks to improve skilled manpower and also improve the skills for those already at work. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to identify both the internal and external implementation problems for ODL in Nigeria. Major recommendations are made based on the result of the study. The Nigerian government should thus subsidize ODL programmes just like the conventional school system and improve electricity supplies to the nation. Open and distance learning equally favours workers as well as applicants and those who could not secure a position in an educational institution through entrance examinations. Workers gain most benefit because they are exposed to training on the job. Companies and industries need workers who are willing and able to update

their skills throughout their lifetimes, hence open and distance learning programmes has become a serious avenue for upgrading their knowledge. It is also crucial for preparing workers to compete in the global economy. It is a source for improving people's ability to function as members of their communities.

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and its perception

Open learning and distance education refers to approaches to learning that focus on freeing learners from constraints of time and place while offering flexible learning opportunities. For many students, open and distance learning (ODL) is a way of combining work and family responsibilities with educational opportunities. There are several approaches to defining the term, Open and Distance Learning Creed (2001) defined distance learning as 'an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone far removed in space and /or time from the learners'. Open Learning, in turn, is defined as 'an organized educational activity, based on the use of teaching materials, in which the constraints on study are minimized in terms of access, entry, or time and place, pace, method of study, or any combination of these'. Thus, the concept of open and distance learning suggests an educational approach designed to reach learners in their homes/offices/shops, etc, provide learning resources for them to qualify without attending formal classes in person, or create opportunities for lifelong learning, no matter where or when they want to study. According to UNESCO (2002), open and distance learning represents 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. Mudasiru (2006) defined distance learning as a term to describe the student-centeredness of education and it deals with the use of print and electric technologies to present individual lessons to learners at a distance. Correspondence study entails distance learning through postal subgroups, that is, learning at home and communicating with the instructor using print materials. Adebayo (2007a) 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.

The practice of ODL in Nigeria takes various forms, which include correspondence study education, distance learning (Sandwich programmes), Part-Time Teacher Training Programme (PTTP), Open University, weekend programmes, adult literacy education programmes, National Teachers Institute (NTI) and e-learning. From the above view, one can deduce that distance learning not only shares the goals of the conventional school system, but it also aims to provide access to a historically underserved, place bound, and highly motivated population. (Nwaocha & Inyiama).

Historical Background of Distance Education in Nigeria

The history of distance education in Nigeria dates back to the correspondence education as a means of preparing candidates for General Certificate in Education, a prerequisites for the

London Matriculation Examination. The first indigenous distance learning programme was the English by Radio programme of Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation that followed independence in 1960. The programme was primarily targeted at primary and secondary school levels and covered core courses at both levels with more emphasis placed on the teaching and learning of Science, Mathematics and English. The technology driven distance learning came into existence almost the same time with the first indigenous distance learning with the emergent of Educational Television programmes of the then National Television of Nigeria (NTV). There was also Schools Educational Broadcast of the Radio Nigeria stationed in Lagos and relayed all through the federation. All radio stations were required to hook at specific times of the day during school hours for broadcasting of programmes. In the last 31 years, University education programmes in the country begin to witness a lot of changes in terms of instructional delivery mode in some of our tertiary institutions. The Correspondence and Open Studies Unit (COSU) of University of Lagos that started in 1974, which later changed to Correspondence and Open Studies Institute (COSI) and now known as Distance Learning Institute was the first attempt made to establish a distance education unit as part of a University in Nigeria. It began initially to offer programmes in science education at first degree level in Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, Physics and Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) for degree holders that did not possess teaching qualifications. The National Teachers' Institute (NTI) started as a distance education institution in 1976 (as the first dedicated distance education institution) with the support of UNESCO. It began by training Grade Two Teachers (TC II). In 1990, the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) programme was introduced when the expectation was that the minimum teaching certificate in Nigeria was expected to be NCE. The Institute also introduced the PGDE programme in the year 2005. Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) also started its distance education through a training programme known as Teachers-in- Service Education Programme (TISEP) for Grades Three and Two teachers and later the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE). Also in November, 1972, the University also established a University of the Air Programme for teachers in secondary schools and teacher training colleges. The Distance Learning Institute of the University of Ibadan which started in 1979 as External Degree Programme of the university is another institution which adopted the distance learning mode

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), was established in July, 1983, by an Act of the National Assembly as the first distance learning tertiary institution in Nigeria when it became crystal clear to the then Federal Government that the ever growing demand for education by her people cannot be met by the traditional means of face-to-face classroom instructional delivery. The institution was closed down few weeks after its establishment and the Act that established the University was suspended in 1984 by the then Federal Military Government that overthrew the civilian government. Many years after the closure, the compelling reasons that informed the earlier establishment of the university as well as the need to fill the gap created by the Federal Government clamped down on mushroom outreach study centres of many conventional universities all over the country and the need to take advantage of emerging developments in the field of ICTs which have revolutionalized the techniques and methods of instructional deliveries in the distance learning mode necessitated the reactivation of the suspended NOUN Act of 1983 in 2002. This paved the way for the resuscitation of the NOUN.

Development of e-Learning in Nigerian Schools

The development of e-learning in Nigeria could be traced back to the development of telecommunication which began in 1886 when e-cable connections was established by the colonial masters between Lagos and the colonial office in London to transmit information and receive feedback. By 1893, all government offices in Lagos were provided with telephone service for easy communication, feedback and easy access and later all other parts of the country were provided with telephone services. A lot of changes have been witnessed in the telecommunication industry since 1886. The provision of telecommunication services was initially monopolized by the Nigeria Telecommunication (NITEL) until sometimes in 90's when the federal government of Nigeria commenced the liberalization policy of telecommunication industry. Four (4) private telephone service providers (Mtel – NITEL, Econet to Vmobile now Airtel. MTN and Communication Investment Limited – CIL) were initially licensed to provide General System for Mobile Services. CIL license was later revoked for inability to pay the license fee before the prescribed which was later given to Globacom (Glo) Nigeria. Etisalat Nigeria began commercial operations on 23 October 2008. With this development, more companies were licensed to provide internet services in Nigeria, and this led to improved access to the internet by Nigerians. The country has less than 11 ISPs in 2000, but by the year 2011, it has risen to above 100 and many got connected to the information super-highway, through broadband VSAT connection.

In Nigerian schools, the commonest type of e-learning adopted is in form of lectures note on CD-ROM which can be played as at when the learners desires. The challenge of this method is that the numbers of students per computer in which these facilities are available are un-interactive as compared to when lectures are been received in the classroom. Some institutions adopted the use of intranet facilities; however, this is not well maintained because of incessant power problem and high cost of running generating set. Most students in Nigeria go to the cyber café but because there are people of diverse intention on the net at the same time, and the bandwidth problem, a multimedia interactive can not be done. Despite all these and other challenges facing e-learning in Nigeria educational institution, institutions such as Yaba College of Technology, University of Ibadan, Obafemi Awolowo University, University of Benin, University of Abuja, University of Lagos, National Open University of Nigeria, among others has the facilities for e-learning. The number seems very low (compared to other parts of the world and the usefulness of the e-learning in the economy development) because of location of most institutions, bandwidth issue and mostly the challenge of electricity. Though most of the educational institutions (private and public) have started setting up their ICT centres for internet services alone without actually taking into consideration other components of e-learning centre.

Need for Open and Distance Learning in Nigeria

The need for Open and Distance Education (ODE) in Nigeria is an important issue for several cogent reasons. Firstly, the vast majority of the population lives below poverty level. They are unable to attend urban based institutions and thus remain deprived of higher education despite their superior merit. Secondly, those who joined workforce without completing their studies or education due to family commitments are unable to combine their work with studies and very few of them who have strong desire for higher studies could not do so because of the limited offer in the traditional institution of higher learning. Thirdly, the tradition of childhood, early marriage and religious belief in the country deprives the majority of female population from higher education. Besides, there are some other usual factors like physical disabilities, remoteness of localities, exorbitant tuition fees in most privately owned Universities and so on.

These are some of the major issues responsible for why millions of Nigerians are deprived of higher education despite their keen interest and eligibilities. ODL provides avenues for higher education for such a vast under-privileged population. Nigeria is generously endowed with human resources that need to be well equipped with literacy and skills to contribute to economic development, which is badly needed for this country. Thus, it is crystal clear that the way forward is to embrace ODE using both hands and supported by all necessary financial and infrastructural commitments.

Position of Yaba College of Technology in the Promotion of ODL in Nigeria

Yaba College of Technology Centre for Research and Sustainable Development is one of the UNEVOC Centre in Nigeria. Its mission of the Centre is to support TVET policy and human resources development in Nigeria and in the West African Region. It aims to promote the production of skilled/semi-skilled technical and professional manpower, to revitalize, and sustain the national economy, reduce unemployment and poverty through the setting and maintenance of high standards, provision of current and reliable information for planning and decision making, sourcing and disbursing of funds and adequate linkages with industry. The objectives of the Centre of Excellence for TVET are mainly: capacity development for TVET personnel, innovation and dissemination of best TVET practices, networking of TVET institutions and promoting the development of flexible Skills.

The Centre organizes training workshops, develops learning materials, and assist the NBTE Centre of Excellence for TVET to facilitates the institutionalization of the National Vocational Qualifications Framework in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Open Distance Learning (ODL) is playing an important role in the dissemination of skills and knowledge in the most fundamental areas through ODL. Since it has the advantage of reaching out to learners scattered throughout this geographically dispersed nation, it plays a vital contribution towards the development of this nation by equipping citizens with valuable knowledge and skills that will help them to improve and sustain their livelihoods.

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