

NIGERIAN OPEN UNIVERSITY: THE METAMORPHOSIS OF THE NIGERIAN SATELLITE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME

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Abstract

The Nigerian economy went into a near collapse in the late 1980's. The concomitant effect was the reluctance of the Nigerian workers in public and private sectors to leave their jobs for full-time University education; leaving certainty for uncertainty! This led to the upsurge of the Satellite educational programme in about 95% of the Universities in Nigeria. The Satellite programme was a 'study-as-you-work' educational programme.

This programme had wide acceptability until the coming of the present democratic political dispensation in Nigeria after long years of military rule. Government, through the Federal Ministry of Education, expressed her reservation over the continued existence of this programme in Nigerian tertiary institutions, complaining about the low standard of the degrees being awarded. The Satellite programme was forced, through the use of Government machinery, to stop operations all over Nigeria.

Empirical evidence, as presented in this paper, confirms that the reality of the moment in Nigeria is the metamorphosis of the Satellite programme into a full fledged Open University. Unlike the former, the Nigerian Open University will not only allow for full control of the quality of learning given to students at the University level, it is designed to incorporate the Polytechnic and Secondary education.

This paper succinctly explains the evolution and sudden collapse of the Satellite degree programme in Nigeria and presents certain proposal for resuscitating the Nigerian Open University. The paper then recommends an Economic Development Distance and Open learning approaches for Nigeria in particular, and the developing world in general.

Introduction

Nigeria, at the turn of the millenium has a population of about 120,000,000 people spread over a wide geographical land mass of 923,768 sq km. It is a country with cultural, religious, social and political diversities. As a former British colony, the awareness for Western education is high. However, those without access to formal education are still disproportionately higher than those that have access. The latter is attributable to the sudden collpase of the Nigerian independence obtained in 1960. The military coup of 1966 brought tremendous retardation and degeneration to the Nigerian economy. The epileptic political resurgence in the years that followed led to further disintegration of not only the economy, but the entire education system (Bamisaye, 2000). Successive military regimes that interupted the weak democratic governments that succeeded them de-emphasised access to education. The assistance given to education, in form of scholarship, study-leave-with-pay, inservice training and government supports were either cut down or completely removed. According to UNESCO (2001) and Bamisaye (2000), the challenge for the survival of higher educational institution in the presence of the ailing economy and rapidly increasing cost transcends government spending restraints.

The economic downtrend not withstanding, the urge for education among Nigerians of all ages remained unabated. The antidote for the latter became obvious: a type of schooling that will allow for a study -as- you-work- opportunity.

Distance Education in Nigerian

Distance Education (DE) in Nigeria traditionally took the form of correspondence courses whether home grown or external. According to UNESCO (2001), the earliest recorded Nigerian distance student sat for a University of London Matriculation examination by correspondence in 1887, and according to Fagbamiye (2000), the first conscious attempt made to establish a distance education unit as part of a university in this country (Nigeria) was made in 1974 when the University of Lagos sought the assistance of International Extension College in the U.K. to establish the Correspondence and Open Studies Unit (COSU). This was latter known as Correspondence and Open Studies Institute (COSIT) and latter as the Distant Learning Institute (DLI).

Jegede (2002), UNESCO (2001), and Fagbamiye (2000) appeared to converge in their sequential listing of the distance education initiatives in Nigeria. They have the sequence as summarised in table 1

Table 1 : Distance Education Initiatives in Nigeria

	TYPE	INSTITUTION	YEAR
1	Correspondence Courses	University of London	1950
2	Extra mural Studies	Oxford University	1947
3	DE course by Radio	Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC)	1960
4	Educational Television Programmes	National Television of Nigeria (NTV)	1966?
5	University of the Air	Ahmadu Bello University (Nigeria)	1972
6	Teachers In-service Education Programme (TISEP)	Ahmadu Bello University (Nigeria)	1975
7	Correspondence and Open University unit (COSU) (later COSIT,DLI)	University of Lagos (Nigeria)	1974
8	Teachers' Training Programme	National Teachers' Institute (NTI)	1976
9	Open Learning	National Open University	1983
10	Centre for distance learning (CDL)	University of Abuja	1990

In Nigeria, the distance learning initiatives operated as shown in Table 1 up to 1990, without any Government policy backing them up. They therefore died in succession. Fagbamiye (2000) exclaimed that the lack of a clear-cut government policy on distance education was the root course of our (Nigeria) backwardness in DE. The distance education programmes in post independence Nigeria were therefore used as a stop-gap measure when the formal system could not meet the demand to increase access to education at all levels and to expand and upgrade the teaching force (UNESCO, 2001).

Economic Dimension

The Nigerian economy went into near collapse in the late 1980's. Ironically, according to Ojo (1997) in Fagbamiye (2000),

“For decades ago, Nigeria was at the threshold of prosperity. Today however, the country which is abundantly endowed with natural resources, is sliding down the global poverty ladder” (Fagbamiye, 2000 P. 30)

Jegade (2002) gave the poverty rate in Nigeria as 67.8% in rural areas and 57.7% in urban areas. The devastating effect of this economic degeneracy brought great impediments on the way of formal schooling in Nigeria. The tertiary institutions were badly hit. Government removed subsidies on students and staff welfare programmes, subvention to institutions were either withdrawn or cut down and so on. Institutions of higher learning were at the verge of collapse. UNESCO (2001) argued that the lack of government funding , among other factors, undoubtedly hindered the quality and effective coordination of distance education initiatives in Nigeria. The central Government could no longer shoulder the huge amount of money needed to run the higher institutions, particularly the Universities.

Access to University Education

The dwindling economy in Nigeria seemed to have no negative effect on the school-age boys and girls in their urge for University education. On the other hand, very many of them continue to seek for admission into the Nigerian Universities through the entrance examinations conducted by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB). The adult learners had the option of leaving their jobs for formal University education because Government were not prepared to sponsor workers on full-time study with pay.

Table 2 shows the JAMB application and Admission Profiles

Table 2: JAMB applicants and admissions

	1986/87	1987/88	1988/89	1989/90	1990/91	1991/92	1992/93	1993/94	1995/96
No of Applicants	193,774	210,525	190,353	255,638	287,572	398,270	357,950	420,681	512,777
No Admitted	39,915	36,356	41,700	38,431	48,504	61,479	57,685	59,378	37,498
% Admitted	21	17.7	22	15	16.9	15.4	16.1	14.1	7.3

Source: Adapted from Jegede (2000).

Table 2 reveals that less than 20% of prospective candidates secured admission into Nigerian universities since 1989. This percentage had continued to fall progressively since this year. While the number of candidates seeking admission continued to increase astronomically, the number offered places in the Nigerian Universities remain very low. Access to formal University education is hence low in Nigeria.

The distribution of the Nigerian Universities is as shown in Table 3

Table 3: Distribution of Universities in Nigeria

Type	Status	Number
Federal	Conventional	16
	Agriculture	3
	Technology	5
State	Conventional	10
	Agriculture	-
	Technology	3
Private	Conventional	7
	Agriculture	-
	Technology	-

Table 3, shows that there are 44 Universities in Nigeria comprising of 24 Federal, 13 State and 7 Private Universities. The large population of Nigeria however overwhelms this number of universities and makes access to formal University education formidable for a greater percentage of those who desire it. Table 4 shows some vital statistics to buttress the aforementioned.

Table 4: Vital Statistics on Nigeria

Description	Number	%
Population of Nigeria	120 million	100
Growth Rate	4 million	3
Age under 15 yrs	54 million	47.7
Age above 64 yrs	4 million	3
Females	59 million	49
Male	61 million	51
Functional Literacy	61 million	51
University Education	24 million	20

Table 4, shows that about 49% of the Nigerian populace have no access to formal education while about 20% have no access to formal Universities education.

Study –as-You-Work Education Initiatives

There had always been a strong bias towards formal education of the conventional type in Nigeria, perhaps because of the negative attitudes to distance education (UNESCO , 2001). Everybody desires full-time University education. In mid-1980's however due to the ailing economy and the risk involved in leaving one's job, for full-time University education, the myth of conventional education was broken. The concomittant effect was the reluctance of the Nigerian workers in public and private sectors to leave their jobs for full-time University education. This amounted to leaving certainty for uncertainty! Jegede (2002) gave the unemployment rate in Nigeria as 3.5% and underemployment rate as 18.5%. On the other hand, the Nigerian Universities (and other tertiary Institutions) became seriously affected by the economic and socio-political problems prevalent in Nigeria during this period. Universities could no longer admit eligible candidates on full-time basis since Government had removed assistance in significant areas. On the whole, less than 10% of the total budget was given to the education sector (Jegede 2002).

In late 1980's therefore, some Universities had no option than to start some outreach educational programmes in Nigeria. The objectives of these outreach programmes could be summarised into two:

- i) To satisfy the yearnings of the working class for formal education, and
- ii) To explore viable means of Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) for the maintenance and sustenance of these Universities in Nigeria.

The State Universities were at the forefront of these education initiatives because of the revenue prospects of the latter. According to Fagbamiye (2000), in the last 10 years, there has been a greater emphasis on internal generation of funds by Universities and other tertiary institutions, exploiting the distance education initiatives.

These educational outreaches came with diversified names and descriptions: part-time, Sandwich, Satellite and affiliated programmes. The common denominator of all of them was that they were study -as-you-work educational initiatives. UNESCO (2001) submitted that the lack of adequate government funding led to a mushrooming of

privately-owned satellite distance learning centres in Nigeria. These, according to them, tended to be ran solely as a commercial venture. Professor Borishade, the Federal Minister of education in Nigeria, corroborated this submission in his address to the workshop on open learning in Abuja, Nigeria where he declared the satellite programmes as mushroom educational programmes without acceptable standards.

The diagram below attempts a schematic explanation of these educational programmes.

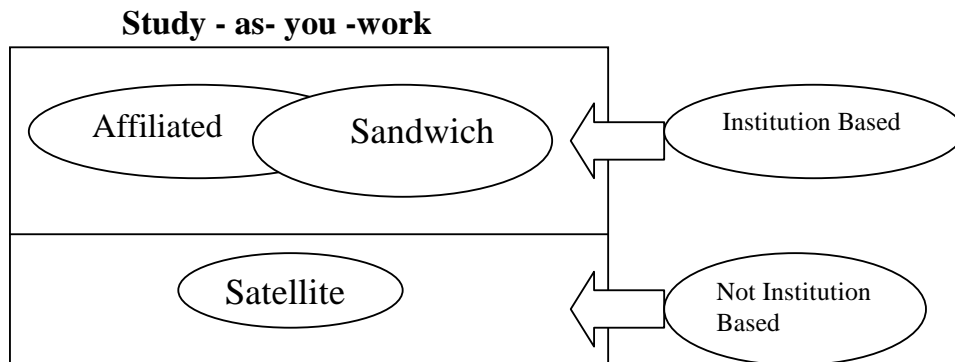


Figure 1: Venn Diagram for Nigeria Distance Education

These distance learning programmes became popular, lately, in about 95% of the Nigerian Universities. As shown in the diagram above, the affiliate and sandwich programmes were run as distance education by Universities while other tertiary institutions and colleges were given approval to run them in the name of these Universities. The latter was to solve the spatial problem created by the distance of prospective students from the base universities having these programmes.

The Satellite programmes were however uniquely different from the other two described above. According to Jegede (2000) UNESCO (2001), and Borishade (2002), the satellite programmes are privately owned, haphazard, uncoordinated with little interest to provide qualitative education and are characterised by large-scale examination malpractices.

These distance education programmes had wide acceptability among the teeming Nigerian populace yearning for formal education during the long years of military rule, notwithstanding all identified flaws.

National Concern

The emergence of the democratic Government in Nigeria in 1999 brought some “structural adjustments’ to the Nation’s education system. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) was introduced to replace the moribund Universal Primary Education (UBE). Jegede (2000), registered his pleasure that the UBE has given government another opportunity to right all the wrong steps of the UPE. Government also planned to aid the rebirth, or the rejuvenation of distance education in Nigeria. The government, through the Federal Ministry of Education expressed her reservation over the continued existence of the mushrooming distance education programmes in Nigeria tertiary Institutions. Government complained about the low standard of the degrees being awarded by the

satellite education outreaches. The Federal Minister of Education, Professor Borishade at several workshops in the year's 2001 and 2002 decried the exploitative tendency, proliferation of educational programmes and award of sub-standard degrees among satellite campuses. He lamented the fate of innocent recipients of such degrees as they may not be accepted in the Nigerian job markets.

The Satellite programme was hence, forced to stop, through the directives of the National University Commission (NUC). Circulars were issued to Universities to stop all satellite programmes with stiff penalties spelt out for defaulting institutions. In late 2001 therefore, the satellite educational programmes ceased to exist as a distance education programme in Nigeria.

The Metamorphosis

Nigeria started a National Open University in 1983 to give access to education for more people. Kadiri (2002) stated in his address to the participants at the workshop on Open Learning in Lokoja, Nigeria, that from available records, the idea of a National Open University came during the last Civilian administration of president Alhaji Shehu Shagari in 1983. The National Open University was stopped unceremoniously by the succeeding military administration of Major General Buhari (Borishade, Kadiri, 2002). Several military administrations, according to Kadiri (2002) had been put in place without the re-opening of the National Open University. Nigeria, according to him, is several years behind other nations with regard to open learning.

The Satellite distance education initiatives which unofficially replaced the abandoned National Open University flourished, as already discussed, before the present democratic administration of president Olusegun Obasanjo. The cancellation of the satellite outreach education programme and the planned emergence of the National Open University is described in this paper as a metamorphosis of satellite distance learning to National Open University in Nigeria.

By definition complete metamorphosis in insect is a series of changes or development from egg to larva, to pupa and to the adult insect. This paper assumes the resurgence of the National Open University as a complete metamorphosis because of the resources commitment and attention given to its re-introduction. By definition therefore, the complete metamorphosis of Distance and Open learning in Nigeria is the series of changes or development from correspondence courses, to old National Open University, to Satellite educational programmes, to the New National Open University (NOU). This is illustrated in the diagram below:

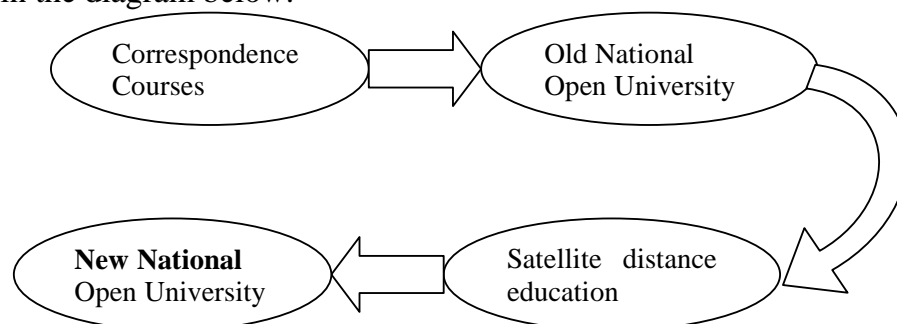
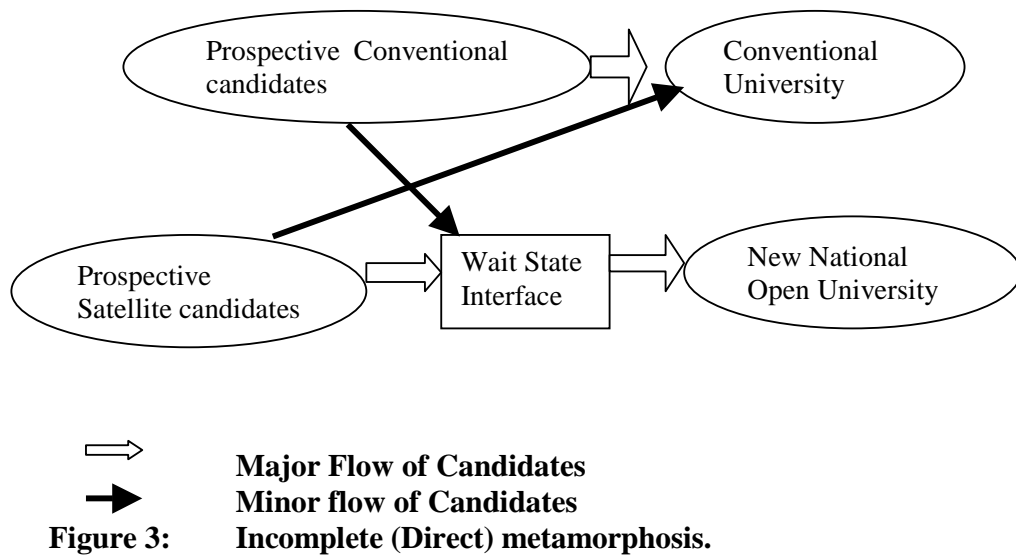


Figure 2: Complete Metamorphosis

The New National Open University is however a direct metamorphosis from the Satellite distance education programmes as shown in the diagram below:



Explanation

1. The prospective conventional University candidates are those who desire full-time University education, majorly through JAMB and other admission modes. They will all flow into the conventional Universities. However, few of them may opt for open learning as the last result.
2. The prospective Satellite candidates fall into the following categories:
 - a) Those on full-time employment or otherwise, who would have opted for satellite programmes but are awaiting commencement of the National Open Universities.
 - b) Those affected by the closure of the satellite programmes but are waiting to re-enrol in the Open learning.
 - c) Those who had lost hope of formal education and were undecided until satellite programmes were canceled but are now ready to take advantage of the Open University.

These three categories constitute the prospective satellite candidates that will flow majorly into the National Open University system.

3. The wait state interface is the period between the stoppage of the satellite programmes and the actual take-off of the National Open University in September, 2002, hopefully.

The wait state interface is characterised by the following:

- (a) Establishing a co-ordinating body for National Open University
- (b) Initiating planning meetings and presentation of Proposals

- (c) Organising workshops on awareness and training in the preparation of instructional materials e.t.c
- (d) Writing of instructional materials
- (e) Printing of Instructional materials.
- (f) Recruitment of staff: administrative and academic staff for National Open University.
- (g) Acquisition of buildings and other resources.
- (h) Advertisement of courses and publishing the admission criteria.
- (i) Admission of Students.
- (j) Re-enactment of the law establishing the National Open University by the National House of Assembly and
- (k) Presentation of resumption Proposals

Sources: Jegede 2000, Workshop on Open Learning Materials.

4. Conventional Universities still exist to accommodate full-time candidates.
5. National Open University re-opens for Open learning for all Nigerians.

The open learning in Nigeria, according to Jegede (2000), Fagbamiye (2000), UNESCO (2001) and Obanya (2000) will not be limited to University education. It will extend to the Polytechnics, Colleges of education and Secondary School education. Government, according to Obanya (2000) intends to use the open learning as a vehicle to carry the Universal Basic Education to the door step of every Nigerian.

The Challenges

The metamorphosis of the National Open University comes with some challenges:

- i. There is the need to ensure access and equity in education to all Nigerians.
- ii. Quality control and standardization of instructions are non-negotiable.
- iii. Education should be given at affordable prices.
- iv. There is the need for inbuilt formative evaluation of the Open learning.

The Expectation

The major expectation, as expressed in this paper, is the need for the National Open University in Nigeria to evolve an Economic Development Distance and Open learning approach in its curriculum. There is the need to develop functional and need-of-the-hour educational programmes. The curriculum developers should consult companies, banks, private and public establishments and parastatals for inputs in order to design programmes that will enhance economic development of the recipient, his community and the nation at large. As a step in the aforementioned direction, the National Open University in Nigeria had advertised some economic development programmes like E-banking, E-economics, E- Library, Banking and Finance and Internet education, to mention but a few.

The recipients of the Nigerian Open Learning should be able to translate the knowledge to be acquired into practical life enhancement projects that could yield economic prospects. The use of local resources and indigenous technology in teaching and learning to complement the electronic and technological media will enhance rapid economic development, not only in Nigeria but in the third world.

It is expected that the National Open University will initiate open learning that will encourage local crafts rejuvenation and adaptation. The emphasis should not be on the acquisition of theoretical knowledge but on practical skills built on broad based functional education and local technology.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper succinctly explains the evolution and sudden collapse of the satellite degree programme in Nigeria. The resuscitation of the National Open University (NOU) was comprehensively discussed as a metamorphosis from previous distance education initiatives.

The following recommendations are made:

1. The re-enactment of the law backing up NOU must be pursued very rigorously so that no succeeding governments can scrap it again.
2. NOU to be made autonomous with little or no interference from Government.
3. The National commission of Open University should be created to monitor the activities of NOU.
4. The use of local resources and indigenous technology for teaching and research in the Open learning should be incorporated into the curriculum.
5. Open learning should be made accessible, affordable and qualitative in Nigeria.
6. Inbuilt formative evaluation techniques that will give necessary feedbacks for improving the activities of NOU should be incorporated into the entire NOU activities.
7. NOU to initiative and sustain economic development open learning curriculum.
8. NOU to extend opportunity for access to open learning to other African Nations and beyond.
9. Government to formulate a National Policy on Nigerian Distance and Open learning to be gazetted alongside with other educational policies.

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