

Problems Militating Against Administration of Open and Distance Education in Nigeria

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Abstract: Open and Distance Education by nature makes the teacher and the learner work apart each other (at a distance). Distance and Open Learning system will if provide the much sought-for openings for academic advancement of self for our men and women who need remedial, continuing, professional education; skill acquisition, life-long education and so on. This situation when achieved will bring rapid development as many will reach their self esteem; perform better in their various life endeavour and contribute maximally for the development of our nation. But a lot of obstacles are on the way of ODL in Nigeria which includes manpower, infrastructure, facilities, energy, funding and administration. The paper proffered some solutions to the issues raised and it is hoped that ODL will give Nigeria the developmental impetus that has been lacking over the years.

Key words: Administration • Distance education • Nigeria etc.

INTRODUCTION

Open and Distance education has to do with approaches and strategies to learning that focus on freeing learners from constraints of time and place while making available flexible learning opportunities. It permits people to learn with no barriers in respect of time and space, age and previous educational qualification-no entry qualification, no age limit, no regards to sex, race, tribe, state of origin and so on. For many learners, open and distance education enables the combination of work, family responsibilities with educational opportunities. Jegede in Al'aezi [1] saw open and distance education as developing from an inconsequential beginning through correspondence courses to a full-fledged modern day technology facilitated, flexible and learner driven, self-directed learning which involves learners who are often in locations remote from the institutions and/or the instructional or tutorial facilitators.

Distance education lays emphasis on the physical distance which does not permit interaction between the teacher and the learner. Open learning has the flexibility of and access to instruction in order to ensure broad availability of educational opportunities to all. As earlier on noted openness, according to Jegede in Al'aezi [1] disregards age, previous level of academic achievement

and other factors such as sex, rigid evaluation system, social and cultural barriers to education as a life-long pursuit in a democratic environment.

It makes education more learner-centred, using a wide range of teaching strategies and media. It is not conventionally restrictive in nature in areas of admission, attendance, subject combinations and such other restrictions. Distance Education lays emphasis on the physical distance which does not permit direct interaction between the teacher and the learner. The apartness of the teacher and the learner makes the striking difference between it and the face to face or contact education. This may justify Otto-Peter's [2] definition of Distance Education as a method of imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes rationalized by the application of division of labour and organizational principles as well as by the extensive use of technological media, especially for the purpose of reducing the physical distance between the learner and the teacher or the distance learning institution. Distance Education makes use of high quality self-learning materials which make it possible to teach a large number of students at the same time and wherever they live.

Open learning is an essential system of education which uses distance education as a means of getting to the learners. Open learning programmes are usually offered through methods of distance education and

it offers degree courses primarily by correspondence to mature students studying part-time. In these programmes, the classes are broadcast in television, aired on the radio or by local tutoring sessions and in sandwich or summer schools provided by open universities- The open universities also conduct teaching and research through mailed course materials and the use of computer facilities.

Taking Open and Distance learning (ODL) together as a concept, Otto-Peters [2] saw it a composite picture which can be viewed when we take ODL as a special form of education in which:

1. Teacher and students work apart from each other, i.e. at a distance.
2. Teacher and students do not communicate "eye ball to eye ball" with each other.
3. Printed materials are exchanged with the aid of a mailing system.
4. Learning usually takes place in the students' home.
5. Teaching and learning processes allow a degree of openness with regards to access, age, methods, duration and location among others.
6. The student does not cease to work for a living as it is a study alongside work.

Early Attempts of Open and Distance Education in Nigeria: According to UNESCO [3], the earliest recorded Nigerian distance student sat for a University of London Matriculation examination by correspondence in 1887. Distance education in Nigeria according to Bandele [4], traditionally took the form of correspondence courses whether home grown or external.

In Nigeria however, the first indigenous distance learning programme was probably the 'English by Radio' programme of the then Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation, a brain child of the independence of 1960. Driven by technology distance learning came into vogue giving birth to Educational Television programmes of the then National Television of Nigeria (NTN), consequently schools Educational Broadcast of the Radio Nigeria became a national radio programme. All these were early efforts at entrenching distance education in Nigeria. In 1974 an attempt was made to establish a distance education unit as part of a university in Nigeria when the University of Lagos sought the assistance of international Extension College in the United Kingdom to establish the correspondence and open studies unit (COSU). Other attempts include the following adaptation from Bandele [4]:

- a) The Extramural Studies of the Oxford University 1947
- b) Correspondence Courses of University of London 1950
- c) Distance Education Course by Radio, Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NEC) 1960
- d) Educational Television Programmes, Nigerian Television (NTV) 1966
- e) University of the Air, Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) 1972
- f) Correspondence and Open University Unit, UNILAG 1974
- g) Teachers in-Service Education Programme, ABU 1975
- h) Teacher Training Programme, National Teachers Institute (NTI) 1976
- i) Open Learning, National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) 1983
- j) Centre for Distance Learning, University of Abuja 1990
- k) Open Learning, National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) 2002

The above efforts in open and distance education in Nigeria has gone a long way in providing a wide range of opportunities to Nigerians in expanding their frontiers in many fields of education.

Reasons for Distance Education: The question why open and distance education in Nigeria is almost rhetoric as it has to do with the need for this system of education. Within the context of rapid technological change and global economic conditions, the education systems of most countries are challenged with providing increased educational opportunities without increased budgets. With technology the separation in distance is bridged using voice, video, data and print mediums as opposed to the face-to-face communication. Open and distance education can provide adults with second chance at a college or university education; get to those unreached by obstacles of time, distance or physical disability and update the knowledge base o-f workers at their places of employment 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. The vantage positions occupied by open and distance education include among others the following:

Accessibility: In Nigeria many candidates old and young aspire to enter institutions of higher learning year-in year-out, without success. Millions write and pass the JAMB examinations with the pass score of 200 marks and above but few thousands are admitted each year for lack of

space. Many of these qualified candidates are ready students of the open and distance educational institutions such as the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) where hostel accommodation, portable water, regular lecture halls, etc, are not so much a problem. Open learning approaches and strategies, in the words of Alaezi in Osuji [5], permit people to learn with no barriers in respect of time and space, age and previous educational qualification - no entry qualification, no age limit, no regards to sex, race, tribe, state of origin, political affiliation and so on. All those do not inhibit the candidate from gaining admission into the open and distance education. Federal Republic of Nigeria [5], advocated for maximizing efforts in making higher education available to as many Nigerians as possible who do not have access to the regular institutions or who are hindered by work but can engage in work study programmes,

Social Status: Characteristically, distance and open learning has created a major shift in how educators and students think about teaching and learning. By allowing students to learn in more convenient locations and often at more convenient times, distance and open learning has opened opportunities to previously un-reached population. In another way, it also enables more people to extend the period of their education from a limited number of schooling years to a lifelong learning process. In addition to these, it changes power and authority relationships between teachers and learners, often encouraging more equal and open communication than occurs in conventional educational settings. Furthermore distance education enables institutions to reach students all over the world and as such, learners gain increased opportunities to experience other cultures and enrich their educational experience [6].

The learner has opportunity to acquire more skills, equip self with more information and values and so more likely to contribute positively to the improvement of self and the environment where he/she operates. With more education through ODL the individual's social status is enhanced for better performance as a person. The individual becomes more confident and better disposed to contribute to the society where he finds himself/herself.

Economic Factor: In the mid 1980s due to the ailing economy and the risk involved in leaving one's job for full-time university education, the myth of conventional university education was broken. The result of this was the reluctance of the Nigerian Workers in public and

private sectors to leave their jobs for full-time university education. In another development the tertiary institutions in Nigeria were seriously affected by the economic and socio-political problems prevalent in Nigeria during this period of economic recession. According to Jegede in Nwaocha [7], within 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, while the uncertainties of the employment opportunities created more fear in the people. In the midst of all these happenings the institutions saw open and distance education as new ways of generating revenue internally. Nwaocha and Inyama [7] saw ODL as often the most cost effective means of offering education to the people. The authors argued further that for the government and educational policy makers, the system is a panacea for the perennial problem of providing equitable and accessible education in an affordable and cost effective way.

The worker who under goes ODL is working and studying and so his poverty has reduced compared to leaving his job for study without pay. When he completes his study his economy is likely to improve as a result of promotion or leaving his present employment for a greener pasture. More importantly, with open and distance education more qualified and better educated, better skilled manpower are injected into the society who in no small measure will impact on the nation's economic growth as a result of improved quality job performance for best practices.

Means of Teaching in Distance Education: The problem of open and distance education in Nigeria has to do with the ways and means of reaching the learners in the Nigerian environment using the system of education under discussion. Generally ODE uses a wide range of technological options made available to the distance educator to get to the learner. The University of Idaho Engineering Outreach in its article Distance Education at a Glance edited by Godttschalk [8] identified four major categories namely voice, video, data and print.

Voice: This category has the instructional audio tools which includes technologies of telephone, audio conferencing and short-wave radio all for interactive purposes. In addition to the above there are also, the passive or one way audio tools such as CDs, tapes and radio.

Video: There are such instructional video tools as slides, films and video tapes which are pre-produced moving images that are combined with audio -conferencing that are one-way or two-way video with two-way audio.

Data: Information can be sent and received electronically using computers. This one road category of instructional tools are described as data. Distance Education (DE) use computer applications in many ways such as:

- a. Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) - this uses the computer as a self-contained teaching machine to present individual lessons.
- b. Computer-Managed Instruction (CMI) — which uses computer to organize instruction and track student records and progress. In delivering the lesson through a computer, the CAI often combines with CMI.
- c. Computer-Mediated Education (CME) - this describes computer applications that facilitate the delivery of instruction such as electric mail (e-mail), fax, real time computer conferencing and the World Wide Web (WWW) applications.

Print: In the words of Gottschalk [8], this is the foundational element of distance education programmes and the basis from which all other delivery systems have evolved. The print format includes textbooks, study guides, workbooks, course materials, modules, syllabuses, project reports, case studies, mimeographs and abstracts.

In whatever form the delivery comes, what is important is meeting the needs of the learner in manners that are instructionally effective and economically prudent. For any distance education programme to succeed there must first be careful planning which major focus shall be an understanding of the course requirements and student needs. It is based on this that appropriate technologies are selected and with hard work and dedication of the facilitators and other support services effective distance education evolves through open learning.

The Challenges or Constraints Militating Against Distance Education: In this segment of this paper effort was made to highlight the major constraints of ODL in Nigeria. The importance of this system of education cannot be over-emphasized as the world is turning round to embrace a more learner-friendly, cost effective and more embracing education which does not sacrifice quality on

the altar of accessibility. Be this as it may, the question still remains, what are the constraints of ODL in Nigeria? Open and Distance Learning is known for its flexibility although it has its own teething problems especially in the present day Nigeria. The following are some of such problems:

Manpower: It may sound incredible that appropriate manpower may be lacking in a nation with a population of over 120million people and a teeming population of unemployed citizens. This field of education needs trained manpower capable of handling programmes in ODL. There are, to be trained facilitators who should be well at home with ODL to handle learners at study centres especially during face-to-face tutorials. There should also be workers who are specialists in writing course materials for use by the learners. The course materials used in ODL differ from ordinary lecture notes and hand outs to which lecturers are used. Course materials need to be handled by specialists who should bear in mind learner characteristics and other personal and group factors of the many and often differing learners that would benefit from the materials.

Infrastructure/Facilities: Open and distance education in Nigeria still leaves much to be desired in terms of adequate provision of infrastructure like lecture halls, studios, workshops and laboratories. AH [9] found out that classroom for teaching at some distance learning centres were inadequate while there were no large halls that could properly accommodate large classes of about two hundred students or more. Most tutorial contacts of ODL take place in secondary schools which laboratories and studios are meant for secondary education and are substandard. This ordinarily renders such facilities inadequate in terms of basic tools, essential equipment, chemicals, specimen and other laboratory consumables. Libraries are not better as many centres have no libraries and where they exist, they fall far short of the standard. Computer facilities for e-mail, fax, video conferencing; audio conferencing gadgets, etc are not adequate for teachers and students. The available ones suffer from network problems.

Energy Supply: The problem associated with electricity in Nigeria has become hydra-headed. The lack of supply and or sudden and frequent outage of electricity in the country do not encourage any educational programme that would depend on power supply. Most ODL teaching and learning should be electronic using the audio, video,

data and print as already discussed in this paper. Often learning is distorted and completely disrupted by lack of power supply. Electric Generating sets (plants) kept in few homes and offices that can afford them to serve as alternative are not helping the matter as damages often occur while cost of petrol or diesel as well as maintenance costs are very discouraging. Worse still this alternative source has caused more harm than good because of the harmful environmental pollution and outright disaster to many homes. Communication technologies such as radio, television, video, computers and internet are strong tools of ODL. The technology hinges on power supply that is very erratic in our country and this impinges on the achievement of the goals of open and distance education in Nigeria.

Funding: Government budgetary allocation to the education sector in Nigeria still remains low. The poor state of the nation's economy has left many citizens with meager resources to contend with life and have little or nothing for further education. Even when some learners can pay their school fees, they find it difficult to own and maintain basic technological tools which necessary for ODL, This situation pushes the learners to opt for buying textbooks and for the organizers to provide instructional materials, classrooms and lecture halls which are cynical intensive. The ODL sector is also inadequately funded as observed by Ah [9], Nwaocha and Inyama [7].

The fact that the training cost per average student of ODL is more expensive than that of a regular conventional university student was observed by UNESCO [3]. As the education sector is under-funded institutions see distance education as an avenue to improve their internally generated revenue while lecturers see the learners as ready market for their textbooks and handouts. In the midst of this rather chaotic state the ODL suffers in its objectives of giving education for all and life-long education to the citizenry in our nation.

Administration: The administration of distance education in Nigeria has not come to the needed standard. In many centres of adult and distance education, there seem to be not enough specialists. Staff strength does not match the students in-take so as to give the necessary student support services. There is need for counsellors and adequate administrative, technical and support staff to coordinate teaching and learning and to render student support services that are vital to distance education

programmes. The nature of the students requires adequate study guidance, counseling and proper orientation. Mechanisms for information dissemination and feedback systems are not in place. People with adequate technical knowledge to cope with the technological demands of ODL are lacking.

Poor Network: The major problem of e-transactions in Nigeria is poor network. In addition to inadequate supply of electricity there is low tele-density all over the place. To open a file in the internet takes several minutes while to attach files download documents and other transactions like that takes hours many times ending up unsuccessfully. This kind of situation discourages users and keeps them Limping from one network provider to the other, or from one cyber cafe to the other. The result of this is dwindling interest in the use of electronic transactions and consequent poor performance by the learners.

An alternative open to the system in the presence of network problems is the postal services. The Nigerian Postal service (NIPOST) has noticeable improvement in their service delivery. However, much is still desired from the staff who, time without number tamper with parcels and cause some unnecessary delays in the delivery of goods and services to their customers. Their courier services (express) have to be explored in sending print items as it is likely to be cheaper than most other courier services in the society.

CONCLUSION

Open and distance education permits the learners to work apart from the teacher. Open and distance education enables some learners to combine work, family responsibilities with educational opportunities. This type of education disregards age, previous level of academic achievement and other factors such as sex, rigid evaluation system, social and cultural barriers to education as a life-long pursuit in a democratic environment.

Recommendations: Manpower is a critical factor in any human endeavour especially in the education sector. Adequate qualified manpower is needed if the open and distance education programme in Nigeria should achieve its objectives. There should be intensive manpower hunt, training and re-training for the purpose of this very important aspect of our education.

Government should provide fund for establishment and or upgrading study centres of our ODL so as to accommodate all the programmes of study. Such budget should take care of lecture halls, laboratories, studios, equipment and other needs of the programme.

The much talked about revolution in the energy sector of the nation's economy is still being awaited. When electricity supply in Nigeria comes to stay, then a lot will be put in place prominent among which is the open and distance education. It is a fact that what makes ODL truly what it is the technology. Technology goes with energy supply. Without adequate and constant electricity ODL programmes soon boils down to the conventional face-to-face university education. It is hoped that when electricity supply is steady, the issues of poor network and low tele-density will be non-issues. The government should leave no stone unturned in ensuring steady power supply in Nigeria for the obvious socio-economic revolution that would result from such state.

The successful implementation of most projects is dependent on money. There should be increased budgetary allocation to the education sector and especially to open and distance education because of its prime importance in providing education to all. When this is done seasoned administrators are put in charge. Also enough manpower should be put in place for the implementation of the programme of ODL. There is therefore need to have specialists as instructors, facilitators, writers, cartoonists, publishers, distributors, graphics and legal personnel.

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