

AN OVERVIEW OF OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Open and Distance Education has been in existence in Nigeria from 2002 till date. The advantage for its establishment by the working class and Business community has not been properly explored. In this paper, we are giving an overview of the essence of the programme to the benefit of the target audience. Education as the case may be, prepares an individual to suit into the labour market, civil service and continuous personal development necessary for industrial advancement of the political growth of a nation. Therefore, it is education that adds value to human dignity and meaning of life. Thus this article presents a broad overview of the state of distance education based on current literature. It suffices to state that Education is essential in advancing a country.

Keywords: Education, Open and distance education, Nigeria, nation building.

INTRODUCTION

It is an established fact globally that education plays a significant and important role in national development. All countries of the world seemed to have accepted the tremendously compelling argument to make education the corner stone of national development.

The Nigeria National Policy on Education has over the years recognized the place of open and distance education in achieving lifelong education and affirms that lifelong education shall be the basis of the nation's educational policy. Open and distance education is a globally recognized and veritable answer to education in a country. Open and distance education is also good for working class people looking to improve their knowledge base and develop skills critical to their job and career development without having to seek for leave or absence for study in the university.

According to Peter (2002), he stated thus, 'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world, No country can really develop unless its citizens are educated'.

OPEN EDUCATION

Open education is education that is typically offered online. Open education broadens access to the learning and training traditionally offered through formal education system.

Open education is a philosophy about the way people should produce, share and build on knowledge. Proponents of open education such as Farrell (2003) believe that everyone in the world should have access to have quality educational experiences and resources, and they work to eliminate barriers to this goal. Such barriers might include high monetary cost, outdated or obsolete materials and legal mechanisms that prevent collaboration among scholars and educators.

DISTANCE EDUCATION

Distance education is the education of students who may not always be physically present at a school. Traditionally, this usually involved correspondence courses where in the student corresponded with the school. Today it involves online education.

Distance education means education that uses one or more of the following technologies

- (i) To deliver instructions to students who are separated from the instructor and
- (ii) To support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, synchronously. The technologies used may include, The internet;
- (iii) One way and two way transmissions through open broadcast closed circuit, cable, micro wave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite or wireless communications device
- (iv) Auditor conferencing or
- (v) Video cassettes, DVDs and CD- ROMs, if the video cassettes, DVDs or CD- ROMs are used in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in clauses. Distance education is a method of study where teachers and students do not meet in a classroom but use the Internet, E-Mail, mail etc to have classes.

Distance education also known as distance learning or distributed learning or remote education, now existed for age. It involves acquiring information from methods other than the traditional way of gaining knowledge by attending institutions.

Present-day distance learning is influenced a lot by computer and electronics technology. The technology has now made it possible for the Guide and Students to connect almost immediately. There is no interaction between students.

Types of Distance Education

Based on the medium: internet, video, audio.

Internet based courses - Students receive instructions through websites, e-mail, electronic bulletin boards and messaging system

Video based Courses - Two types of video distance learning courses are available.

Audio Based Courses - This includes everything from phone conferences, radio broadcasting and pre-recorded audio CDs.

Definition of Open and Distance Education

Open and distance education is a process of learning which allowed for accessibility of education, where everybody can study from the distance (from everywhere in the world). In other words, open and distance education is accessing education offer from any distance. It can also be obtained through internet or online and/or teleconference and it is mainly for those working class adult or the vulnerable members of the society who lacked the privileged of enrolling in the aim of making education accessible by the larger number of persons.

There are many ways of defining open and distance education with different authors but we are going to look at these four authors.

Greenberg (1998) defines open and distance education as a planned teaching/learning experience that uses a wide spectrum of technologies to reach learners at a distance and is designed to encourage learners' interaction and certification of learning.

Teaster & Blieszner (1999) say the term Open and Distance Education has been applied to many instruction methods. However, its primary distinctions are that the teacher and the learner are separate in space and possibly time.

Keegan (1995) gives the most thorough definition. He says that open and distance learning result from the technological separation of teacher and learner of traveling to a fixed place at a fixed time to meet a fixed person in order to be trained.

Open and Distance education in turn is 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 in time and place.

The concept of open and distance education suggest an educational approach designs to reach learners in their houses/offices/shapes etc, provide learning resources for them to quality without attending formal classes in person or create opportunities for lifelong learning no matter where or when they want to study.

Development of Open and Distance in Nigeria

Quite interestingly right from the onset of the National Policy of Education NPE in 1977, open and distance education has been identified as an integral part of education to be used for socio-economic development of the nation. It recognized open and distance education as a distinct sector of education to be organized nation-wide and given individual flexibility in the development of the human resources towards national development. This shift has been propelled by several developments, which are integrating to impact on how teaching and learning occur. Some of these developments are:

1. The shift in the concept of education from an elite-based system to mass higher education with open access and a view to developing knowledge or learning in the society.
2. The exponent growth in knowledge with which the world is finding difficulty keeping pace. We are told that the half-life of the knowledge we currently hold is limited to less than five years (Marshall, 1996). This means that in five years time all the knowledge

we currently hold in our long-term memory and guard so jealously will become irrelevant, redundant or outdated forcing us to continually go back to school again.

3. The emerging postmodernist view of knowledge generation, which is responsible for a move from looking at knowledge generation as hierarchical and restrictive to being regarded as non-linear, socially negotiated and should be accessible to anyone and everyone through a variety of ways.
4. The need to look at the various ways in which knowledge, its generation and transmission can be effectively managed to aid in personal and societal development.

Fleming (1996) argues that a collection of data is not information and a collection of pieces of information is not knowledge unless they have some patterns and relations are understood and contextual.

Learning takes place when we connect new information to patterns we already hold in our long-term memory, this becomes knowledge. Knowledge therefore becomes ideas and understandings, which can be used to take some actions in order to achieve some goals. Knowledge is stored in many ways and places, for example, it may be stored in a person's brain, stored in an organization, or held in a repository such as a library, or organized in a database. Human beings engage in finding, selecting, distilling, organizing and presenting information in a way that, within contexts, can be used for several things once patterns and association can be discerned from them. Given the rate at which knowledge is generated today, individuals, organizations and educational institutions need to transmit, manage and process information and knowledge on a large scale to diverse groups of people in different locations efficiently and effectively.

Benefit of Open and Distance Education in Nigeria

Farrell (2003) stated that there are long and short-term benefits of open and distance education in Nigeria: There are the following:

1. Access and equity for comprehensive national development
2. Alleviation of capacity constraints for economics, human resources and rural development
3. Education for all especially to reduce or totally eliminate illiteracy and poverty
4. Capacity building for human resource development especially in areas of culture
5. Deficiencies such as in vocational and technical education, science and technology.
6. Life-long and life-wide education in order to build a learning and knowledge-based society.
7. Accession to and capitalizing on emerging market. Opportunities both within the Africa region and globally.
8. Generating spin-off effects on other sectors of national development such as raising development. In telecommunications, information technology industry, broadcasting,

postal and information and the development of many education related small-scale industries

9. Alleviating budgetary constraints as expenditure on open and distance education has been shown in other countries to be as low as 30 percent of the total cost of the conventional form of education beyond the take-off costs. Open and distance education will enable Nigeria to provide access for all achieve equitable representation by taking the distance out of education.

Prospects of open and distance Education in Nigeria

1. Accessibility of education by all:

Open and distance education often open to every person of all ages, irrespective of where one is resident. It is open to people both at home and abroad, the vulnerable persons and the unprivileged individuals, because their service and learning methods have given everyone access to education.

2. Openness of the programme

Privileges are given to students to choose the time and place that are convenient to them. They can equally select the method they want to maximize fully the benefit of open and distance education. More so change of courses can be affected easily to suit one's delight.

3. Free time and pace- students do not have to finish their programme to study within a given period of time rather, they study at their own time and pace. They make the decision on how to go about their study, and they study anytime they feel like studying as sometimes their learning is done through online. According to Allen & Seaman (2007), improving students access to higher education has been cited to involve a Student-centered approach in which the instructor takes the role of the facilitator.

According to Sahin& Shelley (2008), students' needs and perceptions should be central in the design development and delivering open and distance education courses. The program provides access to higher education for students who cannot attend traditional on campus courses due to employment and family responsibilities.

Problems of Open and Distance Education in Nigeria

1. Conflicting policy- before the implementation of open and distance education in Nigeria, the policy was to adopt the traditional approach in tertiary institutions but issues arose when some educational organizations rather opted to adopt the modern technology technique in offering open and distance education. This approach is a contrast from what was conceived earlier.

The reason for this departure is attributed to financial interest and a calculated attempt to remain competitive in the business and all these remained the wrong reasons for the establishment of open and distance education. That is why the programme is unsuccessful because it has lost its clear mandate.

2. Lack of adequate planning- The mandate of open and distance education in Nigeria has not been achieved, despite its promises and good ideas the programme has failed. To

see the importance of quality planning in implementing open and distance education in Nigeria, because actually the success of the programme supposed to be directed by the already conceived planning strategies. This would have ensured the need of allowing access to education for all.

3. Lack of clear-cut guidelines- Planning is not however, the only problem of open and distance education in Nigeria lack of clear guidelines, that would have directed educators to plan effectively the open and distance education, implementation in the tertiary institutions the country. They have failed to take into consideration the reason to which open and distance education, assessment of education organization supposed to have been taken into consideration in order to enhance open and distance education.

Factors to consider for the improvement of the management of open and distance education

- i. Admission requirement and procedure
- ii. Development and production of instructional materials
- iii. Structure and management of the delivery system
- iv. Student assessment procedures
- v. Quality of materials used for teaching and promotion of learning
- vi. The student support services
- vii. Monitoring evaluation and feedback system.

RECOMMENDATION

1. There is need to expand existing open and distance education institution, establish new ones, and provide facilities and spaces. If we use reliable statistics of those that need higher education in Nigeria given the facts as stated earlier, distance education in Nigeria could be said to be at the primary stage. All over the world, Open and distance learning is at the 5th stage, and that is the stage of the use of modern sophisticated Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). For Nigeria to benefit from the expected gains of Open and distance learning there is, need to leap this 5th stage of Open and distance learning, In order to cope with the demands and delivery of teaching and learning at a distance. Need for integration of distance learning to the education system- Open and distance learning in Nigeria, in reality is still in its infancy and at the periphery of the education system. This makes distance learning under-valued and under-utilized. Integration of distance learning mode with the conventional face- to-face mode will reduce the resistance to the innovation and will do much to overcome the negative perception about distance education. Education requires remodeling urgently for a comprehensive review of the philosophy and goals of Open and distance learning in a country such as ours with abundance of resources to use education as a developmental strategy.

2. The massification of democratization of Higher education as per the National Policy of Education and the Africa Higher summit- it is obvious from all we have discussed that Nigeria needs to put in place a large-scale mass higher education and to enhanced the open and distance learning system robust enough to allow for a comprehensive and cost-effective use of the infrastructure to be laid. This will guarantee that the massification of higher education and the democratization of access to tertiary education, as laid down in the National Policy on Education and as agreed upon by the African Higher Education Summit of 2015 are successfully and efficiently implemented.
3. The use of Information and Communications Technology in Open and distance learning- it is becoming increasingly necessary to stress the role of Information Communications Technology (ICT) in the delivery of instruction of open and distance learning, especially as all the seductive modern technologies, are being adopted and adapted for open and distance learning without any guiding policy. A word of caution I must say here is that ICT is merely the medium and not the message- The way it is conceived for use. ICT supposed to be an answer to instructional delivery at a distance either synchronously or asynchronously.
4. New Approach to course material design- one of the elements distinguishing open and distance learning from traditional classroom instruction is that open and distance learning relies heavily on course materials course materials are developed using different approaches but of recent, the influence of ICT had become quite pervasive. Many people who instruct in open and distance learning or develop policies on the use of ICT in open and distance learning may fall into the trap of using yesterday's tools for today's work.

CONCLUSION

The sum total of all that we have discussed in this paper is that the state of tertiary education, albeit education in general, leaves much to be desired. It has been unable to respond adequately and effectively to the challenges of modern times and unfortunately, quality has progressively declined. Tertiary education is fundamentally critical to the development of Nigeria. Education, properly focused, creates the knowledge economy that is now the global focus.

Engaging open and distance learning in our institutions of higher learning will give credibility and fruition to the prophecy of Cindy (2002) which was made in October 2002 in Guatemala City, part of the prophecy says, 'There is going to be a revival in Nigerian universities will affect the secondary schools and primary schools, and God will change Nigeria to the next generations'. Engaging open and distance learning to massify and democratic educational access in Nigeria, is a very significant way for us to bring Cindy Jacob's prophecy to higher education, the immediate community of every higher institution and Nigeria as a whole.

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