



**Open-Distance Learning Education: A Key to Human and National
Development in Nigeria**

**L'éducation ouverte et à distance : une clé du développement humain et
national au Nigéria**

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Abstract

Open and distance learning (ODL) education has become a policy option for most countries of the world particularly Nigeria. This is because of its profound easy and convenient accessibility to greater audience, regardless of space and time. This system came into existence because of the universal demand for education, thirst for knowledge and the failure of the traditional education system to provide for the demand for higher education. In Nigeria, National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) is a singular mode institution that run her system using open and distance learning mode. One of the major objectives for establishing the university is to ensure quality education delivery through accessible, flexible and affordable distance learning to all who are ready and willing to learn. This paper examines impact of ODL on human development. The achievement so far, the limitations and the challenges facing the system such as social acceptance of the product. Some recommendations were made such as: assurance of credibility of ODL should be made known to the public among others.

Key words: Open and Distance Learning Education, National Open University of Nigeria, Quality Education, Capacity Development, National Development.

Résumé

L'éducation à distance est devenue un choix politique pour la plupart des pays du monde particulièrement le Nigéria et ceci à cause de sa profonde, simple et convenable accessibilité au grand public, indépendamment de l'espace et du temps. Ce système a été engendré par la demande universelle en éducation, la soif du savoir et l'échec du système éducatif traditionnel à pouvoir à la demande en éducation supérieure. Au Nigéria, la National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) est une institution singulière qui fonctionne avec un système utilisant le mode d'apprentissage ouvert et à distance. L'un des objectifs majeurs de l'établissement de cette université est d'assurer une éducation de qualité délivrée à travers un apprentissage à distance accessible, flexible et abordable pour tous ceux qui sont prêts et veulent apprendre. Cet article a examiné l'impact de la FOAD sur le développement humain. Les résultats obtenus jusqu'ici, les limites et les défis auxquels fait face le système telle que l'acceptation sociale du produit. Quelques recommandations ont été faites telle que l'assurance de la crédibilité de la FOAD qui devrait être connue du public parmi tant d'autres.

Mots-clés : Formation ouverte et à distance (FOAD), National Open University of Nigeria, éducation de qualité, développement des capacités, développement national.

Introduction

In the life of a human being, every achievement reached can be ascribed to certain type of education or another. The best legacy any country can offer her citizens is education because the development of such society improves. More so, the educated ones improve the society due to the significant positions he/she occupies. Education is an inevitable instrument for development of every society and it has been recognized as a tool par excellence for individual, communal and national development. Again, the bedrock of development of any nation is education. The prominent role it plays in such society cannot be overemphasized. In a country, education development is a function of educational achievement.

Education is the strength and wall of any nation's defence and it is well known fact that no nation rises above the level of its education (Kingdom & Maekae, 2013). According to Okwudiba (2003), stressed that education is the most powerful instrument for developing and empowering the citizens to master their social and natural environment. This implies that the greatest bequest a country can render to her citizen is western education. It is stated in National Policy of Education (NPE) that education is the greatest force that can be used to achieve the national objectives (FRN, 2014).

In the advanced countries, educational attainment does not only determine earning capacity, rather it also impact positively on the life of human being. The way a country progress has great influence on the quality of education, and her citizens' educational attainment. This assertion was supported by Ozturk (2018) who submitted that for any country to achieve sustainable economic development; such country has to investment substantially in her human capital.

From Tolu and Abe's (2011) perspective, a nation is seen as 'developed' when is able to make qualitative life available to her populace. Conclusively, government should be concerned about the social welfare and quality life of her citizen. For example, when there is provision of social amenities such as quality education, infrastructure, and medical care, among others. Coping with the uncertainty of human life, both young and old cannot, but have access to western education which is the target of ODL.

Concept of open and distance learning

Concept of open and distance learning is an approach which is aimed at making education accessible to many people with interest, readiness and willingness to gain maximally from quality education which is provided through flexible and affordable distance learning. ODL has become globally accepted form of education which is an integral part of higher education. According to Commonwealth of Learning (1988), open and distance education is seen as the physical separation of the students from the teacher which also involves the use

of unusual teaching methodologies. In the same vein, Adebayo (2007) conceptualize open and distance learning as the type of education that takes place outside the conventional school system, without necessarily having a face-to-face interaction with the learners. In the view of Jegede (2012) open and distance learning focus on the flexibility and access to instruction by distance education method in order to ensure that broad availability of educational opportunities.

Open and distance learning came into existence because of the universal demand for education which also works as a channel for the members of the society who are educationally underprivileged. Idowu (2012) opined that ODL was initiated due to the denial of admission of many qualified candidate into tertiary institutions. It is a well-known fact that a few numbers of facilitators reach a very large number of ODL learners. In furtherance to the above, ODL focus on the availability and alternative form of learning in the presence of the existing inadequate provision of learning in the formal institution setting (Benedict, 2011).

In an open and distance learning setting, educational pattern permit people to learn with little or no hindrance as regard time, age, sex, race, tribe and previous educational qualification. (Alaezi, 2005). In fact, ODL is extremely flexible enough to students who readily have access to instructional materials in order to achieve maximal academic performance. Moreover, ODL encourages students to use materials which are self-learning in nature to learn at any point in time and whenever they feel like. Jegede ((2016) buttressed the fact that, ODL can be adopted for a variety of learning status quo such as primary, secondary, tertiary, vocational and non-formal education.

Universities admission crises in Nigeria and open and distance learning

In Nigeria, access to university education has become a serious one. The Nigerian public has been expressing dissatisfaction with admission into the universities now that there is massive alertness of the significance of university education in the development of the individual and the nation (Ene, 2007). In

the recent time, many candidates and parents do go through hitches while seeking admission for available limited spaces in the universities, this is due to admission policies of Nigerian universities which have been dissatisfactory to the Nigerians.

Every year, millions of Nigerian students get their hearts broken by a failure to get into universities not because they didn't study hard enough for entrance examination, but because there isn't enough room for all of them. In fact, Maduewesi in Rotimi (2001) reported that in the past one decade, only about 20 percent of over 200,000 candidates who sought admission into higher educational institutions eventually got placed. This is due probably to insufficient facilities and lack of manpower, admission policies such as catchment area, and quota system for educationally disadvantaged states (Bakwaph, 2013). A study by Aluede and Idogho (2012) presented a statistical analysis on Nigerian access to university education that only about 5.2% to 15.3% get admission every year; meaning that about 94.8% to 84.7% of the candidates seeking admissions every year never got admitted into Nigerian universities. The study recognized the fact that this low access to university education in Nigeria could be the result of low infrastructural facilities; inadequate public financing; economic constraints; labour market failure and inadequate curriculum.

The table below shows the number of applicants seeking admission to tertiary institutions in Nigeria according to the JAMB breakdown.

**Breakdown of 2019 JAMB Admission Applicants to Top Ten Institutions
according to Type of Higher Institution**

Type of Institution	Number of Applicants	Percentage of the Total
Universities	721,141	93.98
Colleges of Education	23,566	3.07
Polytechnics/Monotechnics	22,385	2.92
Innovation Enterprise Institution (IEIs)	202	0.03
Total	767,294	100.00

It could be seen that the proportion of candidates desiring to be admitted to the University instead of the Polytechnic and College of Education is on the high side. As it can be seen in from the table, with the data for 2019 in this 93.98%, 3.07% and 2.92% preferred the University, College of Education and The Polytechnic respectively.

Many people, as a result of geo-demographic factors are unable to be provided with conventional education. For instance, people living in the mountainous areas of Adamawa and Taraba states and those who live in the creek areas like in Bayelsa, Delta and River state of Nigeria are geographically inaccessible. It is through the open and distance education, which uses multi-media approach, that education could be made available to both the old and the young in those geographically disadvantage (Emenalo, 2010). Open and distance learning is a

means of bridging the demand and supply gap of tertiary education in Nigeria. The admission policy is quite flexible and open to everyone, including the disabled (Ukertor, 2010). Tenebe (2014), highlighted some justification of ODL in National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) profile as provision of education for all and sundry and promotion of lifelong learning, bridging the gap created by the closure of out reaches/satellite campuses, maximum utilization of academic personnel, on the job teacher training etc.

Open and distance learning has brought hope in the lives of so many Nigerians who were hitherto denied the opportunity to go to tertiary institutions of their choice. Open and Distance Learning has provided opportunities for those who could not afford to leave their job to attend full time conventional education (Jimoh, 2013). National Open University specified some benefits students stand to enjoy in this mode of study as enhanced access to quality education, improved general level of literacy, studying through a variety of methods, increased opportunity for skill acquisition, cost effective educational opportunities etc.

Moreover, the establishment of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) has widened access to higher education through open and distance learning method. The right to education is a basic human right and nobody should be denied the opportunity to go to school.

In Nigeria, the National open university has taken care of marginalized sectors of population like Nigeria prison by establishing special study centres in a bid to take education to the inmates. One of the Victor Hugo quotes says 'He who opens a school door closes a prison'. No wonder why Ajufo (2012) asserted that the demand for ODL is increasing due to its flexibility. She further stressed that it is this flexibility that offers opportunities to people with special needs like inmates and educating inmates is the best way of reducing the level of crime in our society. NOUN takes care the needs of the inmates as it is indicated in her vision and mission.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimated that about 500 million people live with disability worldwide. Disability definitely should not be a barrier to acquiring skills and education. In Nigeria, WHO estimates put the number of people with disability at 19 million or approximately 20% of the country's population (Lang and Upah, 2009). The people are often excluded from the mainstream of society and hence may not contribute to the development of the society at all optimally (Mji, meilling-William and Geaza, 2009). For people with disability, teaching and learning approaches of the conventional formal setting may be inappropriate or even behaviorally counter-productive (Ajufo, 2012). Open and Distance Learning structure offers opportunities in lieu of marginalized groups of scholars such as the disable to access educational opportunities. There are many open universities around the world including the Indira Gandhi National Open University, Malaysian Open University, the National Open University of Nigeria and several others, both public and private (Jegede, 2016). Despite the achievements of open and distance learning, there still a source of worry being expressed among leaders and experts of ODL about the quality of output (Daniel, 2010). This can also be traced to the challenges facing the system.

Challenges of Open and Distance Learning

There are lots of challenges facing ODL programme such as:

- i. Epileptic electricity supply weakens most educational activities that rely solely on power supply. Idowu (2012) asserted that no one can meaningfully run ICT – based open and distance learning project without adequate supply of electricity.
- ii. Poor infrastructural facilities such as shortage of classrooms. Ali (2009) identified inadequate classroom for teaching and learning at some ODL centres. Also, there are insufficient computers and electronics gadgets in most study centres. Even some libraries are not well equipped.
- iii. Information dissemination mechanisms and feedback methods are inadequate. The personnel who to handle technological demands of

open distance learning are scarce. There is also a problem of staff-student ratio.

- iv. Economy recession in the country has affected so many individuals to further their education. Some ODL learners cannot afford to pay school fees on time even before the examination.
- v. Again, Open and Distance Learning is faced with poor administration. Obioha and Ndidi (2011) identified the administrative problems of open and distance education in Nigeria. Some study centres lack sufficient staff that have experience in educational administration field.
- vi. Social acceptance of ODL products is one of the major challenges militating against ODL system. There is doubt as regard quality of graduates produced through the ODL mode (Pityana, 2004). Many establishments ignorantly reject graduates of ODL because they feel that they do not possess the needed qualification for the job when compared with their counter parts in conventional universities.

Numerous challenges are facing ODL mode. It means that until those hitches are remediated, maximum benefits from the programme may not be fully realized as individual and as a nation at large.

Impact of Open and Distance Learning on Human and National Development

In the mid1980s due to 'austerity measure' in the country, vacating one's employment for full-time university education was a great problem. Workers in Nigeria either public or private sectors find it difficult to abandon their employments for conventional university education system. Moreover, the country was experiencing economic recession and tertiary institutions were also experiencing some economic and socio-political challenges.

Jegade (2002) asserted that universities could no longer admit eligible

candidates on full-time basis at this period, since Government had withdrawn assistance in some important areas. A reduced amount of budget was apportioned to the education sector, while the dreads of the unemployment generated fear in the heart of people. It was at this juncture that institutions saw urgent need for the establishing ODL as another means of making money for the institution.

According to Jimoh, (2013) Open and Distance Learning has provided opportunities for those who could not afford to leave their job to attend to full time conventional education. The worker who undergoes Open and Distance Learning is working and studying, this will definitely reduce poverty comparing to leaving ones job for study without payment. At the completion of the study, one's economy is possibly changed and promotion or leaving the present employment for a better is ascertained. ODL gives room for more competent and better skilled manpower to be added to the society who will later contribute meaningfully to the economic growth of the nation in terms of quality job performance.

Again, there is Centre for Entrepreneurship and General Studies (CE&GS) in National Open University of Nigeria that was established on 11th May 2017 in line with the National Universities Commission (NUC) guideline. The Centre as an arm of the university services NOUN students and its community in acquiring general skills that leads to lifelong learning. Secondly, the Centre provides services for the general community through training, consultancy, and research. The mandate of the Centre is to create entrepreneurs by inculcating entrepreneurial skills, helping the students to discover their skills, take initiative, utilise possibilities, and take risks and responsibilities, become creative and innovative. This will also enhance human and national development in Nigeria.

Moreover, Student Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) was established by the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) in 1973 to enable tertiary institutions students have basic technical knowledge of industrial works base

on their courses of study before the completion of their program in their respective institutions. The scheme was designed to expose the students to industrial environment and enable them develop occupational competencies so that they can readily contribute their quota to national economic and technological development after graduation. The major benefit acquiring to students who participate consciously in SIWES are skills and competencies they acquire. The relevant production skills remain a part of the assets which cannot be taken away from them. NOUN students are also participating fully in Student Industrial Work and Experience Scheme (SIWES). All these efforts will definitely increase human knowledge, enhance skills and productivity towards national development. Also, Ofoha (2012) stressed that there is need for ODL providers to move beyond the customary focus on access to ensure that the opportunities offered by ODL prepare learners for success if Nigeria is to compete in the global knowledge economy. Beyond these, learners should also be prepared towards global competencies and skills that will enable them useful for national development.

Recommendations

The credibility of open and distance learning programme should be made known to the public as a means for national development.

Course materials should be handled by an expert who will bear learner characteristics and other personal group factors in mind. Also those course materials should be subjected to review from time to time.

Government should endeavor to increase budget on education sector particularly on ODL education so as to take care of infrastructural facilities needed of the programme.

Also, government should urgently look into the issue of electricity due to the technology involved in ODL which goes with energy supply. There will be smooth running of open and distance learning programme when electricity is regular.

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