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Open and Distance Learning: Historical Development, Trends, Policy, Strategies, Contributions and Challenges in 21st Century Education in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT
The subject of this paper is Open and Distance Learning and its brief historical development, trends, policy, strategies, contributions and challenges in the 21st century education in Nigeria. As a position paper the purpose is to examine the subject in order to generate support on the emerging issue on Open and Distance learning. Information for the study were gathered through extensive literature search. The paper raised some basic questions that called for answers. Furthermore, the paper provides some recommendations in support of the open and distance learning in the 21st century education in Nigeria.
Keywords: Open and distance learning, historical development, trends, policy, strategies and media, contributions and challenges.

INTRODUCTION

In Nigerian Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education, statistics show that the population of adults who need tertiary education far outweighs the available educational opportunities in the conventional face – to – face mode of instruction. For instance, between 2018 and 2019, over 1.6 million of the 2.8 million candidates who applied for admission into Nigeria's tertiary institutions were unable to secure placement (LEADERSHIP, 2021). The statistics further show that over 1,662,762 candidates wrote the 2018/2019 Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) of which only 585,498 gained admission into the tertiary institutions. The above statistics does not include other categories of adults who are desirous of obtaining higher education but can not benefit from it because of social, family, cultural role classes at remote locations. These constrains may also include the difficulty in adjusting to a regular time and pace associated with rigid schedules for instructional programmes in the conventional school or traditional face-to-face systems.

The search for alternative approaches to ameliorate the constraints mentioned above has come a long way and under different nomenclatures. Today, the term open and distance learning (ODL) has becomes a generic term and had been defined differently by different authors. Open and Distance Learning is an approach to learning that focuses on freeing learners from constrains of time, space and pace while offering flexible learning opportunities (University of Namibia, 2019). In other words, ODL provides independence and freedom of choice related to time, space, pace, medium, access and curriculum. These characteristics make ODL a better alternative source of education to the teeming tertiary education adult learners in Nigeria. According to UNESCO (2002), ODL is one of the most

rapidly growing fields in education, and its impact on all Education delivery systems has been greatly accentuated through the development of the Internet- based Information technologies.
For purpose of historical development, ODL has gone through many stages as it is illustrated in the table below

Table Showing Earliest ODL Initiatives in Nigeria

1983	Open Learning - by National Open University of Nigeria
1976	Teachers' Training Programme- by National Teacher Institute
1974	Correspondence and Open learning- Unit, University of Lagos
1972	University of the Air- by Ahmedu Bellow University
1966	Educational T.V Programme- by National TV of Nigeria
1960	Distance Education course by Radio- by National Broadcasting Corporation

Adamu (2022)

The objectives of this paper is to provide answers about the policy, trend, strategies, opportunities /contributions and challenges facing ODL in Nigeria. In 21st century, it is expected that the paper will be an invaluable source of information to intended learners' educational administrators and policy makers interested in ODL. The 21st Century education is characterized of global and knowledge based economy, that is information technology and it's application in promoting education for all, best practice and life-long education for every member of the citizen for the vision 2030.

Brief History and Trends of ODL in Nigeria
It is recorded that before the independence, correspondence learning, a kind of ODL was extended to Nigeria by Institutions based in England (Ihejirika, 2003). Back in 1887, several Nigerian students had enrolled as external candidates for the University of London Matriculation Examination (Kanwar & Mishra, 2016). Other notable institutions that extended their distance learning to Nigeria are: Wolsey Hall, Rapid Results College and Metropolitan College.
Back Home, an indigenous outfit, the city correspondence college was founded in Lagos to prepare candidates for GCE (London) examination.

The aim of expanding and enhancing learners access in University education in Nigeria has indeed remained unachievable, despite governments efforts at increasing the number of Universities (Susan and Akuchie (2014) in Thompson, Wordu and Deebom (2018) (Following this development, the National University Commission (NUC) in 2012 approved the underlisted universities to run dual mode programme; they are:

1. University of Ibadan
2. University of Lagos
3. University of Abuja
4. Obafemi Awolowo University
5. University of Maiduguri and
6. Federal University of Technology Yola

Current Trend of ODL

S/N	Criteria	Past	Present
1.	Provider	Universities	Anyone
2.	Structure	Programmes	Courses (Modulized)
3.	Class Size	Few hundreds	Few thousands
4.	Pedagogy	Isolated individuals learning	Connected social learning
5.	Resources	Proprietary specially prepared lessons	Packaged OER
6.	Interaction	One to one/one to many	Many to many
7.	Assessment	Highly controlled teacher centred	More flexible, evidence based and learner focused
8.	Certification	Paper-based	Online-based
9.	Computing	Personal computer	Handheld-Tablet
10.	Learning Technology	Learning management systems	Integrated talent management systems
11.	Delivery Options	Institutional hosted services	Hosted services on cloud
12.	Approach	One size fits all	Custom and BYOC

The above prevailing trends beg for such questions as: where is Nigeria in the globalization race in the knowledge economy, and how would the advancement affect the educational delivery in Nigeria?

Policy on ODL in Nigeria

Following the promises to be derived from the ODL system in the individual and national economic development, the Federal Government of Nigeria in its National Policy on Education (2013) enunciates the following five point goals of ODE in Nigeria:

1. Provide more access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities
2. Meet special needs of employers and employees by mounting special courses for employees at the workplace
3. Encourage internationalization especially of tertiary education curricula

4. Ameliorate the effect of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing Nigerian experts as teachers regardless of their locations or places of work
5. Encourage life-long learning opportunities (NPE 2013)

In carrying out the above goals, the Federal Government shall:

a) Ensure that programmes for open/distance education are equivalent in status to those offered by conventional face to face mode of delivery in the appropriate tertiary educational institution
b) Encourage and regulate open/distance education practice in Nigeria
c) Strengthen the existing coordination agencies on open/distance education which shall:
   i. Advise the government on the development and practice of open/distance education
   ii. Promote open/distance education nationwide in /collaboration with Federal, State/FCT and Local Government Education Authorities
   iii. Ensure the maintenance of standards for open/distance education programmes in various institutions.
   iv. Liase with media houses: information technology providers and other relevant bodies in enhancing open/distance education
   v. Encourage private efforts and other non-governmental organizations in the provision of quality education using open/distance education
   vi. Encourages tertiary institutional participation in open/distance education

Strategies for Effective and Efficient Open and Distance Learning Programme

In other to promote some attributes associated wiith ODL, the following strategies have been highlighted.

1. Open Educational Resources (OER)
   These are learning, teaching and research materials in any format and medium that reside in the public domain. They are openly available for use by students and teachers without the need to pay for royalties or license fee (Wordu and Nwaizugbu, 2021).
2. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC)
   They are free online courses available for students. It provides an affordable and flexible way to learn new skills, advance students career and deliver quality educational experiences.
3. Social Media
   This facilitates the sharing of ideas, text, multimedia and information through virtual networks. Students can share content, interact online, and build communities.
4. Mobile learning (m-learning)/Mobile device
   M-learning is a way of accessing learning content through mobile devices. It empowers learning at the point of need, enabling students and end users to access content whenever and wherever suits them.
5. Gamification Training
   This enables adding game mechanics into non game environments, like a website, online community, learning management system in order to increase participation. Its main aim is to engage with students to inspire collaboration, sharing and interaction.
6. Adaptive e-Learning
   Adaptive e- learning is a stimulation to support learning, improve student engagement and personalize instruction to reinforce learning outcome. It helps students to reach a desired level of mastery at their own pace.
7. Webinars (Web and Seminar)
   Webinars can also be called s webcast, webseminar, web lecture and virtual event. They allow host of companies to share videos, presentations, web pages or other media to their audience or students in a condensed interactive broadcast. Students in different locations can see, and hear their teachers and even ask questions.

8. Podcast(audio-only files) and Vodcast (audio and video files)
   These are programs made available in digital format for download over the internet. It could be in form of audio, video, text, and files which can be downloaded and played on computer. They help the students review previously taught lessons.
9. Learning Management system(LMS)
   This is a software application that allows for the delivery of educational courses, training programs, materials or learning programs. Every teacher can host a coursesite free of cost. These programs can be preserved, reserved or stored in the cloud for easy retrieval.

Chakma (2022) and Edcauadro (2022) also identified other types of electronic media used in Open and Distance learning as follows:

1. Audio book,
2. Audio compact disc,
3. Telephone,
4. Television and satellite,
5. Interactive online learning simulation
6. Video conferencing/ Virtual/ Live virtual training
7. Computer managed learning

Contributions of ODL in the 21st Century Education in Nigeria

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) as a system has provided the much sought alternative means for academic advancement of individuals who needed to promote their higher or professional educational skills, life-long education and so on.

To achieve this, the following key contributions have been highlighted.

- It will help Nigeria educational system achieve the United Nations Policy of Education for all in the 21stcentury . For instance, more educational opportunities will be provided for those denied of enrollment due to their social limitations.
- To the learners, ODL means more freedom of access as well as wider range of opportunities learning and qualifications, thereby improving their social and economic status.
- It helps in promoting the following habits namely; self-study, independent problem solving ability, and time and resource management.
- It is capable of promoting effective and forceful media for massification education, adult and continuing education, normadic education, population education, health and sanitation education, life-long education, teacher education, sex education (e.g experience in covid-19)
- Due to its cost effectiveness, it has attracted a huge number of the school and higher education learners and in turn, has helped in its qualitative development so much so that it might be considered better in comparison to the conventional system of education
- ODL is contributing to the realization of Sustainable Development Goals or Project 2030
- It has also contributed to the best practice in teaching and learning situations. A case in point is Federal Government of Nigeria adoption of ODL in promoting teachers training programme by the National Teachers Institute.
- Furthermore, ODL has the flexibility to accommodate varying levels of enrollment and the capacity to reach out to the all corners of Nigeria.

The Challenges of Open and Distance Learning in Nigeria

In spite of the benefits of Open and Distance education, the challenges of the programme are over-whelming, ranging from:

1. The cost of accessing internet is still very high in Nigeria. Most ODL students make use of cyber cafes where they are made to pay so much on hourly basis despite the poor services and slow rate of the servers.
2. One of the challenges facing the ODL programme in the country is the problem of inadequacies of facilities
3. Most ODL students that reside in the remote and rural communities, towns and cities are faced with the problem of power outages and instability.

4. Inadequate telecommunication connection: (Low teledensity): Access to unhindered use of ICT tools such as telephone and internet has been very low (Asogwa, 2007). The evolution of the global system of mobile (GSM) telecommunication, the use of ICT resources for educational delivery in general and Open and Distance Learning is still very low.
5. Lack of skills in designing and developing courseware: Institutional delivery in ODL is greatly affected by some facilitators' lack of knowledge and skills in designing and delivering course in electronic format. This scenario is a fall out of the non ICT compliant status of many ODL facilitators.
6. Poverty and poor ICT penetration: statistics reveal that many Nigerians live in poverty. The result of this situation is that the cost of computers and other ICT resources are far beyond their reach.
7. Technophobia: (dislike of advanced technology) most of the ODL learners have no computer literacy background, hence they are afraid of using one.
8. Resistance to accept changes and innovations: many organizations find it difficult to accept graduates of ODL as equivalent to graduates of a conventional educational institutions.

Suggestions

1. The federal Government should subsidized the purchasing or acquisition of hardware.
2. The Education of members of remote communities through mobile Learning should be strengthened.
3. Other models of instructional delivery for distance learning such as TV, Radio, and social media should consolidate the use of e-Learning.
4. Efforts should be made by Universities to adopt some global trending ODL strategies to achieve full potency of the process.
5. Education stake holders, Universities, Federal and state Ministries of Education should up scale to meet the ever galloping new trends in ODL to catch up with globalization in knowledge economy.
6. Finally, the Government, Federal and State and their educational agencies should make it mandatory and declare state – of – emergency in providingphysical information infrastructures and digital resources to reach all the communities.
   This is a sin-quo-nul in the use of ODL systems

CONCLUSION

The onus of the search for alternative learning approaches to ameliorate the constraints faced by those who want to further their education have come a long way. Open and Distance learning as a system has provided the much sought means for academic advancement of these individuals who needed to promote their higher professional education skills. Inspite of the enormous benefits of ODL, the challenges of the programme are overwhelming. The position of this paper is that ODL has finally come to stay, as it is evident in its contributions which overweigh the challenges and should be embraced in good fate. Therefore, anything short of this would place Nigeria and its education and economy behind other competing nations.

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