UTILIZATION OF E-LEARNING IN OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract - The demand of higher education for balanced development had led to the open and distance education in Nigeria. The scope of this paper covered Nigeria as a country and e-learning facilities which include: satellite broadcast, CD Rom, online video conferencing, personal computers, internet, computer software packages and so on. Citizens of the country who are not privileged to attend the conventional university had demanded for higher education for job improvement through Open and Distance Education. Open and Distance Education (ODE) is that mode of learning which seeks to remove constraint of time, pace and space, so that as many people as possible are able to take advantage of meaningful learning opportunities throughout their lives. It is an alternative platform of learning for people who really want to learn. The objectives of utilization of e-learning in open and distance education include the following (a) to provide e-learning facilities needed in preparing open and distance education and to reduce cost in spite of the large audience. (b) to augment the work of conventional institutions in places where conventional institutions are unable to admit all candidates who require education. (c) What are the challenges faced with use of e-learning facilities in open and distance education. (d)to provide lifelong learning irrespective of the age of the learner. The driving force which is the motivation of utilization of e-learning in open and distance education is that higher education should develop in the beneficiary a certain number of generic skills to a level that will ensure the continued creative productivity of the individual. This paper identifies the need for enhance access to the utilization of e-learning facilities to higher education. Problems faced with the use of e-learning facilities in open and distance education were highlighted. Recommendations were made, one of which include the need to provide ODE with e-learning facilities by the appropriate authorities. Special arrangements should be made so that qualified and admitted candidates could receive courses by correspondence and contacts through e-learning.

Keywords - Open and Distance Education, e-learning and utilization

I. INTRODUCTION

With the advancement in information technology in the 21st century, e-learning has become an invaluable technology for teaching, learning and research. Otuka (2010) sees e-learning as all forms of electronically supported learning and teaching which are procedural in character and aim to effect the construction of knowledge with reference to individual experience, practice and knowledge to the learner. E-learning which has to do with ICT tools and internet facilities can make teaching and learning more efficient and productive by engendering a variety of tools to enhance and facilitate teachers professional activities through the effective use of internet, intranet, video, tape, PowerPoint, overhead projectors and a host of others. Adrich (2004) defines e-learning as a broad combination of processes, content and infrastructure to use computers and networks to scale and/or improve one or more significant parts of a learning value chain, including management and delivery.

According to Ajadi (2008), e-learning is an innovative approach for delivery electronically mediated, well designed learner centred and interactive learning environments to anyone, anyplace, anytime by utilizing and internet and digital technologies in the instructional design priniciples. Naidu (2006) presents e-learning as incorporating "all educational activities that are carried out by individuals or groups working online or offline, and synchronously or asynchronously via networked or standalone computers and other electronic devices". Therefore, e-learning is concerned with learning through any electronic medium that may or many not be connected to the internet. E-learning implementation will help to change the old pedagogical approach of the learning and changes the teachers from a knowledge transmitter to a knowledge facilitators.

E-learning facilities provide the learners with exciting opportunities to search for more educational facilities. This makes them to develop inquiry mind, creativity and good study habits. World Bank (2003) indicates that when the potential of e-learning is fully harnessed, it could advance knowledge by expanding and widening access, improving the quality of education and reducing cost. When the needs are huge, fully online learning can be crucial and possibly the only realistic means of increase and widen access. In the views of Akudole (2012) e-learning could be beneficial to people through the fact that it:

- Fits into learners schedule because it can take place anytime and anywhere.
- Gives learners the opportunity to learn at his/her own pace.
- Enriches the instructional process through the provision of online interactive learning environments.
- Provides online learning environment that is time and cost effective.
- Promotes the development of self-directed ability.

- Facilities and enriches the delivery of learning content.
- Promote independency in learning.

The national Policy on Education has provided conditions to encourage access to Education. It further states that maximum efforts will be made to enable those who can benefit from higher education to be given access to it. Such efforts included the provision of higher educational institution, scholarships, e-learning facilities and tuition-free higher education. This paper identified the need for enhanced access to the utilization of e-learning in Open and Distance Education. Open and Distance Education (ODE) is that mode of learning which seeks to remove the constraint of time, pace and space, so that as many people as possible are able to take advantage of meaningful learning opportunities throughout their lives. Its key principles involve flexible and lifelong learning, open access learner-centredness, fair chance to succeed and recognition of prior learning. From the foregoing it is clear that Open and Distance Education represents a paradigm shift from the brick and mortar type of education to a mode that is not confined or restricted in any way.

This accelerates the production of globally competitive, high quality manpower for national development in a quantum that face-face institutions cannot. The commonwealth of learning Col, (1999) and Keegan (2009) cited in Oladejo&Gesinde (2014) argue that there is no one definition of open and distance education and point out there are many approached to defining the concept but most definitions are seen to pay attention to the following characteristics:

a) Separation of teacher and learner in time or place, or in both time and place;
b) Institutional accreditation, that is learning is accredited or certified by an institution or agency. This type of learning is distinct from learning through personal effort without the official recognition of a learning institution;
c) Use of e-learning facilities including print, radio and television broadcasts, video and audio disks, computer-based learning, telecommunications and social media. In this case, courseware tends to be pretested and validated before use;
d) Two-way communication allows learners and tutors to interact, as distinguished from the passive receipt of broadcast signals as witnessed in face-to-face mode;
e) Possibility of face-to-face meetings for tutorials, learner-learner interaction, library study, and laboratory or practice sessions; and
f) Use of industrialized processes, that is in large-scale open and distance learning operations, labour is divided and tasks are assigned to various staff, who work together in course development teams.

Based on these characteristics listed above, we may attempt a definition of Open and Distance Education. Open and Distance Education may be defined as a system of learning that blends student support, curriculum and instructional design, flexibility of learning, removal of barriers to access, credit of previous learning and other academic activities such as programme delivery and assessment for the purpose of meeting the diverse needs of learners (UNESCO, 2002; Kaplan &Haenlein, 2016; Adesina, 2017). Whereas Basu (2012) said that "some persons hold the notion that open and distance education is chosen by those who cannot access conventional universities, the more correct position however is that open and distance education is an alternative platform of learning for people who really want to learn". Basu (2012) is of the view that face-to-face learning can be enriched by using technology but in open and distance education, a lot of focus is given to completing regular classes with the use of technology. Okojie (2013) expressed concern over the fact that ODE mode of delivery has been hugely misconstrued by many administrators and students to mean Part-Time or Sandwich programmes. The contrary, however, is true.

Among the many benefits of Open and Distance Education (ODE), are the following (Tenebe, 2010; Adedoyin, 2017):

1. Make learners to tackle their studies at their own individual pace and in the comfort of their home environment. By so doing, the spirit of self-reliance and independence can be more readily generate and fostered;
2. Enhances citizens' appreciation and use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to accelerate national and community development, and provide an organized entry into the global information super high way;
3. Promotes and sustains lifelong and life-education in order to build a learning and knowledge-based society;
4. Overcomes problems of physical distance for learners in remote locations, who are unable or unwilling to physically attend lectures within the premises of the school facility;
5. Utilizes minimum workforce to achieve maximum productivity; and
6. Breaks barriers posed by culture, religion, and politics, such that it widens opportunities for women and vulnerable groups to learn, and meet needs of populations affected by violence, war, displacement and so on.

In economic terms, Aderinoye&Ojokheta (2004) rightly explained that ODE has helped to produce a better skilled workforce, which has in turn led to the growth and development of both local and national economies. Typically, graduates of ODE programmes find it easier to participate in the economic mainstream. Even older individuals, who after their retirement have chosen to engage in academic

upgrading, have gone on to become small business owners/managers, an educational ripple-effect that has helped enhance the development and growth of both local and national economies.

In the United Kingdom, the need to make university education accessible to her citizens informed the established of the United Kingdom Open University (UKOU) in 1969 to provide university education through distance education. Since the UKOU remains one of the few mega distance education university in the whole world and still ranks amongst the four most prestigious universities in the UK right up there with Oxford and Cambridge (Jegede, 2007). Tait, (2016). What is being witnessed today in the developed world is the move of distance education to an integral part of overall educational provision from the marginal position it has occupied in the past (Moore, 2008).

In South Africa, adults who had missed university education at one time or the other and who were eager to hold a university degree had access to it by distance education method through the University of South Africa (UNISA) being the first world dedicated distance education university established in 1951 (Omolewa 1982; Wells, 1992; Baker, 1995).

Furthermore, the quest for alternative schooling for thousands of adolescents in Zambia and Malawians who could not enroll in secondary schools was provided by a supervised study group systems initiated through the establishment of the Zambian National Correspondence College in 1964 and Malawi Correspondence College in 1965 (Johnson, 2008, Yusuf, 2005).

In Nigeria, Omolewa (1982), reported that distance education is not strange to Nigerians because as far back as 1887, a handful Nigerians enrolled for the University of London examination as external students studying through correspondence without enjoying any formal ties to a conventional institution. This means distance education is not strange in Nigeria.

Open and Distance Education makes education affordable to all and sundry and helps in removing the traditional barriers to working adults who have missed the educational opportunity at one time or the other. Distance education institutions should not only impart knowledge or make education accessible; they should also strive in the areas of qualitative education. Distance education is an educational system in which student's formally enrolled in a school or college but receives instruction at some remote site using e-learning facilities.

II. CONCEPT OF OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

The National Open University was initially established on 22 July 1983 as springboard for open and distance learning in Nigeria. It was suspended by the government on 25 April 1984. However, its resuscitation was begun on 12 April 2001 by the former President of Nigeria, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo. At take off of the university, pioneer student enrollment stood at 32,400.

In 2011, NOUN had about 57,759 students. The Vice Chancellor at the time was Prof. Vincent Tenebe. The university was for years operating from its Administrative Headquarters in Victoria Island, Lagos, before its current VC, Professor Abdalla Uba Adamu, moved it to its permanent headquarters in Jabi, Abuja, in 2016. It has over 75 Study Centres throughout the country. It offers over 50 programmes and 750 courses.

By its nature as an ODE institution, NOUN does not provide lectures to students in normal classrooms except some certain study centres. The study centre in Lagos for instance provides lectures to all its Law undergraduates and supplies necessary course materials to all students after the payment of tuition fees. All the courses being offered by the university have been accredited by the National Universities Commission (NUC).

An Open and Distance Education is that educative system that offers instruction to students largely at a distance (Encarta Encyclopedia, 2005). The concept of Distance Education should be all-inclusive contact, no contact and part-time education. Open/Distance Education is the method of teaching in which learners are removed in time and space from the teacher. It uses a variety of media and technologies to provide and/or improve access to good quality education for large numbers of learners wherever they may be (NPE, 2014)

Great Britain established an autonomous Open University in April 1969 whose major aim is "the advancement in dissemination of teaching and research by a diversity of means" (Encarta Encyclopedia, (2005). These include e-learning facilities like radio and television programmes, packaged course materials, correspondence tuition, and the provision of computer. The good thing about Open and Distance Education is that it is open to methods, ideas and as well as students. According to Ani (2007), the Open Education should be specifically to facilitate self-awareness, self-development and self-empowered existence that will challenge and stimulate the doldrums and stagnations created by environmental enslavement (Ani, 2007). He holds that distance education is the shortest cut to unleash the native potentials of citizenry to flourish and fructify in order to develop innovative approaches to curriculum that can give rise to creative and meaningful functional job creation.

Open and distance education is now widespread, not just in the open universities of the world, but in all education and training sectors, from traditional campus universities for corporate training centers. The Government and private organizations have established educational institutions at various levels so that the skills and knowledge required for social,

economic, political and technological development of the nation will be acquired. Although, the nation's educational institution are increasing numerically, the candidates seeking entry into the institutions are increasing more than the available spaces. The general awareness of the importance of education could have led to the increasing demand being witnessed in different parts of the country. Many people want to acquire education so that they will become enlightened and employable. Open and distance education has been described in various ways such as distance education, open university, correspondence university, media university, broadcasting university, university of the air and university without walls (Ani, 2007).

Ani (2007) stated that Open Education system and distance education in Nigeria are now an essential tool in all ramifications of the educational developmental process of enhancing qualitative and functional education. The hierarchical structure of education in Nigeria progressively engages in an elimination process of disqualification as the children climbed from the former 6-3-3-4 to the new 9-3-4 system of education. The number of students who finished post-primary education but never got there outnumbered the few who managed to squeeze themselves into the few traditional tertiary institutions in the country

It does mean that open university or distance education system is urgently needed to penetrate into all the nooks and crannies of the communities to empower the citizens who in turn will create more employment opportunities to tackle the scourge of hunger, mal-nutritional dehumanization and overcome technical slavery. Through Open University and distance education system, the crisis of unemployable and employed certificated but ignorant citizens in this country will be drastically reduced. Through authentic Open University and distance education, the crisis of schooling without thinking which has created frustration, dispassion and dis-satisfaction in the country will change Anih, 2005); Perraton, 2000); Ramsden, (2003).

III. THE OBJECTIVES OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

The Federal Government of Nigeria, in the National Policy on Education, enumerated the objectives of Distance Education viz:

- Provide access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied;
- Meet special needs of employers by mounting special certificate courses for their employees at their work place;
- Encourage internationalization especially of tertiary education curricula, and
- 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.

Enhanced Access to Higher Education through Open University and Distance Education concerned about the barriers to access to higher education and still eager to enhance access to higher education, government approved several alternative higher education measures which later metamorphosed into Open University and Distance Education.

Enhanced access presupposes that access already exists but improvement is required. To face the challenges posed by inadequate access to e-learning facilities due to the barriers, government has repeatedly adopted various measures to address the issue. Such measures included increase in the number of federal and state universities, approving special universities, such as universities of agriculture, university of education, university of science and technology; approval of private universities, introduction of quota system of admission for the catchment areas and disadvantaged states, launching scholarship schemes and establishment of Open Distance Education institutions. Among all these measures, the Open Distance Education seem to be the most effective in addressing enhanced access to higher education.

According to Aderinoye, (2001) there is an increasing demand for higher education by 2.5% annually. This implies that there is still an unsatisfied demand for higher education in Nigeria when compared with the supply. This, to a very large extent, contributed to the acceptance, growth and implementation of Open Distance Education, in Nigeria which was initially looked down upon by Nigerians. The Open Distance Education as credited by Aderinoye and Ojokheta (2004), is a good means of bridging the demand and supply gap. In Nigeria for instance, the Distance Education Studies of the National Teachers Institute (NTI) has proved to be very beneficial to Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) graduate teachers.

According to Adrinoye (2001), over 21,000 NCE teachers have been produced by NTI between 2000 and 2002. This amounts to 36.2% of the 58,000 produced by all Colleges of Education in Nigeria put together during the period.

Onwurah and Chiaha (2007) stated that Open and Distance Education, by virtue of its features, offers opportunities for departments to extend their student and postgraduate "Catchment" areas, offering educational opportunities for people who are unable to reside on campus, or who cannot study full-time in an institution. Through the application of technology, e-learning facilities and the distribution of printed course materials through conventional "open" channels, people can study with the institutions and subject specialists of their choice, whether they live within the country or anywhere in the world. Open Distance Education therefore allows for a specialist to disseminate his or her knowledge to a wider audience.

The admission policy is quite flexible. Education is open to everyone who so desires. Unlike in the conventional higher institutions, there is no quota system or downsizing of courses. Likewise, since accommodation and equipment do not pose any problem, Open Distance Education can afford to register as many students as are available for the programmes.

The flexibility in the method of study encourages many to work and study. A student determines the pace, place, time and medium of study. A part-time of double the full-time span is allowed. This arrangement can be quite attractive to many. Among the outstanding benefits of Open Distance Education is its ability to provide higher education for the disabled such as the blind, the deaf and dumb. Available to them for this programme are various electronic devices.

Federal Government has been establishing an Open Distance Education study centre in each state capital. Its intention to establish National Open University, National Open Polytechnic and National Open School with local government areas (NOUN, 2004) is definitely an attempt to enhance access to higher education.

The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for Open and Distance Education has been very significant. A comprehensive delivery system which includes print materials, audio/video tapes, CD-ROMS, television and radio broadcasts, Statellite broadcast, online video conferencing websites, personal computers, computer software packages power point and so on and the internet are used to achieve the objectives of Open Distance Education. This in itself enhances access. A wider population of students can benefit from these. The importance of enhanced access to higher education is supported by the fact that, apparently, workforce development is a necessary step towards improved productivity. This may enable Nigeria gain a good position in a highly competitive global economy.

IV. CONCLUSION

Thousands of Nigerians have been denied access to quality education due to lack of money, inadequate infrastructural e-learning facilities, personnel and poor administration. For development to be accelerated there must be equal access to education by all. Open and distance education provide these opportunities to all and sundry in Nigeria irrespective of one's status, predicament, locations and timeframe. Open University and distance education could also be a more effective strategy for achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Recommendations

In order to enhance Access to Higher Education through utilization of e-learning in Open Distance Education in Nigeria, the following recommendations were made:

a. To enhance access to higher education, quotas reserved for catchment areas and disadvantaged states should be limited to residents in those areas and not necessarily to those from the respective states of origin.
b. Open and Distance Education should be expanded to include the "prestigious" courses like medicine, engineering, and so on. Special arrangement should be made so that those qualified and admitted could receive courses by correspondence and contacts.
c. Adequate capacity building should be provided for personnel of Distance Learning education in the Nigeria University System. Such training should encompass critical areas of practice such as ICT deployment to enhance e-learning facilities since Open Distance Education mode is today driven by ICT.
d. Funding of Open and Distance Education programmes in the higher institutions should be improved since almost every major project in the operation and management of Open and Distance Education requires substantial funding.

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