

Challenges of Open and Distance Education in Achieving Education for All in Nigeria

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Abstract

The search for what should constitute the fundamental basis for education in Nigeria begun some forty years ago. The quasi-struggle seem continuing by Nigeria's signatories to the outcomes and goals set by the several education conferences and meetings. This involvement requires that a productive and stimulating open and distance education practices emerges as a major pillar of education in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. But in pursuance of this policy, the Federal Government set up a committee to work out the modalities of establishing the National Open University of Nigeria in 1983. However not long after its opening, the University was closed together with five other former University Campuses which later transformed into full fledged Universities. In the cause of the defunct National Open University of Nigeria, it was silently merged with the University of Abuja in 1983. Yet it did not function until 1992 and still in 2002 (more than 20 years) is working towards establishing an Open and Distance Education for the people. This in its entirety indicate serious crisis. Such crisis has kept Distance Education in Nigeria in a deplorable and archaic status that requires extensive rejuvenation and modernisation.

Abstrak

Pencarian asas kepada pendidikan di Nigeria bermula lebih kurang 40 tahun dahulu. Usaha ini berterusan melalui persetujuan oleh Nigeria dalam beberapa hasil dan matlamat yang telah dirumuskan oleh beberapa perjumpaan dan persidangan pendidikan. Penglibatan ini melibatkan praktik pendidikan terbuka dan jarak jauh yang produktif dan menarik sebagai tiang pendidikan yang utama di Nigeria. Berikutan dengan polisi ini kerajaan telah membentuk suatu jawatankuasa untuk melaksanakan penubuhan National Open University of Nigeria pada tahun 1983. Walau bagaimanapun, tidak lama selepas penubuhannya, universiti tersebut ditutup bersama-sama dengan lima kampus universiti yang lain dan National Open University of Nigeria seterusnya disatukan dengan University of Abuja pada tahun 1983. Walau bagaimanapun, ia tidak berfungsi sehingga 1992 dan masih pada tahun 2002 (lebih daripada 20 tahun) berusaha untuk membentuk pendidikan jarak jauh dan terbuka untuk masyarakat. Keseluruhan episod ini melambangkan satu krisis yang serius. Krisis ini telah menyebabkan

pendidikan jarak jauh di Nigeria berada dalam keadaan yang tenat dan memerlukan usaha semula dan pemodenan yang meluas.

Introduction and Background

At the heart of every distance education system in the world are people. It is for the sake of underserved, marginalised, deprived and denied aspirants to education that experts in distance education, collectively, come together to conceive and create course materials, scheme ways and means of having it delivered, prepare challenges to test if learning outcomes are being met and finally celebrate the success of the learner as well as the facilitating/learning venture. As a community, distance educators go through this complex and demanding sequence of protocols to ensure that those who participate in these distance education programme succeed in their effort (Ogili, 2002).

There are many reasons why those who promote and practice distance education need to be mindful of the interest of those who seek out their services. Perhaps, the most important of these has to be the fact that distance education delivery is fast becoming a mainstream rather than a side stream activity. More and more, governments, individuals and institutions are beginning to look at distance education as the only alternative for them as they aspire for an educational provision. Globally, some 48 million learners participated in higher education. Of these, 17 million were in Asia. Based on present trends of growth, this number will grow to 97 million by the year 2010 and perhaps up to 159 million by the year 2025.

Nigeria is a vast country spanning hundreds of kilometres with a population of over 110 million people. The number of illiterate adults and youths who have dropped out of school system is over-whelming. A great majority of these people live in the rural areas of Nigeria. This may require the construction of a new university every week for the next twenty years. When we couple this volume to the increasing inability of governments to support, through taxes, conventional means of delivering higher education and in parallel (to this inability) the emergence of affordable and sophisticated communication technologies, the attraction of distance education becomes fairly obvious. In such a context, our community of educational providers must not only demonstrate excellence in the way we deliver education but also excellence in the way we support our clients to succeed.

In Nigeria, there is need to re-energise the distance education practice, extend its reach and its quality. It is clear that Distance Education course is much more than a package of study materials. No matter how perfect and sophisticated it may be, a study package is still no more than well-presented print, visuals,

audiotapes, video and perhaps computer-based instructional materials. If learners are to benefit from the special circumstances of self-study at a distance, then they must be supported in various ways. They may be distance from their teaching institution, but they must not be isolated.

However, the new social circumstances, economic efficiency and democracy cannot develop without people. But people living in countries in transition are socially and psychologically burdened with the legacy of former time. There is no doubt that they need help to overcome the negative effects of that legacy and to establish new values, attitudes and behaviours.

Today, the metamorphosis in education previously lacking in prestige into a multifaceted functional education programmes attract great interests and growing respect in ensuring that the socially, economically and geographically isolated cope with the increasing challenges in volume of information. It is an instrument for accelerating the pace of all aspect of human transformation, to shake-off inertia in a people, achieve mobilisation and direct their productive forces in improving their living conditions. The collapse of the global community conceived and build on unity leads to peoples socialisation taking place in an extreme individualistic manner.

But the main goals of the transformation include to help individual to discover universal human values and to think critically and independently. It is also to make decisions responsible and to adapt to the changing socioeconomic environment and to develop consciousness, and prepare for responsibilities of citizenship. Thus, the new social circumstances, economic efficiency, critical consciousness, political and psychological potential can manifest clearly with the use of the right brains and the rights equipment in transformation operation using the right education that is socio-culturally based. In order to be effective, there should be linked to the felt-needs of the Nigerians that is culture specific for functionally especially in individual homes and lives.

Based on the response of Nigerian Government to the various International declarations on Education for All. It becomes very surprising that distance education conceived more than twenty years ago has not taken off up till March, 2003. Despite the projection that Nigeria re-enters the open and distance learning world with the take-off of the National Open University (NOU) and the co-ordination of all open and distance education activities. This is with the hope that government will be embarking on capacity-building to provide quality instructional and learning support services to distance learners nation-wide. It is also necessary that a national network of community resource/study centres would be progressively established across the three tier government study centres.

To this end, a robust and effective management system is required to support and enhance the instructional functions of the said open and distance learning systems in Nigeria. Beside, quality distance learning and teaching is always supported by instructional facilitation and tutorial facilitators will be required to conduct tutorial meetings and professional workshops, course development and design, be responsible for tutor marked assignment, and assist with the conduct of examinations. All these are yet to be put into practice for formative or summative evaluation. It is like a child unborn. Progress is basically the result of human effort. It takes human agents to mobilise capital, to exploit resources, to create markets, and to carry on trade. Their effectiveness as prime movers depends not only on their own development but on the knowledge, skills and capabilities of those who they lead as well.

Thus, in a very real sense the wealth of a nation and its potentials for socio-economic and political growth stem from the power to develop and effectively utilize the innate capacities of the people. Today, we are adapted to life in a society that is expanding economically, socially and culturally. What is the driving force, behind this growth. The practical implications is that the educational system can no longer have the ambition to give its pupils a training that is sufficient for the whole span of productive years in life of the individual. Hence, the need for new knowledge and new experience to achieve competence in the knowledge, wisdom and skills which society requires. Distance education which is more than two decade in Nigeria is required for expansion of vision, creativity and a determination of increased effectiveness (Torres, 2001).

Quintessential Crisis in Distance Education in Nigeria on Achieving Education for All

Despite the fact that Nigeria has practised distance education for more than two decade, one thing is to establish distance education programme another is to sustain it. For more than twenty five years now, it has not been clear to what is preventing distance education from taking-off practically.

Okeem (1990) highlights that some of the distance education crisis in Nigeria include:

1. The economic crisis which has led to mass unemployment thereby creating feeling of fear of future and helplessness.
2. The doubtful political future of the country and their continued uncooperation in the scheme. Frequent change of government is with greed and non-serious commitment remains the problems especially in the third world countries.

3. Inadequate resources for providing the essential equipment needed for research, or even test tubes, animals, chemicals, library books and journals and the provision of municipal services and recruitment of staff in terms of quality and quantity, etc.
4. Bad leadership, corruption, political instability and poor economic management of our nation.

In the same vein, Ogili (1998) reiterates that Nigeria is facing many obstacles in running the distance education system. Some of this crisis include:

1. Inadequate trained distance educators. Even the few experts available require constant re-trained to keep abreast of the fast rate of technological changes.
2. Dependence on consultants outside Nigeria as a result of shortage of experts needed.
3. Lack of finance and culture of preventive maintenance in our society.
4. Most of the present distance educators can hardly be described as intellectually inclined either by training or in practice. Also poverty, misconception of what distance education is, lack of professionals, lack of institutional readiness and dearth of logistics, etc.
5. The commercialisation of media in Nigeria against the rising cost of families for educating their children at a time when many are not sure of any regular income at all (Ogili, 1997 a & b; Ogili, 2000).
6. Lack of effective co-operation among distance education institutions because of non-formation of a clearing house for cross fertilisation of ideas and information at a given time and for exchange of experts.
7. Geographical remoteness which results to learners lack of access to institutions and other relevances when need most.
8. Lack of political stability, security of life and property, and squandamania of public resources (Ogili, 1998, 1999 & 2001).
9. Radio receiver and cassette players are often expensive in Nigeria in relation to met only average wage and salaries earners.
10. Irregular and unreliability of postal services in Nigeria which is a major drawback in distance education system. This makes learners travel long distance to centres of distribution with economic implications.
11. Lack of information about what distance education is and non-availability of education media where necessary. Hence, Achebe (1983) identifies massive illiteracy as preventing Nigeria from emerging a great nation of African continent.
12. Existence of personal jealousy, and rivalries, assassinations and rituals of human elements, conflict of personalities, favouritism, clique, factions, prejudices, and idiosyncrasies resulting from the political

relations between persons, difficulties in communication and imperfections in organisational structure (Ogili, 1999).

13. Shortage of relevant training experts to provide the necessary interaction with learners whose needs might vary extensively.
14. Lack of intellectual technique in the field of distance education which has prevented the current practitioners from making popular acclaimed achievement in the solution of Nigeria's educational crisis.
15. Most of the present distance education hardly be described as intellectually inclined either by training or in practice.
16. Long periods of training which are necessary before entering any profession do not seem to have taken off seriously in distance education. However, except for few practitioners who trained abroad. Majority of Nigerian practitioners in the field are professionally untrained.
17. Lack of financial grant to facilitators to attend and participate in international and local conferences, workshops and seminars.
18. Lack of sound management practices in the programme of distance education in Nigeria. Appointment are done on ethnic basis thereby sacrificing merit to mediocrity.

It is with obvious clarity that all these mentioned above depict basis in distance education with bitter dissatisfaction. Moreover, creation of programmes without careful formulation of job requirement created problems of role conflict and role ambiguity. All these crisis situation determines the success and failure of distance education in Nigeria and the world in general.

Recommendations

Distance education has drawn widespread and growing interest in this millenium as a result of the emergence and growth of sophisticated communication technology. Distance education brings about effective telemetric learning and thus the need for the following:

1. Organisation of regular conferences, seminars, workshops and courses for its members and other interested and/or reference groups.
2. Recruitment and retention of professionally trained distance education personnel (academic/technical) to man the study centres.
3. Setting up a very strong professional associations of distance educators with full political will and vigour.
4. Engaging in regular publication of its activities and achievements through the *Nigeria Distance Education Journal* and other academic/professional journals.
5. Organising and encouraging research grants to professional distance educators.

6. Federal, state and local governments should set aside at least 5% of their budget for the provision of electronics, mechanics and other materials. This will be supported with adequate security and maintenance culture.
7. Nigeria Association of Distance Education (NADE) should be formed and strive to come of age by establishing a permanent secretariat with a paid secretary to co-ordinate the activities on a day-to-day basis.
8. Although the quintessential characteristics of distance education is its sheer generosity and generality, it needs supports internally an externally to be above to achieve the desired level of success in Nigeria. All it takes to solve distance education crises in Nigeria is just a change of heart by the leaders. However, the leadership should protect and promote the interest of the masses through encouraging and massifying education.

Conclusion

The prosperity of a country depends largely not on the abundance of its revenue or on the strength of its fortification and beauty of public buildings, but critically on the number of cultivated citizens, its men of character and enlightenment. The masses themselves should see education as liberation, from bondage. It is only in a genuine democracy can citizens control government decisions and actions. Therefore, since good democratic government is the only guarantee for stability, progress and non-military intervention in Nigeria specifically and Africa in general. It is high time constant vigilance required were observed to ensure that public officials do not become public masters and public time bombs. It is clear that distance education has the answer to the developing nations problems given the necessary supports required despite man-made obstacles.

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