



Open and Distance Education Programmes in Nigeria: Challenges and Way Forward

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ABSTRACT

It is a well known fact in Nigeria that there are millions of applicants who completed their secondary education without opportunities for them to go further because the number of higher institutions in Nigeria are grossly inadequate to accommodate the number of applicants wishing to pursue higher education and obtain additional certificates like Diploma, Nigeria's Certificate in Education (NCE), Higher National Diploma (HND), Degree or Post Graduate Degree programmes, hence the introduction of ODE programmes and establishment of ODE institutions such as National Teachers' Institute (NTI) and National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) by Nigerian Government. The National Teachers' Institute (NTI) is charged by government to specifically "organize and provide programmes for the training, development, upgrading and certification of teachers; conduct postgraduate courses and examinations in education for graduate teachers; to carry out research in conjunction with other bodies on any matter relevant to educational development in the country; to formulate policies and initiate programmes at all levels of education designed to improve by way of research, the quality and content of education in Nigeria; to foster and enhance international cooperation in the education of teachers; etc". The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) dedicates itself to preparing professionals in various disciplines through the distance learning mode. It offers a choice of qualifications from Certificates, Diplomas to Post Graduate Diplomas and Degrees. It also caters for the continuous educational development of professionals such as Accountants, Bankers, Lawyers, Doctors, Engineers, Teachers, Politicians, Self-employed, Businessmen and Businesswomen. This paper will highlight on the details of Open and Distance Education Programmes in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Distance Education is an area of learning that focuses on teaching methods and technology with the aim of delivering teaching, often on an individual basis, to students who are not physically present in a traditional educational setting such as a classroom. It has been described as "a process to create and provide access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both". The Commonwealth of Learning (2012) explains Distance Education as "the delivery of learning or training to those who are separated mostly by time and space from those who are teaching and training. The teaching is done with a variety of mediating processes used to transmit content, to provide tuition and to conduct assessment or measure outcomes". Similarly, UNESCO (2002) sees Distance Education as "any educational process in which all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/time from the

learner, with the effect that all or most of the communication between teachers and learners is through an artificial medium, either electronic or print". Greenberg (1998) defines contemporary 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 learner interaction and certification of learning". Teaster & Blieszner (1999) say "the term distance education has been applied to many instructional methods: however, its primary distinction is that the teacher and the learner are separate in space and possibly time". Keegan (1995) says that distance education and training result from the technological separation of teacher and learner which frees the student from the necessity of traveling to "a fixed place, at a fixed time, to meet a fixed person, in order to be trained". Some of these definitions are clear, that the student and teacher are separated by space and time, while others explained that they may be separated by space but not necessarily by time. This would include compressed video, which is delivered in real time. As stated earlier, this type of live video instruction is the fastest growing means of distance learning today.

DISCUSSION ON THE MAJOR ODE INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA: NATIONAL TEACHERS' INSTITUTE (NTI) AND NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA (NOUN)

The National Teachers' Institute (NTI) Kaduna, Nigeria was established in 1976 to upgrade and update teachers' skills and knowledge for effective classroom performance in Nigeria. The Institute is one of the parastatals responsible for the production of quality teachers in Nigeria. The Federal Government of Nigeria through Act No. 7 of 1978 charged the Institute to among other things provide courses of instruction leading to the development, upgrading and certification of teachers as specified in the relevant syllabus, using Distance Education Techniques.

Specifically, the functions of the Institute includes:

- I. Upgrade under – qualified and unqualified teachers;
- II. Provide refresher and other upgrading courses for teachers;
- III. Organize workshops, seminars and conferences for the enhancement of teachers;
- IV. Conduct examinations for participating teachers in the NTI programmes;

- V. Carry out researches on the best, current and scientific ways and methods of imparting knowledge to Nigerian teachers;
- VI. Foster and enhance International cooperation in the education of teachers;
- VII. Improve the quality and quantity of Nigerian teachers.

NTI TRAINING PROGRAMMES FOR TEACHER DEVELOPMENT:

- I. Teacher Certificate Grade II (TC II): 1984 to 2006.
- II. Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE): 1990 to date.
- III. Pivotal Teacher Training Programme (PTTP): 2000 to date.
- IV. Advanced and Postgraduate Diploma in Education: 2005 to date.
- V. Special Teacher Upgrading Programme (STUP): 2007 to 2009.
- VI. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme for teachers on demand by States and other Agencies: 1980 to date.
- VII. Capacity building programmes for teachers under the MDGs: 2006 to date (NTI, 2007).

The National Teachers' Institute (NTI) is one of the leading Institutions in the production of teachers in Nigeria. The institution has been playing active role in Open and Distance Education activities in the country, as a result of which the Commonwealth of Learning and International Council on Distance Education (ICDE) among many organizations recognized the Institute as one of the most reputable and largest teacher training institutes all over the world.

The Distance Education programmes of the Institute provides unlimited access to education to all categories of people in Nigeria, especially to those who due to one reason or the other would want to further their education in the ODE system because they want to remain on their jobs and businesses or for the robust and openness of the system.

The Institute has established strong partnership with the British Council on Continuing Professional Development for Trainers of English Language Teachers (CPDTELT).

The Institute is the Secretariat of the West African Teacher Consotium; member of African Council for Distance Education (ACDE) and a member of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) Vancouver Canada, UNESCO, USAID, JICA, UNICEF, etc (NTI, 2007).

NTI CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARDS EDUCATING TEACHERS IN NIGERIA

Since inception, the Institute has made significant achievements and pursued vigorously its mandate. It has enabled teachers to engage in lifelong education. In summary, the Institute has:

- 1. Increased the supply of teachers in Nigeria and the neighbouring African countries, like Benin Republic and Niger.

- 2. Created access to quality teacher education materials.
- 3. Offered various continuing professional development programmes for teachers.
- 4. Collaborated with various international development agencies to improve the quality of teachers.
- 5. Emphasized innovative techniques of teaching in all her programmes.
- 6. Enabled personnel of educational institutions at all levels and across the country to engage with open and distance learning techniques, as well as innovative techniques of teaching at the basic education level.
- 7. Provided well equipped Centres for Educational Technology in the study centres for teachers.
- 8. Supported the production of open educational resources and sensitized teachers on OERs.
- 9. Produced and transmitted high quality radio and audio programmes.
- 10. Commenced work on the mobile telephone project in collaboration with UNESCO, NOKIA and British Council.

NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA'S EXPERIENCE

The National Open University was initially established on 22nd July 1983 as springboard for open and distance learning in Nigeria. It was suspended by the government on 25th April 1984. However, its tremendous and unassailable role in tackling the country's educational problems including access, equity, and education for all became so evident and consequently its resuscitation was begun on the 12th of April 2001.

The National Open University of Nigeria is an Open and Distance Learning (ODL) University, the first of its kind in the West African sub-region. The University, at present, has 47 study centres spread across the nation. It has a student population of over 120, 000. The university is also recording landmark achievements in various feats. It was recently rated 7th position among universities in Nigeria and 86th position out of the 100 universities in Africa by Webometric International. In addition, NOUN was given the European Quality Award in Education 2011 at Oxford, UK, among others. Indeed, the university is well prepared for you

The National Open University of Nigeria dedicates itself to preparing professionals in various disciplines through the distance learning mode. It offers a choice of qualifications from Certificates, Diplomas to Post Graduate Diplomas and Degrees.

PROGRAMME DELIVERY METHOD OF NOUN

The NOUN employs a range of delivery methods to take education to the people and make learning an enjoyable activity. These methods include:

Printed instructional materials, audio, video tapes and CD-ROMs. These would be transported to you by courier companies, NIPOST and NOUN's in-house transport division.

Television and radio broadcast of educational programmes

Electronic transmission of materials in multimedia (voice, data, graphics, video) over fixed line (telephone or leased lines), terrestrial and VSAT wireless communication systems.

CONCLUSION

The only general misconception and misunderstanding of distance education in Nigeria and other parts of the world where it is practiced, is that the conventional programmes are rated as better in quality. This is not true and it is totally false. Good or bad quality formal conventional education can be found in either of the systems. It all depends on how either programme is conceived, developed, delivered, and evaluated, the quality of materials used, the dedication of staff and the effectiveness of the learner support system. It is necessary here to emphasize that in order to address the challenge posed by unequal access to education; there is the urgent need in Nigeria for a shift from the current dependence or relying completely on conventional education system, claiming that there is no solution to the problem of inadequate access to education, to large scale expansion and mainstreaming of distance education at the tertiary and post primary levels.

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