DISTANCE LEARNING, SANDWICH AND OPEN EDUCATION SYSTEM IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract
In recent times, Distance Learning, Sandwich and Open Education Programs have become the vogue in Nigeria's educational development. This is however, not to say that they are a recent development, for since the 1970s the sandwich programs have existed. The main aim of the programs then was to give opportunity to those teaching and are tenure staff to acquire higher qualifications in their fields of study, so that when they attend these programs at break time, their work would not be disturbed. Today, these programs have become more attractive to all segments of the society not only for those in the teaching profession, but for all and sundry, as lawyers, politicians and entrepreneurs among others have taken to acquiring higher qualifications from these programs. Thus, most Universities and Colleges of Education in Nigeria have established centers for the running of these programs. A National Open University has also been established in Nigeria to cater for those who cannot gain entry to regular courses. Against the above background, this paper intends to investigate into the issues that necessitate the establishment of these programs and examine how they have contributed or otherwise to the development of education in Nigeria.

The development of education in Nigeria has a long history from the middle of the 19th century when missionaries from the United States of America United Kingdom and Western Europe established primary and secondary schools so as to bolster their evangelism mission. Progression in educational development continued along with colonial economic and political activities. But one aspect of progression is that the operation of these primary and secondary schools was carried within the regular school program. While teachers' colleges were established along secondary schools, there was the need to train qualified teachers to take over the role of teaching and instruction from the else while colonial teachers. Thus, in the 1940s and 1950s, while some teachers of Nigerian origin were admitted to study in Britain, others went to the Teachers' Colleges that were established in Nigeria.
From the 1960s onward, the need to develop education in Nigeria became very apparent as this was one of the cardinal agenda of the First National Development Plan. Despite the effort of the Federal government then to recruit teachers from abroad, there was acute shortage of teachers in the schools. To ward off this shortage of teachers, apart from the Teachers' Colleges that were established mostly by the missionaries, both the Federal Government and the regional governments established higher colleges of education called Advanced Teachers' Colleges. Some of these included that Advanced Teachers' Training Colleges at Lagos, Ibadan and Zaria in 1962. That of Ibadan was later relocated to Ondo, in 1964, now known as Adeyemi College of Education. Others included that of Owerri in 1963, Kano in 1964 and Abraka in 1968. In later years these colleges were up-graded to their present status of Colleges of Education. Despite the fact that these Colleges were able to meet the initial requirements of teachers in the primary and secondary schools, there was still the shortage of teachers. Thus, the need to introduce part-time and sandwich programs to produce more teachers. Hence, from the early 1970s most of these Colleges of Education had started the introduction of part-time and Sandwich programs with the objective of producing more teachers. Nevertheless, while these programs have to some extent contributed to teacher education development, there have been attendant challenges in their operation. It is these challenges that this paper intends to examine. In doing this, the paper will briefly clarify the concepts of education, differentiate between part-time, distance learning, sandwich and open education and suggest ways in which these programs can be repositioned to be more efficient in promoting educational development in Nigeria.

Conceptual Perspectives

Education as a concept has been defined variously and by different scholars. For Ker (2012) education is an art of imparting knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to someone with the aim of bringing about a change in behaviour. Okafor (1984) has earlier described education as a process of acculturation through which the individuals are helped to attain the development of their potentialities and their maximum activation when necessary, according to right reason and to achieve thereby in project self-fulfillments. One of the fathers of education, Dewey (1963) had described education as a scientific process by means which man studies the world and accumulate knowledge which leads to useful and intellectual living. In this way, it serves the needs of the society. Education from the several perspectives of it is used to transmit knowledge from one generation to another, which means that it encourages the socialization of people into the social system. In this way, it is seen as a formalized and institutionalized instruction to individuals or people within the society to enable them acquire knowledge not only to be useful to themselves but to contribute to the development of their society. For the above purpose, several institutions of instructions have to be established to inculcate the tenets of education. In other words,
the teaching and learning of education cannot be undertaken in a vacuum and that is why several processes, institutions and programs have been devised to implement the learning of education. Hence, in Nigeria and other countries, the establishment of both regular and part time, and now sandwich and open distance learning programs.

Distance learning, sandwich program or part time program and open education system have been used to mean the same thing with different perspectives. In the case of distance learning, it is used as "an umbrella term that covers both distance and open education approaches in which education reaches teachers in their schools, provide learning resources for them or enable them to qualify without attending the institution in person or open up new opportunities for keeping up to date, no matter where or when they want to study". (Danjuma CF Sharehu and Achor 2015:40). In this case several sources of media communications are used by students such as the print, broadcast the internet and through occasional contacts with the lecturers.

Before the introduction of the Open Distance Learning (ODL) program, the Sandwich and Part-time programs had been in existence. Sandwich entails that students are admitted to study for their degrees or other programs during leave or break periods. That is to say that they undertake their study outside the regular study periods which means that when the regular students are on break those regarded as 'sandwich' can then go to their various institutions for their studies. This is done against the background of the fact that it is the same lecturers or tutors that teach the regular students that would have time to teach them too. It is also undertake for the fact that it is meant for in-service teachers who can only have time for their studies during holidays outside their work places. It is thus a course of study which includes periods of study and periods of working in business, industry or school. In the case of part-time or what may even be regarded as evening programs, these are operated against the background that some people do not undertake regular courses that seem more tedious. Furthermore, workers in employment may not be allowed by their employers to undergo such courses because they have no provision for their training or advancement. It also becomes an opportunity for those workers who cannot take the risk of resigning from their employment. It is on the above basis that the sandwich, part-time or evening and open distance learning become imperative. As shall be seen later, these programs have their challenges, but they have in their own way contributed to the advancement of education in Nigeria particularly for those in the teaching profession.

History of Educational Development in Nigeria

As it was noted in the introduction, the educational system in Nigeria has witnessed a long history of development. Starting from the early colonial periods particularly from the later part of the 19* century, Christian missionaries were the ones
that laid down the foundations of western education. Indeed, it was the Christian Missionary Society (CMS) that first established schools in Badagry and Lagos in 1882. In later years, the Methodist and the Roman Catholic penetrated the hinterland. It should be noted that the kind of education introduced to Nigerians by the early missionaries was aimed at training people to understand foreign languages in order to translate the Bible into native languages. It was on this basis when full colonialism was entrenched from the beginning of the 20th century the government deliberately embarked on policies and programs that would transform the educational sector. Most importantly, outside the missionary schools that were established, the government decided to established its own secondary schools and colleges. It was also seen as desirable the establishment of teacher training colleges and craft schools and technical schools to produce teachers that would eventually replace the foreign ones and also train people that would acquire skills to contribute to national development. From the 1940s and 1950s it became imperative that educational institutions needed to be established to foster the production of civil service experts, teachers and other skilled personnel to eventually replace the colonial masters. Of note here is the establishment of the University of Ibadan (then University College) in 1948. Earlier, the Yaba College was established in 1934 as a technical and skill oriented institution. After independence in 1960, and with the initiation of the first national development plan, more universities, colleges of education and polytechnics were established. Today, the educational space in Nigeria seems to have expanded more than any sphere in national endeavour as Nigeria has over 150 universities, countless colleges of education, polytechnics, colleges of agriculture in addition to numerous secondary schools and colleges. The institutions, particularly the tertiary ones are offering different courses and in all areas of knowledge. Their numbers are growing everyday because of the increasing population in the country.

Of importance to us in this paper however, is the growth and expansion in terms of acquisition of knowledge outside these structured institutions of learning. Today, because of the massive population because of those who want to acquire education, the regular and institutionalized educational establishments cannot cater for all of them. Thus, the need to make provision for them to acquire knowledge through the non-regular processes.

The National Policy on Education of 1987 as revised in 2004 is an instrument par excellence for effecting national development. In this light it gives the five man national goals as building (a) a free and democratic society (b) a just and equalitation society (c) a united, strong and self-reliant nation (d) a great and dynamic economy, and (e) a land full of opportunities for all citizens. In addition to these main goals, the policy objectives are;
(i) The inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and Nigerian society

(ii) The training of the mind and the understanding of the world around

(iii) The acquisition of appropriate skills and competencies both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society.

The above objectives explains why the government in Nigeria has over the years tried to devise and implement several policies and programs to enhance the education of its citizenry. One objective of the policy is to train the mind in order to understand the mind. Thus, teacher training becomes an important tool of this objective. That is why the National Policy on Education on page 38 states that:

Teacher education will continue to be given a major emphasis in all our educational planning, because no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers.

It is on the strength of the above policy that the place of open and distance learning, the sandwich and part time programs has been given recognition. According to the policy document on open and distance education, its goals are:

1. Provide access to quality education and equality in educational opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied.
2. Meet special needs of employers by mounting special certificate courses for their employees at their work place
3. Encouraging internationalization especially of tertiary education curriculum
4. Ameliorate the effect of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing experts as teachers regardless of their locations of place of work (FME, 2008).

The policy therefore recognizes the need to train those outside so that they can acquire knowledge with much hindrances. But how far has this innovation in the educational system in Nigeria faired and its attendant challenges.

The Challenges and Prospects of Open Educational System for Educational Development.

Looking at educational development in Nigeria from its colonial antecedents to the contemporary times, it can be said that new innovations have been introduced all these years. Of significance to us here is the institution of the Open Education System through Sandwich, Open Distance Learning and Part Time programs. These programs have been operated or established against the background of the National Policy on Education which intends to provide
education for all and sundry particularly for those who because of one reason or the other would not be able to attend regular programs. Thus, right from the early 1970s many institutions of higher learning in Nigeria have established correspondence learning centers, part time, sandwich and now Open Distance Learning. In Nigeria, Universities like those of Lagos, Ibadan, Port Harcourt, Benue State University, Jos, Nigeria have a long history of running these programs. Colleges of Education such as Alvan Ikoku at Owerri, Zaria, Kano, Obudu in Cross River State, Calabar and many others run these programs for both the Nigeria Certificate of Education (NCE) and degree programs respectively.

Essentially these programs center on producing teachers for the primary and secondary school teachers.

Apart from above programs, part time programs have also held sway in postgraduate courses in quite a lot of the Nigerian Universities. Quite a lot of them operate on evening and weekend basis. Students who are employers of their establishments who do not have time for regular courses find time to enroll for part time and evening classes in order to meet the demands of their work and other engagements.

In addition to the Universities and colleges of education that promote these programs, two federal government institutions have been established to run the courses for part time and distance learners. One of this is the National Teachers' Institution (NTI) set up to serve as a Distance Learning Educational Institution with the aim to provide additional means of solving the challenges facing Teacher Education in Nigeria. According to Sharehu and Achor (2015:79), these challenges include:
1. The need to truly professionalise the teaching profession at all levels
2. The need to curb the worrisome shortages of professional teachers nationwide.
3. The need to provide serving teachers the opportunity to further, upgrade/update their qualification and professional competence without necessarily leaving their jobs.
4. Finally, the need to provide the above minimum costs to both the students and the education authorities (www.ntinigeria.org)

Over the years, the NTI has been able to make progress in training student teachers in the acquisition of the Nigeria Certificate of Education (NCE), Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE), Advanced Diploma in Education, Pivotal Teachers' Training Programs (PTTP). The institute is in the process of starting degree programs through Open Distance Learning in such core subject areas as Mathematics, English, Social Studies and Primary Education among others.
The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) is another institution that is promoting the Open Distance Learning Program in Nigeria for the award of various types of degrees. It was established against the background of the fact there are thousands of young and qualified candidates who are seeking admission placement in regular Universities who cannot be absorbed. Since its inception, it has taken quite a chunk of prospective candidates into its programs. Like the NTI, it has many study centers across the country. In fact, one of its first graduates is former President Olusegun Obasanjo who re-established it during his tenure as the President of Nigeria. It was initially established during the Second Republic of President Shehu Shagari in the early 1980s.

As it has been pointed out above, these programs have made enormous contribution to the growth of teacher education in Nigeria. The primary and secondary levels of education have benefited from the acquired knowledge of the graduates of these programs especially those of the sandwich. From the inception of the erstwhile Universal Primary Education (UPE) of the 1970s and the current Universal Basic Education (UBE) coupled with the number of schools and their attendant populations, there was the need to train teachers for these school. Since not all the teachers can go to regular institutions, they need to undertake their courses in the open education programs. While we do not have the data to ascertain the number of graduates from these ODL institutions, on a general note, it can be said that over the years the number must have been very high. The quality of teaching has also increased tremendously. With their existence, thousands of Nigerians have gained access to education which otherwise they would not have acquired. But there are some factors and challenges militating against the running of these ODL programs which we need to briefly highlight below.

The open education programs were set up to essentially encourage the development of teacher education in Nigeria. This is against the backdrop of the lack of enough qualified teachers to teach in both the Primary and Secondary schools. At their earlier stages they were aimed at filling the gap left behind by the departing expatriate teachers.

These programs have longer periods to end their courses than the regular ones. The short period of contact of these courses makes teaching intensive for both the students and the lecturers alike. The lecturers in particular have to attend to their normal duties thus, much commitment on their part is not there. These are designed to take care of the break period of the teachers who would not have time for their employment duties. In some cases, the entry qualifications of those undertaking these courses are lower than the regular students so as to give them the opportunity to acquire their qualifications.
Work environment and other socio-cultural factors affect the students' learning capabilities. Many students find it difficult to adjust to the requirements of their studies because of what they leave doing in their homes or workplaces to come to school. The programs seem costly for the students in terms of tuition cost, teaching and learning materials. Students are expected to buy study materials, texts and books, but the funds are not there. In most cases, they sponsor their training. The lack of senior academics who are committed to imparting knowledge to ODL students. Some of the instructors particularly at the professional cadre are too busy to be committed to teaching the part time students. Some of the ODL students prefer face-to-face teaching than computer based instructions because they have been used to the former style. Even then most of the students come from rural areas where they are not exposed to internet services. There is also the problem of power supply in these rural areas. Sometimes, interactions between the lecturers and the students during contact sessions are not enough for students to cope with their studies.

In as much as the distance learning program is expected to replace the lecturer since the students can read and work through the specially designed study materials at their own pace, they may not always find time to concentrate unless they deliberately create time and space for their study.

Despite the above constraints and many more, not stated here, there are prospects in terms of the future of the open education system in Nigeria. It has been alluded to the fact that these programs were instituted to complement the courses taken in regular universities. At the same time, they were established to produce teachers that would fill the shortages experienced in the Primary and Secondary Schools.

At a time when information communication technology is becoming the deal, it is imperative that it should be a tool that will enhance open education system in Nigeria. The sandwich and part time programs are now becoming stale, as such focus should be on the new innovation that is being introduced in Distance Learning. Most Nigerian universities and other tertiary institutions like the Polytechnics are now emphasizing on the use of ICT since it has become a global phenomenon. It is hoped that Nigerians will imbibe the tenets of this new direction, It would make teaching easy as students can sit in the comfort of their environment and learn what is being impacted to them through the internet, mobile phone, computer and other sources of communication. As pointed out by Alfred (2014) computers and internet access create opportunities for both the students and teachers. In addition, video technologies, such as camera, cassette recorder (VCR) and discs which are widely used now are an advantage to the teaching and learning process in open education. In the final analysis, Nigeria is part of the global agenda and as such it cannot afford to be out of the track in improving on its Open Education System. It is hoped that with public
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awareness created by the government, people will get involved more widely in the promotion of Open Education in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The Open Education System in Nigeria has gone a long way. It has been run under the Sandwich, Part time, evening or weekend and now the Open Distance Learning Programs. Despite the challenges posed by the operations of these programs, they have made their contributions to the development of education in the area of training teachers and other people who would not have ordinarily had the opportunity to study. In its present state of Open Distance Learning, if teachers and others alike imbibe the information and communication technology competent of it, obviously it will go a long way in reducing some of the challenges posed by the learning process of these programs. It is recommended here that more commitment should be given to the promotion of on-line information to students and the lecturers who are facilitators in these programs. There is lack of motivation, inadequate funding from the government and the institutions that run these programs and the lack of provisions of the ICT centers and programs to enable them operate efficiently. If these challenges are taken care of adequately, the Open Education System in Nigeria will be a major contribution to the development of education.

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