STATUS AND TRENDS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMME PRACTICES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper treated the status and trends of distance education in Nigeria. In the write up distance education was seen as the type of education offered to learners who are separated by distance. The paper also saw the present status of distance education in Nigeria as that of stable growth. This is because distance education in Nigeria has metamorphosed from mere correspondence learning to open and distance learning (ODL) and transcending into the status of National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). In Nigeria non-formal education dates back to the late 19th century (1887). The paper recommended that even though distance education has come a long way in the nation, government backing is not strong enough and it is so needed in the areas of infrastructure, facilities, equipment, personnel, student support services, power supply and funding. There is room for improvement so that this type of education will offer more professional courses to decongest the regular school programmes, and provide opportunities for the much needed both lifelong education and education for all. The need also exists to train educationists, pedagogists and andragonist in the use of electronic media for e-teaching and learning.

Distance education (DE) programme practices are of much concern in recent times as they form an essential part of the entire educational programme of studies and practices all over the world. Distance education is defined in many ways by so many educationists and practitioners of distance education. As the scope of adult and non-
formal education expands, distance education as a mode of delivery evolves. This situation seems to influence the definition of the concept of DE.

Since its inception, distance education has continued to improve in its status giving way to more trends of innovations. This is why like any other human learning; distance education has come a long way in its existence and development through history. What is DE?

Distance education programme practice in Nigeria dates back to the era of correspondence colleges of the likes of the 1950s and 1960s. Distance education programme practices in Nigeria have come a long way in helping individual learners realize their intellectual and occupation dreams. Before now, Distance education practices were concerned with crop production animal husbandry, horticulture and other such agricultural and research institutes fields of study. Recently, environment issues, adult literacy, functional education life-long education etc. are added concerns of Distance Education.

This work aims at highlighting the present status and trends of distance education programme practices in Nigeria and Tanzania with a view to comparing these variables in the two countries of Africa. It is hoped that the information derivable from the study will further help to avail Adult Education learners the opportunity of understanding where DE is and what it does in the area of helping adult learners to realize their potentials.

What is distance education?

Distance education as an integral aspect of adult education has come to stay having been into existence for more than a century. Distance education is a form of education where teaching and learning are separated by time and space. According to Eya, Ugwu and Alu (2006) distance teaching occurs when the teachers and the learners are not in constant face-to-face contact with each other, but through correspondence, radio, television, internet, telephone, audio, print or electronic media. In this type of education the teacher and the learner are physically separated during the learning process, this separation can occur in so many ways depending on the nature of the course content and delivery medium.

Distance education in the course of its existence had acquired some nomenclature such as correspondence college, Open University, University of the Air, University without walls and so on.

In the words of Eya, Ugwu and Alu (2006), each of these names by which distance education is known has its, limitations of distance which leaves distance education to be more inadequate. This view is correct because distance learning takes place but the sender or the source of learning experience is separated from the receiver or learning by distance-hence the name Distance education.

Brown in Okediran (2006):382) saw distance education as a means by which instruction is passed to learners who are often geographically separated from the
provider and often described in terms of the technological devices used. Distance education tends to be instruction centred rather than learner centred. Two major issues can be deduced from the above definition and these are that distance education is usually defined in terms of technological devices used in its delivery hence we talk of correspondence learning, telephone conferencing and so on. On the other hand distance education is instruction centred and this can be explained because the teacher does not see the learner so as to assess his/her physical readiness or otherwise, or read his/her emotions and how he/she reacts at least physically to situations in course of delivering the lesson. Distance barrier makes the two concentrate only on the instruction. There is no more avenue for the teacher to demonstrate or express himself physically before the learner so as to arrive at a more concert and practical knowledge on the part of the learner.

He cannot give physical or life examples in the immediate learning environment. These form the reasons for defining distance education in terms of the technology in use and for making the teaching and learning instruction centred and not learning centred. In time and place, distance education has given humanity opportunities to exit and to continue to develop. Some expressions of such opportunities had manifested in the establishment of distance education institutions like University of life in Malaysia, Everyman’s University in Israel, People’s University of South Africa, University of the Air of I.M.T, Enugu Nigeria, Television University of China, Open University of Britain, Open University of Nigeria, etc. All these were done with a view to satisfying people’s needs while considering their circumstance and environmental factors.

In what looks like a broader perspective of the definition Ogili (1998) quoting Holmberg (1989) argued that distance education covers the various forms of study at all levels which are not under the continuous and immediate supervision of tutors with their learners in lecture rooms or on the same premises but which nevertheless benefit from the planning, guidance and teaching of a supporting organization. It is therefore, the family of instructional methods in which the teaching behaviors are executed apart from the learning behaviours. In distance education, communication between the facilitator and the learner must be facilitated by print, electronic, mechanical or by other devices (Ogili 1998).

The functionality of distance education programmes must be judged on fewer than three critical ways namely:

i. It must involve two-way educational communication between the teacher and the learner and such communication occurs contiguously.

ii. Distance education must involve two-way communication between the teacher and the learner(S) for the purpose of facilitating and supporting the educational programme. In all the definitions of Distance Education, it has to do with passing instruction from the teacher to the learner(S) through a medium when
the two are physically or geographically separated by distance may be through print, mechanical or electronic. It may be hardcopy, audio/visual.

iii. Distance education uses technology to mediate the necessary two-way communication: accessing education in our time through Distance education facilities is not complete without challenges generated mainly by ICT (Nwizu and Ekwelem, 2008). In the same way solutions which are institutional and government focused are proffered for DE to effectively provide access to education for those who need it.

Status of Distance Education in Nigeria

Adult education before 1961: status is described in the Advanced Learners Dictionary (2009) as position of thing or person in the society. It is on this premise that the writer shall look at the position of Distance education programmes and practices in the nations under study. It may be necessary to repeat that Distance education came to Nigeria in 1887, according to Aghaosain Okukpen (eds) (2009). This means that distance education is about 124 years old in the Nigeria nation. In the same vein Adult Education was in Tanzania as early as the beginning of missionary activities in the old Tanganyika (Tanzania) under the British colonial rule. Tanzania got her independence in December 1961 but before then, the missionary Sunday schools had started exerting influence on the people including the adults, youth clubs, women associational brigades and scouts (Okeem 1982).

It aided to educate the people politically through rallies, induction courses, lectures and campaigns, Adult training and of courses education was taking roots in these nations. In the same way voluntary organizations, local authorities and central government established agencies were providing some sort of education to the people. In an effort to produce better house wives, the Lutheran missionaries of Tanganyika opened a school at Moshi in 1928 which was government aided. The curriculum was designed to give girls who had received the lower primary school course a further one or two years of study and training aimed at making them better Christians and mothers. In these early adult education classes apart from reading and writing, the curriculum included hygiene, local geography, civics, nursing and child care, folk lore, singing, cooking, washing, gardening and so on. In the fifties, young married women were sent to training schools or homes for adult learning which would prepare them, were taught right manners, cooking, hygiene, house keeping and other domestic works including skills of sewing, baking, gardening, and so on.

For the early native catechists and other African church workers with slender intellectual attainments it was an effort seen by the whites as a pitiful reflection of western bigotry while to their African brothers, such effort was a radical departure from the old law which opens a vistas for more ideal life through these “apostles” of the new learning, preaching emancipation of the young and the old alike. At the end of these early attempt, a more coherent educational philosophy for African Dependencies was
formulated through the reports of the Phelps-strokes commission of 1924-1925. This report emphasized Adult Education and an advocacy for the integration of school with the communities they were said to serve. By this, emphasis was placed on the adaptation and relevance of African education to the needs of the people. It is true to say that this adaptation and relevance were determined and executed by the westerners but that served as a more serious attempt of incorporating the communities and of bringing into lime light, Adult education.

Table I
The Trends of DE in Nigeria before and after 1960s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of ANFE</th>
<th>Provider Organization</th>
<th>Type of funding</th>
<th>Remark degree of finding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult literacy adult basic education</td>
<td>Governments federal, state and local</td>
<td>i  Government</td>
<td>Fair not adequate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ii  NGOs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>iii  Foreign aid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedial</td>
<td>i  education institution</td>
<td>i Quasi-government</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii  private individuals</td>
<td>i.  Private beneficiary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension education</td>
<td>i.  Government educational institutions</td>
<td>i.  private beneficiaries</td>
<td>As occasion demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii.  Agric &amp; researcher institutions</td>
<td>ii.  government beneficiaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iii.  NGOS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing education</td>
<td>i.  Armed force</td>
<td>i.  Armed force</td>
<td>As a matter of necessity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii.  Education institution</td>
<td>ii.  Government institutions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iii.  NGOS</td>
<td>iii.  NGOS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iv.  Commercial enterprises</td>
<td>iv.  Foreign Aids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance education</td>
<td>Government institution -open university -Universities -NTI-National Teachers institute.</td>
<td>Private beneficiaries</td>
<td>To satisfy needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour education</td>
<td>Trade Unions Employer Organizations</td>
<td>i.  Trade Unions</td>
<td>As occasion demands elements of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ii.  Employers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>iii.  Beneficiaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Nigeria of present, Adult education has come a long way and has come to stay. The nature, scope and forms of Adult and Non-formal Education run and financed in Nigeria and Tanzania are undertaken by the adults and youths in various forms. The various forms by which they are taken are broadly categorized into adult basic education, extension and continuing and further education. The organization of Adult and Non-formal education is done by the government or its agencies, or by private individuals and organizations (Onyeozu in Okediran, 2006).


Distance education in Nigeria is government driven and provided by government institutions like the Open University, conventional and national teachers Institute. This type of education is financed by private beneficiaries to satisfy needs. The financing of distance education in Nigeria and Tanzania by non-governmental organizations is sporadic. The government policy of each one teach one or fund the teaching of one has not held sway as remedial education is still largely provided by government educational institutions, private agencies and individuals who do that in order to provide remedy for certain lapses in the education of the beneficiaries.

In the words of Hassan (2006), the present trends in the provision of remedial and extra-moral education by commercial organizations for the youth are to ensure that they pay for their education. This payment comes from the parents/guardians of the beneficiaries. The training may come in form of pre-degree, pre-science, pre-NCE, pre-OND of various institutions as well as in specialized skills of computer, auto mechanics, agriculture practices, health skill and so on.

At present the organizations providing distance education in Nigeria include:

a. Government-Adult Education occupies a place in the National policy on Education

b. Non-government organization – they use adult and non-formal education to reach the un-reached.

c. Institution – Adult education forms part of their curriculum and uses distance education as an organ for reaching the learners.

Distance learning gave rise to satellite campuses in Nigerian education. This phenomenon can be traced to the activities of University of London which started its
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distances learning programme in Nigeria in 1887. The University allowed external candidates for degree programmes to enroll for London GCE and basic professional degree courses in law, commerce and Government. There followed the Rapid Result Colleges, Wosley Hall College and London Institute of Marketing as well as other private correspondence colleges that followed. On 26th February 1977, University of Ibadan started the department of Adult education (Agbaosa, 2009).

In the listing of all the attempts on distance education initiatives in Nigeria, Jegede (2002) and Fagbmiye (2000) seem to agree and this is presented in the table overleaf:

Table II: Distance Education Initiatives in Nigeria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Correspondence courses</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Extra Moral Studies</td>
<td>Oxford university</td>
<td>1947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>DE course by Radio</td>
<td>Nigeria Broadcasting corporation (NBC)</td>
<td>1960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Educational Television programme</td>
<td>National television of Nigeria (NTV)</td>
<td>1960s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>University of the Air</td>
<td>Ahmadu Bello University</td>
<td>1972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Teachers in-service education programme (TISEP)</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Correspondence and open university unit (COSU),later on (COSIT and DLI)</td>
<td>University of Lagos</td>
<td>1974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Teacher’s training programme</td>
<td>National Teachers institute (NTI)</td>
<td>1976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Open learning</td>
<td>National open University</td>
<td>1983</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is pertinent to know is that until 1990, distance learning in Nigeria operated as shown in the table above without government policy to back it up. For this reason they came and went in quick succession. It does appear that when the formal system failed to provide the demand for increased access to education at all levels DE began to have impact on the people of Nigeria and to receive the due attention it requires. In response to the demand, by late 1980’s some universities in Nigeria had no option than to have outreach educational programmes in centers located at nearly all the major cities in Nigeria. This move was satisfying the educational yearnings of the working class as well as generating revenues, internally, for the institutions. These programmes came inform of sandwich, part-time, mature, evening, satellite and affiliated programmes of studies. What is important, according to UNESCO (2001) is that they all have a common denominator of being study-as-you work educational initiatives. The circle of DE in Nigeria therefore, is presently completed starting from correspondence course to old National Open University through satellite Distance Education to the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN).

Nigeria was also tackling her illiterate population education by embarking on Universal Basic Education Programmes which afforded many over-aged school “children” (adults) the opportunity which they had hitherto missed. The UPE programme of early 1970s was a sure way of fighting illiteracy in Nigeria. The school enrolment which was envisaged to be 7 million Nigerians got to 21million. This affected funding and administration of the programme.

Meanwhile as the pupil’s population increased in the regular school (primary) programmes, those of adult’s literacy classes also metamorphosed. In addition many adults who stopped at standard or elementary six classes had opportunity of furthering their education in the UPE Teacher Training Colleges. This was the situation until the early 1980s when government’s inability to cope with the funding and management of the UPE programme set in.

Distance education was still on-course as many forms of adult and non-formal Education Continued to provide opportunities for people in Nigeria to acquire new knowledge and or up-date themselves in their various life endeavor. The Nigerian experience uses distance education in mobilizing rural woman for social role, sensitizing them for improved standard of living and training that serve as self reliant avenues. Distance education in Nigeria was used to expose people to social living, Medicare, hygiene, family planning and security consciousness as well as for literacy, entrepreneurship and management (Eya, Ugwu and Alu (2001). This type of education serves those who work and would want to acquire more information, knowledge or skills
for improvement of self, or for better performance in place of work. It also enables the un-reached workers and professionals acquire new information or skills necessary for life.

Conclusion

Distance education has long standing history in Nigeria following the practices of adult education in the country. It is for the need of mobilization, sensitization and training for skill acquisition, acceptable social living, literacy and self reliance of rural populace and how to get at the un-reached individuals that distance education becomes very important in any nation. Distance education has over time metamorphosed into open Universities which in some cases use electronic teaching and learning situations to get to the target group. The present trend in the nations under review is that people can graduate in various fields of life through distance education.

There can be found people of different knowledge background, skills, professions and biases as product of distance education. Such products are better in their standard of living, skill acquisition; better informed and better citizens of their nation and all are the handiwork of distance education practices in Nigeria.

Recommendations

In view of the foregoing discussion, the following recommendations were made.

1. Distance education in Nigeria had come a long way but government backing is still not enough. There is need for government full backing so that open Universities, for example, will be brought nearer to the people by siting the centre in places other than state capitals alone. The National Open University of Nigeria should have study centres in all the Local Government Areas of the country.

2. Distance education should be improved to offer more professional courses in order to decongest the regular Universities which suffer from dearth of fund and facilities (especially ICT).

3. There is need to train educators and pedagogists in the use of electronic systems for e-teaching and learning.

4. Distance education should be properly funded if the nation must reap the benefits therein.
References


UNESCO (2001). *Distance Education in the E-9 countries* Graph print, France.


