INNOVATIONS AND TRANSFORMATION IN TEACHING AND LEARNING THROUGH OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING EDUCATION IN RIVERS STATE

Samuel W. Amadioha, Ph.D
Department of Technical Educational Foundations,
Rivers State University of Science and Technology,
Nkpolu,
Port Harcourt.

Abstract
Open and distance learning education is a multi-dimensional approach or it is described as courses flexibility designed to meet individual learners, requirement. It is an organized education provided outside the formal education system. Thus this paper sees it as an attempt to breaks down the traditional barriers to teaching such as pre-requisites age, geographical location availability scheduling style and cost. The paper also recommended that learners proficiency in Rivers State can be improved through short course or raising the awareness of poor adult education the sources of their problem and how to be organized to overcome them through adult education, continuing education, on the job accelerated training, functional literacy, extension service and second chance of school to those who by accident of birth and place would otherwise be deprived by learning in Rivers State in particular and Nigeria at large.

Key Words: Pre-requisites age, geographical location, availability scheduling accelerated training, functional literacy and extension services etc.

At any point in time in the history of any nation, the education practice had always been informed by the prevailing societal needs. The context and mode of administration is determined by the historical specificities of the govern period. For example, during the middle-ages, education was administered for and through the church. In Europe, during the industrial revolution which led to mass production on the factories occasioned the employment of many hands to tend the machines. To meet the demand many children were herded into large classes where they were given basic skills and knowledge to warrant them fit into and work in the industrialized society. Similarly, at the turn of the 20th century, the American University Challenge System was faced with a lot of...
challenges given the method applied by the seminary training procedures which has become obsolete, sterile and unproductive. To arrest the ugly situation, the authorities from the leading universities met and came up with a solution.

According to Efebo (2004) the authorities redefined the purpose and mission of the American universities, this gave rise to a lot of innovations in teaching and learning processes in education, one of which is the distance learning which is being emulated the world over. In fact in many advanced countries, distance learning has come to be regarded as a supplement to regular education process.

What is Open/Distance Learning?

Many educationists have put forward different definitions about distance learning. According to Nwana (2006), distance education is seen as any form of education which adopt such strategies as to enable the teacher and the learner to get so physically separated from each other that they are beyond to unaided sight and hearing of each other, yet interacting reasonably enough for meaningful learning to go on”. This means that formal education, the teacher and the learner have physical contact with each other while in the case of distance learning, there is no necessary physical contact between the teacher and the learner yet teaching and learning is being carried out as in the formal school system.

It is seen as according to Faur’s (2001) in ABSU (1997) as “a flexible alternativesystem of education which endeavors” to redistribute teaching in space and time” promotes “assisted self learning and enables the person choose his part more freely in a more flexible framework’ It is a factor seem as an industrialized form of teaching which emphasizes rationalization, mechanization, mass production, division of labour, concentration and controls evolution from postal teaching to open distance education. In other words, this system does not either imply the physical presence of the teacher appointed to teach the students in a classroom or in which the teacher is present only on occasions for selected task.

Furthermore, the French government (2000) defined distance education (telenseignement) as containing two basic elements the physical separation of teachers and learners and the changed role of the teacher who may meet students only for “selected tasks such as counseling, giving tutorials or seminars or solving study problems”. The open learning system is a multidimensional approach or rather is desorbed as courses flexibility designed to meet individual requirements. It is an attempt to break does n the traditional barriers to teaching such as pre-requisites age, geographical location, availability scheduling style am cost. Thus, the open distance learning is an organized education provided outside
the formal educational system. For example, it could be for the upgrading of the proficiency of agricultural extension workers through short courses or raising the awareness of poor adults about the Sources of their problem and how to organized to overcome them.

Major Characteristics and Features of Open Distance Learning Education

These are;
““The use of reproduced courses as the main basis for study, the existence of organized two-way communication between the students and a supporting organization that is, the university, college or school with its tutors and counselors, the planned and explicit catering for individual study. The cost effectiveness of the educational use of mass communication methods when large numbers of students follows the same produced courses, the application of industrial work methods to the production of learning materials and to the administration of distance learning scheme.”

The notion of distance study as a mediated form of guided didactic conversation:
i. There were surnamed up and grouped into two main features by Kaye and Ruble (2000)Efebo (1997) as: I An enlargement or opening of educational opportunity to new target population previously deprived either through geographical isolation, lack of formal academic requirements or employment conditions and,

ii The identification of particular target groups and their key characteristics, (needs, age, contribution, time available for studying local facilities etc) to enable appropriate courses, learning methods and delivery systems to be designed on systematic basis.

It is note worthy that distance learning does not make room for rigidity rather flexibility and multi-dimension approach is encouraged in terms of administration and time to achieve the desire result. Thus any approach which tries to remove barriers that prevent attendances at more traditional courses is applied.

Organizational Typologies of Open and Distance Education
Many scholars have tried to create a typology for distance education system. However, the most accepted typology of distance education is that given by Kegan (2004). According to him, in distance teaching, institutions can be divided into two main groups these are autonomous and mixed institutions.
Fig 1: Organizational Typologies of Distance Education

According to him autonomous institutions are those totally committed to distance education while mixed institutions are those distances deliverer formed within conventional educational institutions.

Autonomous institutions are further sub-divided into two types. The first type is described as public and private correspondent schools and colleges. While the second type is called distance teaching universities or open universities He argues that these types of teaching universities have complex method through which learning and teaching takes place. The distance learners are supported by as much provision of support services as possible.
Mixed institutions are divided into three types: the first type which is type (three) is the independent study dimensions of conventional colleges and universities. This includes correspondent schools and others who support and deliver learning through a whole range of technologies. They usually depend upon the faculty of the larger institution for course development and the faculties (facilities) are often contracted on an overloaded basis in this case distance students are made to study the same materials and sit for the same examination as regular (campus) students.

The consultation model is what he referred to as type four institutions. In this model, study normally commences with residential seminar on campus after which students continue, to study at home from the learning materials provided.

The type five is what Keegan referred to as the Australian integrated model. This type exist within a conventional college or university but is different from others in the sense that lecturers are given dual mandate and allocated group of both internal and external students m equal number. Furthermore, efforts are made to integrate on and off-campus students, by designing compulsory periods of time for face to face session for the off campus students.

However, it must be pointed out that there is no hard and fast rules as to the administration of distance learning given the above typologies. Rather different institutions in different countries adopt the best typology most convenient to it and the learner. The basic idea is that the system is concerned with eliminating geographical, socio-economic and psychological barriers in learning. Emphasis is laid on maximizing access to education in terms of time and space and supports the learning process through choice of methods and mode of communication.

Open/Distance Education in Nigeria

Prior to this time, there existed some non-formal/distance learning programmes through which some Nigerians who were not opportune to receive their desired education through the regular school system were educated even up to G.C.E, Diploma/Degree levels. These were manifested in form of correspondence courses with some overseas and local agencies. Prominent among these agencies were the rapid result college, the Wesley Hall, the exam success correspondence college. (course) etc. It will be worthy of note that Chief Jeremiah Obafemi Awolowo of the blessed memory and other prominent Nigerians received their educations through this process when it would not have been possible for them to do so through their formal school system given their social and economic
background at that material time. There were many who could not take such bold initiative and were left behind the “iron curtain of illiteracy.” We will be able to know how much loss the nations has suffered through the illiteracy of these group by assessing the contributions of Chief Obafemi Awolowo to the educational, economical and political development of this great country. The legacy still lives on.

The Nigerian Response

It was in attempt to fully encourage distance learning that the Nigeria government considered distance and national education as a necessary education policy to be pursued in the country. According to the National Policy on Education (2004) the objectives of the adult and continuing education should be:

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To provide functional literacy education for adults who never had advantage of any formal education, to provide functional and remedial education for those young people who prematurely dropped out of formal school system, to provide further education for different categories of completers: of further education system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills, to provide in-service on the job vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills, to give the adult citizens of the country necessary aesthetics cultural and civic education for public enlightenment.”

To accomplish the above objective a mass literacy campaign was launched by the Federal Government to awaken the people on the need to be educated not minding the age and other barriers. In response to this many Nigerians universities started adult non-formal education programme. A national commission for adult education was set up to co-ordinate adult education activities.

Practical Approach for Effective and Successful Open and Distance Education Programme

Radio Audio Cassette and other wireless devices.

To be able to reach the rural population and the masses, there must be a well-developed radio audio cassette and other wireless devices other agencies like religious groups, political associations and economical institutions can organize education programme for their members. For example religious group can expand their Sunday school programme and other study periods to accommodate secular and a civic education. This method was adopted in Sweden some years back and through this method, many of their illiterate population were educated.
Effective Radio School System: The government can improve on what is on ground by embarking on massive radio programme or radio and Tv schools. The radio programme was used in Ghana and Brazil to reduce illiteracy level/ratio in their countries. Likewise in Kenya they were used to reduce the illiteracy rate in the country from 50 percent in 1979 to 11.8 percent in 1980 (UNESCO).

Audio Video Means: The distance learning programme should use audio video means as part of its delivery methods. This should include all electronic means which as, radio, video tape, cassettes, and computers with fitted modules and communication infrastructure, by post and telephone. The usage of these modules should be encouraged and improved to expand the programme.

Then finally on the issue of time, different (slow and fast) learners should be allowed to learn at their own pace.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the programme can take any from like adult education, continuing education, on the job training farmer or work training, functional literacy, extensions service second chance school etc. Open and distance learning education can also provide education to those millions of people who by accident of birth and place would otherwise be deprived of the learning etc.

Conclusion

Through the above contribution may sound funny, and utopia, well no one can tell how much Nigerians will achieve until they are tried here. After all there is nothing wrong in frying. The fact that a greater percentage of the Nigerian populace are still illiterate should give every well thinking Nigerian a concern special, now that we are talking of development, millennial goal, integration economic and political democracy, patriotism and civic culture. These variables are easily tenable in a literate society than in an illiterate society. In fact, there has always been a close relationship between literacy and power and literacy and revolution in human history. Literacy has always been a powerful weapon which helped in bringing about desirable socio-economic and political changes. Most countries that were under colonialism can attest to this. If we must transform this nation from what it is to the state of being where no man is expressed then literacy is necessary for all and should be pursued through the formal and of course, the distance non-formal learning system and must be declared as a national emergency. The government, the universities, philanthropist, NGOs/CBOs and other religious and humanitarian organizations should take up the challenge and advance this country through investing in the distance/non-formal education programme.
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