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DISTANCE LEARNING CENTRE
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

**Evaluation, Growth and
Contemporary Trends in
Open Distance Education**
The Ibadan Experience

In Honour of Prof. Bayo Okunade

Edited by

**Oyesoji Aremu
Ayo Kehinde
'Femi Ayoola**

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ICT and ODL Delivery: The Experience of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria

**Omokhabi, A. Adiat
&
Babalola, N. Akorede**

Introduction

Distance learning programme began in Nigeria like in every other part of the world through correspondence education with the use of regular postal service, to pen and paper method but it is now being driven by the use of information and communications technology (ICT) in the 21st century. Open and distance learning programme is highly important in salvaging the conventional mode from the crises of various dimensions and magnitude of not being able to accommodate a large number of admission seekers with limited human, financial and physical resources in the country.

The delivery of such educational programme is also important at this age of information in order to grow and move with the latest as well as to promote globalisation. This method of delivery will not only promote globalisation but also bridge digital divide and promote digital inclusion among the students as well as the members of staff. This paper, therefore, looked at the relevance of ICT in ODL delivery with particular reference to the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.

University education in Nigeria, like every other part of the world, is at the centre of human resource development and advancement. It is the highest level of education where a high level of manpower, intellectual and future leaders is being developed. University education is pursued in order to gain knowledge and develop intellectual capacities and high-level technical capacities that underpin economic growth and development (Odekunle, 2001; Ajayi, 2003; Olutola & Olatoye, 2015). This university education is pursued mostly through conventional mode until recent times.

University education in Nigeria is in travail; the system is fraught with crises of various dimensions and magnitude (Ajayi & Ayodele, 2002). In the contemporary world, the conventional mode of education has failed to admit the prospective candidates who applied for university education in Nigeria due to a large number of admission seekers coupled with limited human, financial as well as physical resources in the country (Oladejo, 2015). University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre with her open and distance learning is meant to fill this vacuum through her flexible nature.

Distance learning programme employed the use of correspondence education which was made possible through regular postal service in delivering education to prospective students and later to what Braimoh and Osiki(2008) referred to as paper and pencil method due to lack of or limited use of ICT due to power problems, shortage of ICT compulsory equipment and inability to use them. However, in recent times, the National Universities Commission (NUC) guidelines for open and distance learning spelt it out clearly and compulsory the use of ICT for both the centre and students in Nigerian universities where it was submitted that, for specific programmes, functional Internet access would be required for all study centres and students are expected to be able to have access to ICT to assist their learning. Also, appropriate use of media and ICT should be made use of by the centre.

The use of ICT in the delivery of open and distance learning programme is not limited to Nigeria alone. Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA, 2002), through its policy, also recognise that the centres must establish virile ICT-driven distance education delivery system. ADEA also recognises the training of distance education operators, including course writers, support service providers, producers, managers, instructional designers and technicians.

The application and use of ICT does not only change the life of every individual but also change the educational delivery, most especially open and distance learning in Nigeria. This assertion was corroborated by Ayo, Odukoya and Azeta (2014) who submitted that the application of ICT-based learning has great potential for increasing access to university education in Nigeria. Harsasi (2015) argued that the essence of distance learning is the separation between students and teachers which means students had to be able to study independently. The University of Ibadan Distance Learning has leverage separation between the students and lecturers with information and communications technologies (ICTs). This has been supported with the provision of different learning support materials which include computer-assisted instruction (CAI), CD, hand-held devices such as mobile phones and downloadable from the University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre website, use of different social media, online tutorial (e-learning), radio broadcast, and the like. In essence, the use and application of ICT has changed the delivery of distance education from chalkboard, slate, lantern and phonograph to the use of computer-assisted instruction (CAI) in the 21st century.

Open and Distance Learning in the Information Age: An Overview

Distance education came into prominence during the last decade of the 20th century following the establishment of the foremost United Kingdom Open University (UKOU) in 1969. But in Nigeria, it started around 1960s with correspondence colleges

from the United Kingdom providing intermediate and advanced level training to a number of qualified Nigerians via correspondence courses (Owoeye, 2004 ; Ohioze, Odishika, Adedeji, Olusanya & Adesina-Uthman, 2013).

The concept of distance education was agreed globally at the International Conference on Distance Education (ICDE) to be known as open and distance learning (ODL), which provides answers to the needs of working adult learners (Ojokheta, 2000; Aderinoye, 2002; Oladejo, 2010). Oladejo (2015) submitted that distance education (now known globally as open-distance learning) is a discipline within education that has been associated with various definitions and terminologies. There is no general definition of the concept; different authorities defined differently and interchangeably to mean different things. However, King, Young, Drivere-Richmond and Schrader (2001) did not support the interchangeable use of the terms 'distance learning' and 'distance education' because both terms differ. The concept of open distance learning (ODL) is very broad and can be defined in various ways. Hence, it is important to point out that there is no single, all-embracing definition. Freeman (2004) defined ODL as an amalgamation of two approaches which focus on expanding access to learning. Several founding fathers of distance education had earlier come up with different definitions. For example, Moon, Leach and Stevens (2005) define ODL as the open learning approaches which, when combined with distance education methodologies, are often referred to collectively as open and distance learning. According to Commonwealth of Learning (2000), ODL is "correspondence, home study, independent learning ... flexible learning or distributed learning". In ODL philosophy and practice, ODL represents approaches that focus on opening access to education and training provision, freeing learners from constraints of time and place, and offering flexible learning opportunities to individuals and groups of learners (UNESCO, 2002). Common elements on which many

authors agree in their definitions are the combination of distance education (DE) and open learning, and access and separation between the lecturer and the learner. In general, the goal of ODL is to broaden participation and to overcome geographical, social and economic barriers (Kelly & Mills, 2007). Also, the Federal Government of Nigeria in the National Policy on Education (2004) described ODL as lifelong learning, life-wide education, adult education, media-based education, self-learning. There are common elements to all these definitions, that is, the combination of distance education (DE) and open learning, access and separation between the lecturer and the learner.

Ayo, Odukoya and Azeta (2014) viewed ODE as a formal education system that deploys ICT facilities to communicate, teach, coach and facilitate productive learning among students who are domiciled in distant locations. Such education system is said to be open because students are not limited by such conditions/factors like age, sex, pregnancy, work, race, religion and so on. It is an education that is open to all. This definition is in line with the current nature of open and distance learning with ICT and inclusiveness. In essence, to both definitions, distance learning is referenced more as ability, whereas distance education is an activity within the ability (of learning at a distance) which is still limited by the differences in time and place (Volery & Lord, 2000). These limitations have been bonded by the application and use of ICT in the 21st century.

Distance learning is a tool for promoting inclusiveness because it is a channel for bringing education to groups that have previously been marginalised and excluded in the developing countries. The uniqueness of ODL is as follows:

- (a) There is separation of learner and teacher in time and space.
- (b) There is flexibility in the use of multimedia devices and entry requirements for increased access and equity.
- (c) There is availability of programmes to learners at their chosen locations.

- (d) It is learner-centred.
- (e) There is openness with regard to access, duration, age, sex, goals and knowledge delivery technique.
- (f) It allows students to combine education with work.
- (g) It allows for a two-way communication between the teacher and the learners (Afolayan, 2015).

According to Rumble (1992), De Wolf (1994) and Holmberg (1995), open and distance learning has been used to give students a second chance education, and this seems to have been particularly the case in teacher development programmes in Africa. But in this contemporary Nigerian society, open and distance learning does not only give second chance education, but also promote equality and give access to all.

Distance learning was nursed at the University of Ibadan about the same time it was conceived in University of Lagos (UNILAG, 2010). The University of Ibadan inaugurated her distance education in 1988 in an attempt to meet the needs of the ever increasing applicants for university education through her distance learning programme. She (University of Ibadan DLC) adopts Degree by Examination Model pioneered by the University of London, as her faculties participating in the distance learning programme are given the roles of defining the knowledge to be mastered by the learners and certifying the students' performance through constant assessment and evaluation (Adegbile & Oyekanmi, 2011). The University of Ibadan is running the 21st century open and distance learning programme that employs ICT in bonding the limitations of traditional distance learning programme.

ICT and Delivery of Open and Distance Learning

In a distance learning system, learners are remote to the institution and are in a large scale. It is difficult for a learner to visit the institution every day to get a service/support as available in a conventional system and at the same time. It is even difficult for the institution itself to provide various services to the learners at different phases of a student learning life cycle due to limited

human resource (Rao, 2010). Information and communications technology (ICT) is a prime resource to overcome such limitations that distant learners may experience. Information and communication technology is a group of technologies by which various support services could be provided at different phases of student learning life cycle in distance learning (Robinson, 2008; Murali & Rao, 2009). The various phases are: the admission phase (programme details, fee structure, admission procedure and registration and re-registration); the learning phase (learning schedule, programme delivery, lectures through video conferencing, webinars, audio and video programmes, multimedia presentations and case studies); the evaluation phase (examination schedule, internal and external assessment, examinations, improvement, valuation, revaluation and result declaration); and the certification phase (marks/grades updates, certificate printing and issuing and convocation schedule).

The new forms of distance learning programme driven by (ICTs), supported by the Internet and use of World Wide Web (WWW), has significant economic, pedagogical and organisational implications (Oladejo & Gesinde, 2014). Oladejo and Gesinde (2014) further submitted that it has a significant trend towards intensifying globalisation. Dhanarajan (2008) submitted that distance education is the means by which the teacher is taken literally to the student. He further submitted that students are separated from the teachers in teaching and learning process by a physical distance which is often bridged by communications technologies.

ICT in use in ODL is also re-shaping universities' entire organisational structures. Westbrook (2001), for example, observed that the introduction of ICTs in education has resulted in the changes in four core areas: curriculum, role of teacher and students, organisational structure, and learning environment. Given that a growing number of transactions now take place online at a distance, appropriately automated systems for recording these

transactions, tracking them, keeping and retrieving student records and so on must be supported by holistic policies and procedures that take into account all academic-related activities.

During the past few decades, there have been considerable developments in open and distance learning in many developing countries. The development in the traditional distance learning is being accelerated by the use of ICT which is different from the 19th century distance learning programme (Donald, 2014; Afolayan, 2015). This assertion is supported by Wheeler (2006) who emphasised that distance learning as a concept existed for over a century, notably in the form of paper-based correspondence courses. Now, however, it is depending increasingly upon technology for its success.

Technology is advancing day by day and new technology emerges every day. This technology has effects on the delivery of distance learning in the contemporary world (Banas & Emory, 1998). The University of Ibadan Distance Learning adopts different technologies as well as applications that promote learning among her students. Rao (2008) submitted that open and distance learning system requires ICT infrastructure to provide various services effectively at different phases of a student life cycle. The ICT infrastructure include the network infrastructure, the computing infrastructure, the system and application software, the Internet Service Provider(ISP), the bandwidth, the policy framework and the security infrastructure.

Open and Distance Learning: Digital Divide or Digital Inclusion?

Distance learning began with the introduction of correspondence education in the 1770s (Harting & Erthal, 2005). Correspondence education was made possible with the launch of regular postal service to the public, that is, “new technology”. ICT is the 21st century technology that drives distance learning and that is the reason why the University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre

made computer literacy compulsory as a requirement for students in order to interact productively.

Pallof and Pratt (2001) posited that technology becomes the mediation for Distance Education. They opined that technology serves as a vehicle through which the course is conducted. The students' social interaction in the context of the online course forms the foundation of the learning community. The purpose is the shared involvement in the online course itself. Sharing information, interests and resources is part of what online education is about.

The importance of ICT in distance learning is being reiterated by Rao (2009) and Robinson (2008) who maintained that ICT is a group of technologies by which various support services are provided at different phases of student learning life cycle in distance learning. The University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre has developed to the level of this technology and presently, this technology is being adopted from the centre to lecturers and from the lecturers to students.

Nworgu (2007) submitted that ICT industry is significant inroad into the Nigerian society. The significance is also being felt in the delivery of open and distance education in Nigeria but ICT resources and facilities were grossly limited in the country. Only very few wealthy Nigerians had access to these facilities and services. The technical know-how to use these technologies, public awareness of ICT and its application are very low. The University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre promotes digital inclusion and bridge digital divide among her students. According to Nwegbu, Osadebe and Asadu (2011), the term 'digital divide' emerged in the 21st century due to innovations in information and communication technology. It is used to define inequality in access to and use of telecommunication infrastructure by citizens to solve personal and societal problems.

The University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre, through her open and distance learning platform, does not only bridge the

digital divide among the students but also among the academic staff. She provides iPad for students and smartphones for the Heads of Departments and the course coordinators across the University. It also provides smartphones for their members of staff for ease of communication. It also makes available a functional email where information is communicated to students as well as course advisors. In essence, it promotes digital inclusion among her members of staff, academic staff and the students.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The delivery of distance education has moved from the traditional form of education which was mainly driven through correspondence post to the 21st century distance education through open and distance learning that is driven by ICT. The University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre is one of the centres that base their programmes mainly on ICT. Her programme is ICT driven not only among the students, but also among her staff, Heads of Departments, academic staff as well as course advisors. In essence, it promotes digital inclusiveness.

Based on its conclusion, the study recommends that students, Heads of Departments, academic staff and course advisors should be more versatile in the use of ICT to further promote the delivery of distance learning education because ICT is advancing day by day. New applications and technologies emerge every day.

Governmental and non-governmental organisations should support the University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre as well as other centres that run distance learning programmes in promoting adequate infrastructural facilities in order to provide strong ICT services not only for distance learning programmes but also to bridge the digital divide among distance learning students in Nigeria.

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