

EVOLUTION OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This work was a collaborative effort of all the authors. Author BA designed the study, performed the table and chart analysis. Author FKO wrote the protocol and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author RNT managed the interpretation of the charts. Author SL managed the literature searches. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

ABSTRACT

Distance education can be traced back to the period when ambitious Nigerians started seeking for admission into universities overseas. Since most of these universities groomed those students for examinations without tuition, correspondence schools in the United Kingdom and Nigeria became imperative to close the gap. The Federal Government of Nigeria at independence in 1960 also placed premium on distance education as the Ashby Commission set up in 1959 recommended the establishment of distance learning unit in the University of Lagos in it eventually took off. From there, distance education has now been fully accepted into the Nigerian University System. As of today, the National Universities Commission has recognized seven Federal Universities as dual mode institutions and the National Open University of Nigeria as a uni-mode university. There are other institutions such as National Teachers Institute and the Ahmadu Bello University Institute of Education that offer National Certificate of Education programmes through distance learning mode. Although, the Federal Government recognizes distance education as a means of improving access, economic consideration is basically the motive behind the transformation of most conventional universities to bi-mode distance education institutions in Nigeria, especially State owned universities. This portends great danger to the quality of outputs from these distance education institutions.

Keywords: Distance education, Higher education, Unimode, Dual mode, Universities.

1. Introduction

Distance learning in Nigeria started at the time when some educationally enterprising

persons linked themselves with overseas institutions for correspondence studies and examinations. This initiative was not

unconnected with the principle of the colonial administration did not display much enthusiasm for providing higher education for the native population. Since an educated person is difficult to enslave, it was observed that this negative disposition was a ploy devised by the colonial masters to keep Nigerians under perpetual subjugation of Britain (Hamza, 1992).

Hamza (1992) observed that the colonial masters were interested in creating structures that facilitated exploitation of their resources and suppress any revolt. However, the few Nigerians who could afford it, travelled to Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone, as the only institution in West Africa which prepared students for the Bachelor of Arts (B.A) Degree, as early as 1876. However, it was not until 1887 that the British colonial government in Lagos approached the University of London to extend its examination facilities to Nigerian candidates. With the approval on April 20, 1887 for the London University Examination to be held in Nigeria, many Nigerians were provided opportunity to register for the Bachelor of Arts or Science Degree Examination. Omolewa (1985) traced the origin of distance education in Nigeria to the external examinations organized by foreign institutions of higher learning such as Universities of London, Cambridge and Oxford. Although Nigerians could take examinations organized by these institutions, none of these universities organized lectures for them in order to prepare them for these examinations. This variant of distance learning was labelled correspondence education - syllabi and recommended texts were dispatched by post and details of

examinations were later sent to candidates to appear after paying prescribed fees.

Many Nigerian students patronized the correspondence institutions abroad, without leaving the shores of the country. The institutions include Bennett Correspondence College, Wolsey Hall, Rapid Results College, Examination Success Correspondence College, City Correspondence, G.B. Coker and Metropolitan Institute among others. The first generation of educated Nigerian were products of such institutions, having been prepared for the General Certificate Examinations, ordinary and advanced levels, as well as the RSA examinations, as private candidates. This marked the beginning of distance education in Nigeria, since tuition was provided by these institutions through correspondence. Therefore, distance education came in handy to meet the aspirations of Nigerians for higher education.

Omolewa (2008) argues that the quality of correspondence education at the time was evident from the universities which operated external degree programmes set the same questions for both its internal and external students. Other analysts have traced the proliferation of “mushroom” evening schools or Centres, during the decade 1990-2000, in various parts of Nigeria to the gap created by examination without tuition of early correspondence education (Hamza 2000; Jubril 2000). However, the standard of distance education is ubiquitous, as it permeates all aspects of the programme including course materials development, instructional facilitation and learner support services (Jegede, 2016).

2. Distance Education and Higher Education in Nigeria

The primacy of education in Nigeria as a tool for socio-economic and political development is amplified in the Nigerian National Policy on Education, which stated that education is an instrument per excellence for effecting national development (FRN, 2004). It was further added that education shall continue to be given premium in the national development plans because education is the most important instrument of change and that any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by educational revolution.

As a prelude towards independence, the Federal Ministry of Education set up the Ashby Commission to examine the needs of Nigeria in the area of Post-Secondary School Certificate in Higher Education from 1960-1980. Part of the suggestions in the report of this Commission submitted in 1960 was the establishment of the University of Lagos considering the concentration of people and the higher demand for university education. It included as one of its features that associated with the university (but preferably under a Dean or Director with special knowledge of correspondence education) that there should be a Department of Correspondence courses. This Department should offer to properly qualified and enrolled students which can be taught well by correspondence. Ashby believed that such institution in Nigeria will be very popular and would encourage large numbers of men and women in employment to improve their education and to fit them for more responsible post. This is a sign that distance education has long been recognized as an integral part of Nigeria education history.

The official recognition of

correspondence education at the University of Lagos marked the beginning of an attempt to make distance education an integral part of the Nigeria University System. In 1974, the University of Lagos sought the assistance of International Extension College in the United Kingdom to establish the Correspondence and Open Studies University (COSU) later known as Correspondence and Open Studies Institute (COSIT) (Fagbamiye, 2000).

According to Fagbamiye (2000), this was the first conscious attempt made to establish distance education unit as part of a university in Nigeria. This was in line with one of the objectives of the University of Lagos at inception, that is, provision of facilities for part-time studies in areas such as business administration, law and education through correspondence and distance learning techniques. COSIT has since undergone a lot of restructuring to ensure that the frequency of study centre meetings are reduced to barest minimum, leaving only meetings for tutorials, informal group studies while the institute provides the support learning materials, such as course texts, audio and video recordings. The name COSIT has since been changed to Distance Learning Institute with an enhanced status of a college that has its own academic board management and it is empowered to formulate policies, employ its staff and be responsible for academic programmes, examinations as well as supervise its day-to-day activities.

Some other universities in Nigeria like University of Ibadan, Ahmadu Bello University and University of Nigeria, Nsukka were providing extension services to their catchment areas (Olakulehin, 2008). In the mid-1960s, University of

Ibadan and Ahmadu Bello University were providing extension courses to farmers so as to acquire new skills in order to introduce them to new agricultural methods. The Ahmadu Bello University Institute of Education also established Teacher In-Service Education Programme to increase the quantity and quality of teachers in Northern Nigeria. At the end of this programme candidates sat for Grade III and Grade II Teachers Certificate Examinations. Later, when National Council of Education came up that the National Certificate of Education (NCE) should be the minimum qualification for teaching at primary level, the Ahmadu Bello University Institute of Education, started the NCE by correspondence programme.

One of the challenges with the introduction of the Universal Primary Education in 1976 was inadequate teaching personnel to cope with the demand of the programme. It was that on ground that distance education was rated as the alternative means of training the required number of teachers (Olakulehin, 2008). This led to the establishment of the National Teachers Institute (NTI) as the first institute specially established by the Federal Government of Nigeria to provide distance education courses to upgrade under-qualified and unqualified teachers. In line with the minimum qualification directive for teaching in primary schools, the NTI also introduced the NCE by distance learning in 1990 (Adaku, 1997).

An attempt made to establish an Open University in Abuja was truncated and replaced with a dual-mode institution established as the University of Abuja. At the University of Abuja, the Centre for Distance Learning and Continuing

Education (CDLCE) was set up and mandated to provide distance education component of every course that the University would provide. However, the strong commitment of the Federal Government to distance education finally led to the emergence of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) in 2002. The establishment of National Open University of Nigeria is traceable to the National Policy on Education (FRN 2004), which has as its major objective to make life long education the basis for the nation's educational policies at any stage of the educational process after primary education, an individual will be able to choose between continuing full-time studies, combining work with study or embarking on full time employment without excluding the prospect of resuming studies later.

The idea of an open university for Nigeria which was given force through the National Policy on Education refers specifically to the problem of access to higher education. The policy is that necessary efforts will be made to enable those who can benefit from higher education to be given access to it. Such access may be through universities or correspondence courses; open universities or part-time and work study programmes" (FRN 2004, p.2). By seeking to provide equal and adequate educational opportunities for all, the Nigerian government searched for alternative models to the traditional campus-based higher education. Consequently the policy explicitly referred to open and distance education as the system which encompasses education for all, education for life, lifelong learning, life-wide education, adult education, mass education,

media-based education, self-learning, personalized learning, part-time studies, and much more. In this sense it was making specific reference to the open and distance learning as a system which promotes “equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels” (p.10).

3. Current Status of Distance Education in Nigeria

The high demand for education and the inability of existing institutions to meet such demand encouraged most universities in Nigeria to start new distance learning programmes at satellite campuses, study centres and outreach centres in different locations in the country. There was the case of the University of Lagos that established an outreach centre as far as South Korea until it was proscribed. The mode of operation was to recruit tutors from the locality where such outreach centres are located in order to organize face-to-face contacts with students. These centres replicated academic programmes in parent universities. These outreach/study centres cannot be regarded as distance education when viewed from international perspectives. It is observed that the primary motive behind their establishment is often to generate income. The poor quality of education offered through these outreach centres was considered generally low and uncoordinated. Thus the Federal Government decided in 2001 to limit the activities of these centres within 200 kilometres radius of the parent university. In addition, such centres must not be cited in a town or city where another federal or state university exists. This decision led to the closure of many outreach centres thereby putting an end to “mushrooming” of study centres by different universities.

However, the increasing importance of distance education must have informed the position of the Federal Government on distance education as articulated in the National Policy on Education. It states that the goals of open and distance education are to:

- Provide access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied.
- Meet special needs of employers by running special certificate courses for their employees at their work place.
- Encourage internationalization especially tertiary education curricula.
- Ameliorate the effect of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing experts as teachers regardless of their locations or places of work, (FRN, 2004).

From the above, it can be deduced that from an uncoordinated beginning, distance education has become a regular feature of education in Nigeria. Beginning with the explicit call for access to education through non-formal means in the National Policy on Education (NPE) when it was first written in 1977, through several workshops, meetings and conferences to Ministerial Strategic Plan 2016-2019, priority call has been placed on providing access to all learners in Nigeria, as a public good, a fundamental human right that should be inclusive and equitable. The Government has adopted as stated in the NPE (FRN, 2004) “policies which were to be directed towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels”. And pledged to “make life-long

education the basis for the nation's education policy" by ensuring that "after primary education an individual will be able to choose between full-time studies, combining work with studies...alternative mode of learning". The policy also states that "the education system is structured to develop the practice of self-learning".

In the Communiqué of The Presidential Retreat on Education held at The State House Conference Centre, Presidential Villa, Abuja, on Monday November 13, 2017, it was noted higher education deserves special attention given that the development of a country directly and indirectly influenced by quality of human resources produced by higher education system; The President Retreat recommended that 'access quality higher education should also expanded through enhancement of carrying capacity of the Nigerian higher education system. The expansion of open and distance learning delivery system at all levels of education should be given priority. This derives from the inability of the campus-based universities to accommodate the large number of applicants seeking university places every year.

According to Ojerinde (2011) of 1,185,579 persons that took the JAMB examination in 2019 a total of 211,991 was admitted, amounting to 17.9 percent of the applicants. This shows that less than 20 percent of those who apply to universities are admitted. Also, Adesulu (2013) reports that, in 2010/2011, Nigeria had 112 universities with carrying capacity of 450,000 against 1,493,611 applicants. Thus, the admitting capacity was 30.13 per cent of the total number of applicants. This means that at best, only 30.13 per cent of

the total numbers of applicants were accommodated during that academic session. The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), the body responsible for coordinating admissions into tertiary education in Nigeria, reported that from 2010 to 2016 out of a total of 11,703,709 applications received, only 2,674,485 students (a mere 28 per cent) were given admission places across the 36 states and the FCT of Nigeria.

Year	Number of applicants (JAMB)	Number Admitted (JAMB)	Percentage admitted	Number of applicant Not admitted	Percentage of unsatisfied demand	Student enrolment (DLI)	Graduate output (DLI)
2000/2001	467,490	50,277	10.76	417,213	89.24	1382	254
2001/2002	550,399	60,718	11.03	489,681	88.97	1853	481
2002/2003	994,380	51,845	5.21	942,535	94.79	1803	459
2003/2004	1,046,950	105,157	10.04	941,793	89.96	1721	716
2004/2005	841,878	122,492	14.55	719,386	85.45	None	None
2005/2006	916,371	76,984	8.40	839,387	91.60	1934	722
2006/2007	803,472	88,524	11.02	714,948	88.98	2102	813
2007/2008	911,653	107,370	11.78	804,283	88.22	2182	856
2008/2009	1,054,053	194,521	18.45	859,532	81.55	2605	1031
2009/2010	1,182,381	281,675	23.82	900,706	76.18	2655	1583
2010/2011	1,330,531	402,872	30.28	927,659	69.72	2601	1650
2011/2012	1,503,933	502,313	33.39	1,001,620	67.61	3315	1915
2012/2013	1,644,110	525,365	31.95	1,118,745	68.05	3281	1907
2013/2014	1,735,892	568,197	32.73	1,167,695	67.27	3179	2165
2014/2015	1,606,753	585,245	36.42	1,021,508	63.58	None	2290

Source: Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board and DLI (2000-2015)

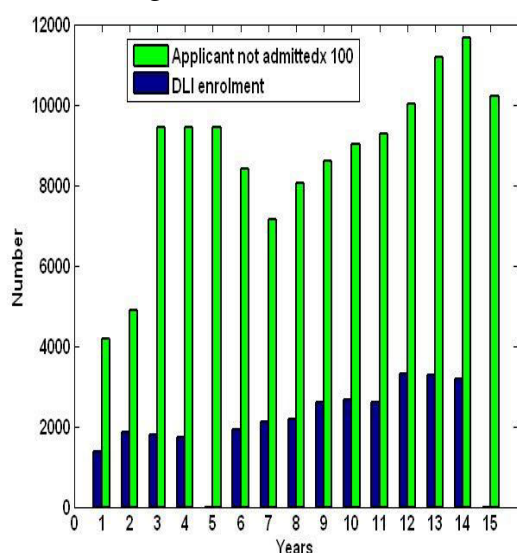
Table 1: Students Enrollment at Distance Learning Institutes University

order to take care of one million applicants that were not admitted into Nigerian universities even though they were qualified, the Federal government of Nigeria has directed full attention to the use of distance learning as an effective and appropriate answer to the access question.

Consequently, NUC has granted permission for the opening of distance

learning centres in eight conventional universities in Nigeria: University of Ibadan, Ibadan; Obafemi Awolowo University of Ile-Ife; University of Lagos, Akoka; University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri; Modibo Adama University of Technology, Yola; University of Abuja, Abuja; Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso; and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (NUC, 2017). It has also recently licensed ten other Universities to be dual-mode universities. They include: Babcock University, Ekiti State University, Federal University of Technology, Minna, Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Osun State University, University of Benin, University of Ilorin, University of Nigeria and University of Port Harcourt.

Figure 1: Enrollment into Distance Learning Institutions at the University of Lagos Distance Learning Institute, Nigeria



Source: Adenike.O. (2016)

The dual mode institutions combine both the conventional and distance education programmes. In some of these institutions, students come for residential programmes when the regular students are on vacation. More recently in the year

2018, the Federal University, Oye-Ekiti approached the National Universities Commission for approval to run open and distance learning programmes. The university appointed a consultant in person of Professor Olugbemiro Jegede, the pioneer Vice-Chancellor of the National Open University of Nigeria to steer the foundation of the Distance Learning Institute. The preparatory launching was undertaken in November 2019. Following this, the Commonwealth of Learning, Canada, in February 2020, provided capacity building training for course development for open and distance learning, Moodle learning management systems, open educational resources and instructional design for development of self-learning resources.

The second category is the dedicated distance education institution, with the National Open University of Nigeria as the only uni-mode University in Nigeria. The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) International (2001) identified four major reasons for strong and growing institutional commitment to distance education in Nigeria as follow:

- Institutions see potential for it to expand their reach and scale of operations.
- They regard distance education system as a strategy to absorb large number of students who cannot currently be placed in face-to-face programmes.
- They see it as a means to provide education to working students.
- They see it as an opportunity to generate income

The justification for a multipurpose distance learning institution includes the following among others:

- The administrative structures of conventional educational systems are not the most suitable ones for developing and managing open and distance learning systems.
- Conventional institutions may regard open and distance learning as a poor relation and consequently be reluctant to allocate it adequate resources.
- The pedagogy of open and distance learning is different from that of conventional systems.
- Significant innovation is more likely to occur outside the framework of traditional educational institutions (Commonwealth of Learning and Asian Development Bank, 1999).

Rumble and Latchem (2003) observed that administrative structures of conventional institutions were not best suited for the development and management of distance education. A lot of reasons have also been advanced to justify the need for bi-modal distance education institutions. Some of the arguments for bimodal institutions include the following:

- The structured learning materials prepared by course teams provide consistent quality of instruction to both off-campus and on-campus learners.
- Learners benefit from esteem that comes from a conventional university and demonstrated parity of standard.
- Staff are free to teach in more interactive ways (Commonwealth of Learning and Asian Development Bank, 1999).

However, the COL International (2001) identified the following as implications of locating distance education within dual mode institutions:

- Distance education tends to be regarded as second best option, open to those who, for whatever reasons, cannot enroll in face-to-face institutions.
- A need to generate income has been associated with locating distance education within predominantly face-to-face institutions. While this is not out of place, it becomes a challenge when such money is not invested in the improvement of ODL facilities. In addition, when income generation becomes the predominant logic for distance education programmes, it could constrain quality.

From these observations, COL International (2001) concluded that location of distance education facilities within the face-to-face tertiary institutions has relegated distance education to being regarded as what might be termed the “poor brother” of face- to-face education provision. Although both unimode and dual mode institutions for distance education are operating side by side in Nigeria, not much emphasis is placed on their peculiarities. Therefore, their organizational structures as well as their mode of instructional delivery differ slightly from that of conventional institutions. This is to be expected as most of pioneering staff in distance education institutions are employed from conventional institutions in the country. In addition, while the official position of government is for distance education institutions to improve access, the primary

concern of management in most distance learning institutions appears to be opportunity to shore up their internally generated revenue. This is premised on the rate at which most conventional universities in Nigeria are transforming to dual mode distance learning institutions. Thus economic considerations are the underlying factors for the proliferation of distance learning institutions in Nigeria.

4. Distance Education Institutions in Nigeria

The National Universities Commission was established as part of the recommendations of Ashby Report in 1960. Although, the body was originally saddled with coordination of development of universities in Nigeria, it has assumed more powers such as licensing and accreditation of academic programmes in Nigerian universities. Table 2 above,

contains the list of institutions licensed by NUC to run distance learning programmes in Nigeria. As mentioned earlier, the operations of distance learning institutions in Nigeria appears not to have taken into consideration the peculiarities of distance learning mode. This is because distance learning has its own daunting challenges. For instance, the preponderance of dual mode distance learning institutions and the sourcing of their pioneer staff from conventional universities, appears not to have given distance education its own identity. This is reflected in their organizational structures, academic programmes and mode of instructional delivery that are patterned after the conventional system. This corroborates COL International (2001) and Rumble and Latchem (2003).

Table2: List of Single and Dual Mode Institutions/Universities in Nigeria

S/N	Single Mode	Dual Mode
1	National Open University of Nigeria	Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria
2	National Teachers Institute, Kaduna	University of Ibadan
3		University of Lagos
4		Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife
5		Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola
6		Federal University of Technology, Minna
7		University of Ilorin
8		University of Nigeria, Nsukka
9		Abia State University, Uturu
10		Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti
11		Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye
12		University of Maiduguri
13		Joseph Ayo Babalola University
14		Ladoke Akintola University, Ogbomoso
15		Lagos State University, Ojoo
16		University of Benin
17		University of Port Harcourt
18		Osun State University

19		Babcock University, Ilishan-remo
20		Federal University, Oye-Ekiti (Preparatory phase)

Source: Derived from Information on NUC Website

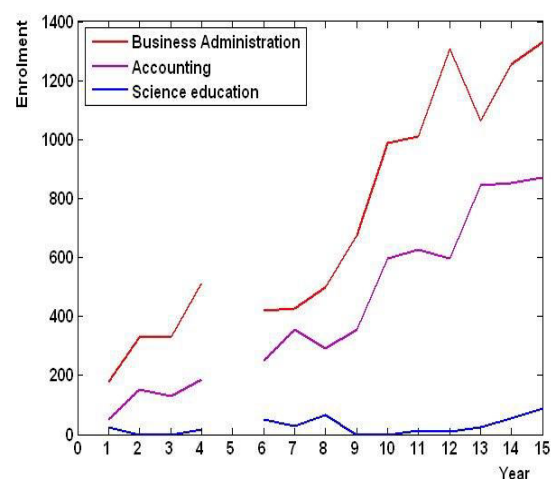
Awe (2011) observed that distance education can be categorized under specialized institutions that are given special attention in view of their capital intensive nature. However, it has been discovered not to be so in Nigeria. For instance, specialized universities in Nigeria have not given preferential recognition over conventional universities; a development that brought about the homogenous institutions (Saint, Harnett and Strassner, 2003). Thus, open and distance institutions in Nigeria are not insulated from the lingering funding challenges facing the conventional universities.

One of the peculiarities of distance education is the massive deployment of technology to break geographical barriers in order to reach the learners. However, the low level of ICT penetration could constrain quality instructional delivery in some of the distance learning institutions. In a study conducted by Nigerian Information Technology Professionals in America in 2002 indicated that given current ICT penetration, it may take Nigeria 50 years to catch up with America on the aspect of personal computer count per household (Iromano, 2004). Also, Olulube, Ubogu and Egbezor (2007) reported that a study conducted by the Global Information Technology used the Networked Readiness Index (NRN), covering a total of 115 economies in 2005-2006, to measure the degree of preparation of a nation or community to participate in and benefit from ICT developments ranked Nigeria 90th out of the 115 countries

surveyed. Yusuf (2005) observed that in Nigeria, like most African countries, basic ICT infrastructures are inadequate. Awe (2012) reported that students identified inadequate ICT facilities and support staff as barriers to distance learning. Thus it can be said that lack of technology is a very big problem to distance education institutions in Nigeria.

The constraints imposed by inadequate ICT infrastructure appear to have limited the choice of programmes in these institutions. This is reflected in a situation whereby preference is given to non-science based courses as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 2: DLI student enrolment per discipline in the last 15 years.



Source: Adenike.O. 2016

As a result of the foregoing, the mode of instructional delivery is through face-to-face contact with learners coupled with print media usually distributed at the study centres. However, some dual mode distance learning universities and the only

uni-mode distance learning university National Open University owned by the Federal Government have invested massively in the utilization of ICT facilities. Tutor Marked Assignments are done online while theories are mainly through Pen On Paper. In addition, students' intake is still localized as foreigner students cannot be enrolled into these institutions due to inadequacy of ICT facilities.

5. Conclusion

Distance education in Nigeria has moved to the mainstream of higher education provision as a credible alternative to conventional, campus-based mode of education. In addition, it has now become fully integrated into the Nigerian higher education system. It is however observed that the potential of distance education as a means of improving access has not been fully explored. The major constraints to distance education include inadequate ICT facilities as well as the deployment of organizational models in conventional institutions without consideration for peculiarities of distance education institutions. It is therefore recommended that distant education institutions require systemic and institutional transformation to keep abreast with global best practice in management of distance education institutions.

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Consent

As per international standard or university

standard, study was written, patient consent has been collected and preserved by the authors.

Competing Interests

Authors have declared that no potential conflict of interests exist.

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