

GLOBALIZATION, INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES (ICTs) AND OPEN/DISTANCE LEARNING IN NIGERIA: Trends, Issues and Solution

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ABSTRACT

The main thrust of this paper is to discuss the development of open and distance education in Nigeria and the major manifestations of the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in education in open and distance learning. This study further discusses the importance and use of ICTs in open and distance learning in making education accessible to a larger population of students. From that vantage point this paper reviews the phenomenon of ICTs in open and distance learning in developing countries such as Nigeria.

The paper identifies a number of issues that impede the effective optimization of ICTs in open and distance learning in developing countries. Prominent among the issues highlighted are poverty, intermittent supply of electricity and language barrier.

The paper argues that these problems are to be tackled if the objective of enhancing the potentials of ICTs in open and distance learning in developing countries were to be achieved. On that note the current paper makes some humble suggestions on how to curtail the problems. The study employed descriptive method. An intact class of students that registered for the Bachelor of Education distance learning programme of the Faculty of Education of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife formed the samples used for the study. This was done to collect information on the factors affecting usage of ICT. The result shows that lack of skills rank highest (46.1%), following this is non availability of ICT at home (18.8%), costs (11.3%) and non familiarity with ICT (10.6%).

Keywords: Cyber space, Virtual reality, World Wide Web, Open and Distance Education, Changing economy, Internet, Information and Communication Technology.

INTRODUCTION

Evidently, the last two decades have witnessed considerable growth in education. This unprecedented phenomenon can be attributed to the globalization of open and distance education through the application of ICTs.

In this vein, Moore and Tait (2002), remark that open and distance learning is one of the most rapidly growing fields of education, and its potential impact on all education delivery systems has been greatly accentuated through the development of ICT-based technologies, and in particular the World Wide Web.

In effect, numerous open universities have emerged to absorb large numbers of new learners, while, on the other hand, increasing numbers of traditional universities have begun to offer their programmes also through distance education (Dimevski and Kokol, 2004). A review of research literature reaches the same conclusion that with electronic tools, people can learn virtually anytime and at any place they choose without obstacles in place, time and social status (Velzeoer, 1996; Greer and Murtaza, 2003; and Keegan, 2004). Thus, the importance of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and e-learning in promoting open, distance and flexible education cannot be over-emphasized.

However, the rapid development of ICTs and the shifts from linear to hypermedia learning create new challenges particularly in developing countries.

Moore and Tait (2002) point out that ICTs open up new horizons for progress and the exchange of creativity and intercultural dialogue. Nevertheless the growing digital divide is actually leading to greater inequalities in development. This is giving rise to paradoxical situations where those who were in dire need, the disadvantaged groups, the rural communities, or the physically challenged and less privileged do not have access to the tools which would enable them to become full-fledged members of the knowledge society. Considering numerous issues and problems surrounding ICT, Preece (2006) opines that it may not be seen as a final recipe to widening access to education. Similarly Mejiuni and Obilade (2006) maintain that poverty constraints and access affect the use of ICTs. In the light of the foregoing, ICT is yet to be fully integrated into open and distance learning in most of the developing countries.

Nigeria is a clear example of such countries with high illiteracy rate of about 56%. The implication here is that there is a need to expand access to education as a social justice if the country is to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as it relates to education by the year 2015. One of the effective ways to achieve the goals is through the open and distance learning using technological enhanced instruction. Regrettably, ICTs are not accessible to most Nigerians as a result of scores of issues and problems.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to discuss the issues and challenges facing the application of ICTs to open and distance learning in Nigeria.

This is with a view to suggesting strategies for harnessing the advantages of ICTs to open and distance education. To achieve the above, the following objectives are stated for the study

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study reviews the efforts being made in developing countries in respect of open and distance learning especially in Nigeria with particular reference to the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). It also examines the concept of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and open and distance learning.

The paper also discusses the impacts of ICTs on open and distance learning and outlines of current global trends in open and distance learning. In addition, it investigates factors militating against the effective application of ICTs to open and distance learning.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)

According to Meadowcroft(2006) ICT is the technology used to store, manipulate, distribute or create information. It is also the tool that we use to perform calculations, to store, and manipulate text, and to communicate. Marzelle quoted in UNDP (2002) states that ICTs are both traditional (such as radio, television, dance, drama folklore, print and fax) and new devices such as the Internet, the World Wide Web, electronic mail, teleconferencing, and distance learning tools such as CD-ROMS, hypertext, ipod , virtual classroom etc.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are electronic and non-electronic technologies, infrastructure, systems, and services used to publish, store, retrieve, and transmit information, to communicate ideas, and to generate knowledge (Mejiuni and Obilade, 2006). World Bank(2002) defines ICTs as the convergence of activities that facilitates capturing, processing, transmission and display of information through digital electronic devices, telecommunication, internet, world wide web, virtual realities and cyber space. According to this school of thought, the potential of ICTs in providing equitable access to education is a fact that is widely accepted by all. It has provided viable platform for generation, adoption and exploitation of knowledge through open and distance education. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) perceived in this way can give a boost to open and distance learning. There is no gainsaying the importance of ICTs to open and distance learning. ICTs guarantee the inalienable access of the individual to education.

Open and Distance Learning

Efforts have been made by different individual scholars, institutions, cooperate bodies to define open and distance learning (Dhanarajan, 2000; Evans and Fan, 2002). They all agree that open and distance learning is characterized by the separation of teacher and learner in time and place; learning that is certified in some way by an institution or agency; the use of a variety of media including print and electronic two-way communication that allows learners and tutors to interact; the possibility of occasional face-to-face meetings; and a specialized division of labour in the production and delivery of courses. For the purpose of this paper, the UNESCO's (2002), definition of open and distance learning is operationally adopted.

Thus the term open and distance learning reflects both the fact that all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in time and space from the learner and that the mission aims to include greater dimensions of openness and flexibility whether in terms of access, curriculum or other elements of structure.

Sometimes, open and distance learning is designed for school-age children and youths. However, in many cases, most courses and programmes of open and distance learning are targeted at the adult population. This is a way of providing and expanding educational opportunities to the adult population in developing countries.

ICTs/Open and Distance Learning

The merger between distance education and open learning to constitute open distance learning has been attributed to the advancement in the field of telecommunications, Information and Communication Technology (Hawkey, 2002). Prior to this, teaching and learning is done through printed materials through regular mails. However as a result of globalization and breakthrough in technology, teaching and learning changed. The present changing economy and the proliferation of modern technologies call for change in demand for education and the approach to teaching/ learning and the delivery of education .

Today, emphasis is on distance education and life long learning using the modern ICT approach either through integrated media approach, multi-site learning system, e-learning or through virtual classroom. Other methods include written materials, interactive television/radio instruction, videos, audio tapes, and CD-ROMS to the learners.

Currently, the e-mail, the web and video conferencing over broadband network connections are used as well. Through these methods, opportunities are provided for the learners to play back or revisit materials they have missed or do not understand. Learners can also check their understanding at the end of sections through the use of self-assessment questions. Similarly, learners can skip or skim materials with which they are already familiar, this is because they are modularized and learners centered. Therefore, ICTs have a positive impact on distance learners. (Galanouli, Reddaclif and Crabbs 2004; Olofssen and Luidberg, 2005).

Hence, the use of ICTs for expanding open and distance learning is considered both a necessity and an opportunity in this era of globalization.

Open and Distance Learning: A Global Experience

Access to education is a global issue while education has become an important agent of globalization. Hence, the international community and governments all over the world have made commitments to make education accessible to its citizenry. This is to eradicate inequalities, poverty, hunger and higher level deprivation in educational endeavors in order to achieve the MDGs. In order to meet these goals, attention and priority has been given to the open and distance learning programme. This led to the proliferation of open universities, virtual universities, correspondence schools, external studies, universities of the Air, Correspondence courses using the postal services etc. Open and distance learning is a global phenomenon. The period between 1960-1985 has been the most progressive in terms of credibility and development in distance education, while 1985 to 1995 has been perceived as the stage of stability because distance education is not only accepted world-wide but shifted its focus to consolidation and integration of innovative technologies in the education system.

Other development in the field includes the inauguration of the International Council for Correspondence Education (ICCE) which was established in 1938 in the U.S.A. with 87 delegates from five countries marking a humble beginning. By 1982, at the 12th world conference that was held in Vancouver, Canada, the name was changed from ICCE to International Council for Distance Education (ICDE) with an increase in population from 87 to 450 delegates. In addition, the country grew from 5 to 55. Currently, the ICDE is officially affiliated to UNESCO in category 'A' international non-governmental relations and cooperates closely with the United Nations. Therefore, with well over 100 countries represented, ICDE functions as the window to the world of open and distance education. Since the first Open University, the United Kingdom Open University (UKOU) was established in 1969, the growth of open universities worldwide has been phenomenal. Yet, the didactic processes of open and distance learning are not only of good quality but are often superior to conventional face-to-face teaching. Also, since its inception, the open and distance learning programmes have proved to be cost-effective as well. The implication of the foregoing is that it is very difficult to capture accurately the number of institutions running Open and Distance learning programmes or the number of the beneficiaries.

For example, the Central Radio and Television University (CRTVU) in Beijing established in 1978 is at present the largest distance education institution in the world with nearly 2,000,000 students on its rolls.

In the same vein, Indira Gandhi National Open University, Shanghai Television University, China; Anadolu University, Eskisehir, Turkey; Bangladesh Open University, Gazipur Bangladesh; State University of New York, New York, USA, are a few among scores of renowned Open Universities that have turned out millions of graduates of high intelligence. Find below the statistics of students and institutions in Table: 1

Table: 1
Institutions and their respective students

INSTITUTION	NO.OF STUDENTS
China Television University	> 500,000
Anadolu University Turkey	>500,000
South Korea National Open University	>300,000
Indira Gandhi National Open University	>200,000
University of South Africa	>100,000
Open University of Britain	>100,000
Univerdad Nacional-Spain	>100,000

Source: Dhanarajan(2000)

Recounting the global phenomenon of Open and Distance learning, Fagbamiye (2006), asserts that it is an educational system that has democratized knowledge, such that previously disadvantaged groups now have access to quality learning. This, in a way, can be attributed to the emerging information communication technologies turning the global village into a global knowledge village. This opinion was also shared by Quane and Glanz (2006)

A Brief History of Open and Distance Learning in Nigeria

Realizing the fact that education has become the core of globalization and also the key to development and an emancipation tool from servitude, thralldom and deprivation, majority of Nigerians sought for higher education at the expense of their comfort. Therefore, in quest for higher education some ardent Nigerians crossed the border down to Fourah Bay College, Sierra-Leone, as the only institution in West Africa which prepared students (as early as October 1876) for Bachelor of Arts (B.A) Degree. However, some Nigerians who wanted to attend Fourah Bay College could not do so because of the problems of expensive transportation, high tuition fees, and maintenance costs. 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 Examinations. Successful candidates also proceeded to the Masters of Arts Degree Examination.

The approval of London University Examinations marked the upsurge of a great number of "mushroom" evening schools in various parts of Nigeria. Besides, majority of serious students in Nigeria patronized correspondence institutions abroad. Some of these institutions include Correspondence College in England, Wolsey Hall, Rapid Result College, Examination Success Correspondence College, City Correspondence, G.B Cooker and Metropolitan Institute etc. Also, various educationists in Nigeria founded evening classes in order to make education accessible to students in pursuit of knowledge.

One major concern to Nigerians has been access to quality education. This is reflected in the number of candidates that applied for admission every year to the tertiary institutions through the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB). Of the more than 1,000,000 applicants to Joint Admissions Matriculation Board annually, only few of these students are given admission. This is because most of the universities have limited facilities, space and capacity to admit less than 150,000 candidates.

Table: 2
Statistics showing the number of students
who applied and those admitted into university

Year	Total number of students who sat for UME	Total students admitted	Percentage
2000-2001	550,399	60,718	11%
2001-2002	749,727	9,769	12.1%
2002- 2003	994,381	51,845	5.2%
2003-2004	1,046,965	104,991	10.1%
2005-2006	841,878	122,492	14.5%

Cited from Aworuwa 2009

This indicates that we are far behind in achieving and provision of qualitative education as entrenched in the MDGs. It also reveals that the conventional residential / face-to-face institutions are limited by several constraints- teachers, classrooms, lecture theatres, laboratories, funding and lack of modern teaching facilities to cater for the teeming qualified and interested Nigerians. Besides, Nigeria is one of the DE-9 countries -the nine high population countries accounting for 72% of the world's illiterates (Mexico, Brazil, Egypt, Nigeria, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan and China). A sure recipe to resolve the challenge of providing equitable access to quality education to the majority of the qualified and interested adults/youths is through Distance and Open Education. In this wise, the National Open University Bill formally received the approval of the Senate on the 20th April, 1993. The aim of Nigeria Open University was to provide access to higher education for the physical challenged, those having financial constraints, geographical remoteness, the less privileged and those who could not gain admission into full time residential programme because of the nature of their employment, and those who are not catered for by the existing universities.

The National Open University, since its inception, has been employing integrated media/ multi-media techniques in teaching using correspondence education closely supplemented by lectures, tutorials and counseling services organized through a network of local study centers called multi –site or multi-campus method. Joining the trail-blazers in widening access to education through open and distance education with newer ICTs are some universities in Nigeria. These include the University of Lagos, the University of Abuja, Abia State University, Imo State University, University of Ibadan, The National Teachers' Institute and Obafemi Awolowo University that was adjudged the best ICT University in Nigeria. It was the foremost ICT University because it has integrated ICTs into Distance Learning and into every aspect of academics and administration using the new ICT strategic plan for resolving the challenges of quality education through distance learning programme.

Impact of ICT on Distance and Open Learning

Although Ict is yet to be fully integrated to distance education on a large scale in Nigeria, however there are empirical evidence to show the positive impact it made where it has been integrated.

Some of these are:

- Equitable access, recent developments in technology provide increasing effective ways to reach out to population in remote areas and to other disadvantaged groups by providing them with quality educational opportunities using the multi-site learning systems.

- The use of ICT especially the STEP-B project at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife has encouraged cost sharing and partnerships. Through collaborative partnerships, ICT has been used to reduce the cost of provision of quality education. The adoption and application of integrated media approach to distance learning have contributed to improve cost efficiency of ICT to education.
- The flexibility and accessibility enabled by ICT led to the emergence of open distance learning (ODL) in OAU Ile-ife through virtual learning, electronic medium and integrated media techniques for which the university was known and acclaimed as the foremost ICT University in Nigeria.

As a result, the university has set the pace in developing a strong ICT-based programs for out of school youths, adult learners in remote areas all over the country using the multi-site technology via interactive radio/televised instruction, ICT-based simulations and e-learning platforms using the learning management system called Academic Blackboard. Find some of the militating factors as obtained in the data collected from the sample.

Table: 3
Reasons for not using ICT Resources in the classroom

ICT Facility/ Service	Lack of skills %	Not Available at all %	Cost of using %	Not familiar %	Lack of time %	No Technical support %
Internet	51.3	16.2	12.0	7.1	9.4	3.4
E-mail	34.2	17.5	14.9	11.4	18.4	3.5
Desktop publishing	61.0	12.7	5.9	9.3	7.6	3.4
Word processing	59.6	10.5	8.8	7.9	9.6	3.5
DVD/TV	16.8	19.6	7.5	32.7	16.8	6.5
Digital camera	49.1	18.2	17.3	7.3	3.6	4.5
CD-ROM	53.2	18.3	7.3	7.3	11.0	2.8
Educational software	43.2	22.5	14.4	5.4	8.1	6.3
L.C.D projector	48.7	22.6	7.0	13.0	3.5	5.2
LAP-TOP	46.9	19.5	13.3	9.7	8.8	1.8
Computer conferencing	47.8	26.1	11.3	7.8	2.6	4.3
Video conferencing	42.1	21.9	15.8	8.8	3.5	7.9
Mean Causative Factor/Reason	46.1%	18.8%	11.3 %	10.6 %	8.6%	4.4 %

The findings above showed the factors affecting ICT usage among distance learners who enrolled for the Bachelor of Education programs at OAU Ile-Ife. Lack of skills was the highest factor (46.1%), non availability at home (18.8%), costs (11.3%), not familiar (10.6%). Other constraints are common traditions which include inherited customary pattern of thought, action and social behaviour.

The issue of culture, social attitudes and values has a resultant effect on the utilization of ICTs in distance education.

Although, we cherish education but the poor economy and the current high unemployment rates among the youths are gradually changing the values accorded to education. The value of most Nigerians today is to make money rather than education. The phobia that ICT created is another challenge and this has to do with widening unemployment rates. The summary of the whole issue is that common traditions, cultural values, poor ICT infrastructure in the rural areas and epileptic power supply have negatively affected the development and integration of ICT in distance and open education

Issues of ICTs Utilization in Open and Distance Learning

The utilitarian value of ICTs in promoting open and distance learning cannot be over-emphasized. This presupposition however is not without some criticisms. For example, Preece (2006) contends that the introduction of ICTs should not be considered as the only catalytic element in widening access to education through open and distance learning. In essence, successful environments for holistic, multi-sectoral approaches usually supported by institutional legal frameworks and facilitating mechanisms, such as an Education Act, Education Trust Fund (ETF) relevant educational policy and curriculum and a country comprehensive poverty reduction and growth strategies are equally pivotal. Mejiuni and Obilade (2006) assert that many people in developing countries live below the poverty line (below US \$2) and expend most of their income on food. This is an indication of poverty – leaving them with no money to acquire modern technologies (ICTs) and quality education. Lack of Internet access, epileptic power supply and non availability of basic amenities, schools and equipment in the rural areas pose enormous challenges. In addition, Internet cafes available in urban centers are run on commercial basis and, in most cases, are high-priced beyond what the poor in the urban cities can afford. Based on the above, Quane and Glanz (2006), regret that poverty, marginalization, poor economy, and poor distribution of essential facilities constitute major problem in many regions of the world. Hence, the use of new Information and Communication Technologies once seen as a possible tool for providing access to education through open and distance learning, has turned out to be impracticable, especially for the poor in the developing nation and in remote areas where people are already neglected.

Secondly, the language of ICTs is still largely English. Oduaran (2006) points to the fact that it will take some time before non-English speakers in the developing world can gain first - hand knowledge of developments that have taken place or which are taking place in ICTs. The language and cultural barriers are key issue in ICTs if it is to be used as an implement to foster open distance learning. Advocates of mother-tongue maintain that the proper teaching of mother-tongue is the foundation of all education". On that note, Aggarwal (2004) is of the view that proper education can only be imparted through the mother-tongue. Therefore, the language of ICTs has to be liberalized to accommodate mother-tongues or local languages of the developing countries. Doing this presumably can make education more meaningful and accessible to the distant learners. But it is a known fact that this is going to be difficult feat to achieve without adequate funding and political will.

Thirdly, the erratic supply of electricity and incessant larceny and vandalization of electrical equipment have always hamstrung the utility of ICTs in open and distance education in Nigeria. In this wise, Ali-Akpajiak and Pyke (2003) remark that even though Nigeria has an abundant supply of energy sources, thermal, hydro, solar and oil resources, it is described as a poor country in terms of availability of energy for its citizens, because the sector is relatively under-developed. Therefore, if ICTs have to play an active role in the open and distance education, regular supply of electricity is essential.

Fourthly, the use of ICTs by physically challenged is a crucial issue in open and distance education. Alluding to Berdichevsky and Shettle (2001) Mejiuni and Obilade (2006) put the number of persons with disabling hearing impairments at 250 million worldwide with two-thirds of them living in developing countries. Non availability of the appropriate media devices such as TTY, computers specially made for these categories aggravate the situation. If deaf people were to benefit in the open and distance education using ICTs, it becomes imperative to make available to them special phone equipment such as TTY with moderate or highly subsidized cost.

The same kind of gesture should as well be extended to other physically disabled distant learners. This implies that people with disabilities should have the same access as everyone else to education. Regardless of all the issues enumerated above, the objective of providing education for all may not be readily attained except ICTs are fully optimized in open and distance education. Our changing and globalized society makes increased demand for the utility of ICTs in open and distance education an imperative. In this wise it becomes imperative to address the issue of ICTs utilization in open and distance education.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the development of open and distance education in Nigeria, the factors that encouraged the development of distance and open education and the importance of ICTs in open and distance learning with particular focus on Nigeria. It was established that if the MDGs with respect to education in developing countries is to be achieved, the importance of ICTs to open and distance learning can hardly be over-emphasized. However, ICT is yet to be fully integrated into distance and open education on large scale in the country. The study identified quite a number of factors that hinder the effective application of ICTs to open and distance education. Prominent among the problems identified include low ICT skills, poverty, epileptic supply of electricity, political bottle necks, poor economy, culture, constant changing traditional values and language barrier. However, these problems are not insurmountable if governmental and non- governmental agencies, corporate bodies, philanthropists, organizations, financial, material and technical interventions are made readily available. In addition, all the stakeholders in the open and distance learning, such as students, facilitators, support staff and administrators should be computer literate. This is with a view to demystifying the application of ICTs to open and distance learning in an era of globalization.

Suggested Panacea for Strengthening ICTs for Open and Distance Learning Education in Nigeria. In view of the importance of ICTs in open and distance education, the following panaceas are suggested.

- The use of ICTs for open and distance learning should be part of the publicly supported education scheme. There should therefore be public places where the candidates of open and distance learning can go to access technology driven - lectures with little or no pay. This will bring about improved computer and internet access for open and distance education. It is also believed that it will also complement the efforts of the open and distance learning centers to establish e-learning courses for the students. A good example is that of OAU Ile-Ife
- ICT specialists in collaboration with the competent and qualified staff in distance leaning, web-based instructional designers and management specialist be encouraged to render their invaluable services in the rural communities.

This will make learning more accessible to rural dwellers through open and distance education.

- The capacity building for staff of open and distance education centers is imperative as this will upgrade their technical skills and understanding in specific areas of ICTs to inculcate active learning among distant students.
- The sensitization of efforts to demystify the use of ICTs in open and distant learning should be recurrently embarked upon among the adult learners. This will not only reduce the problem of cyber -phobia among them but will also motivate them to appreciate the value of ICTs in open and distance learning.
- The fact remains that many people in the south live below poverty line, expend most of their income on food, leaving no money to invest in ICTs for open and distant learning. This poses a challenge for the prompt intervention in the areas of finance, technical and material support from the foreign donors, NGOs, philanthropists, corporate bodies and institutions. Such interventions will go a long way in making ICTs accessible to the adult learners in open and distance education setting. In addition, it will facilitate the optimization of ICTs for development and accessibility to the web-based and on-line instructional materials in an open and distance learning setting.

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