

A Compelling Need for a Comprehensive Review of the Laws Establishing Regulatory Agencies and Tertiary Institutions for Open and Distance Learning in Nigeria

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1.0 Introduction

It is a globally incontrovertible truism that education plays a significant and important role in national development. All countries of the world seemed to have accepted the tremendously compelling arguments to make education the cornerstone of national development. The arguments include (i) the vital role education plays in economic and technological development, (ii) education of the citizenry to remove illiteracy and poverty, and (iii) developing a culturally and socially tolerant people who exercise ethical and moral considerations in national and local affairs, with a community spirit.

The justification for the use education as a veritable tool to catalyse socio-economic development does not require any long argument or star gazing. The logic is quite simple: no development can meaningfully take place in any country unless you build the assets in human resources. Indeed it was the Late Nelson Mandela, an anti-apartheid revolutionary, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, and former President of the Republic of South Africa, who alluded to this when he said that:

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. No country can really develop unless its citizens are educated.”

Unfortunately, its implementation has become a nightmare for many developing, especially the Sub-Saharan, countries where hap-hazard policy formulation and execution, coupled with either the absence of, or the lack of enforcement of ineffectual, laws and regulatory activities to guide educational development.

In a number of African countries, with Nigeria being a sterling example, whereas the cascading effects of all the levels of education are known to establish a composite whole in the implementation strategies of education for national development, each level is often taken in isolation of others. Furthermore, the apex of the system, being tertiary education, is often treated with planning that is not consistent with or designed for long-term success. In a number of cases, many institutions operate illegally and indeed many have been known to produce several cohorts of graduands without any law or operate with obsolete laws that are only fit to be consigned to the archives at best or oblivion in its actual sense. We shall examine this further at the later part of this paper.

A cardinal goal of the government's commitment to transform Nigeria using education as a socio-economic development tool of the massification of quality education was through the Universal primary Education (UPE) in 1976. The UPE provided for every Nigerian child from age 6 to enrol and remain in the primary school for six years under a free education scheme funded by the federal and state governments.

2.0 Policy Framework

A policy framework for a nation puts in perspective what education should do for the country as an instrument of development. However, no policy can be formulated unless the country identifies its philosophy and national goals as a guide to policy formulation. Issues such as what does the country want its citizens to be? Where should the country be in ten or fifteen years' time in terms of development of its people, resources and infrastructure? What are the guiding principles for social interaction, freedom and justice for its various peoples and communities? How does the country want to relate to other countries within the global sphere?

There are two over-arching guiding philosophy for Nigeria. They are to:

- (a) live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principle of freedom, equality and justice; and
- (b) promote inter-African solidarity and world peace through understanding.

Furthermore, the five main national goals of Nigeria, derived from the national philosophy which have formed the foundation for the National Policy on Education, are the building of:

- (a) a free and, democratic society;
- (b) a just egalitarian society;
- (c) a united, strong and self-reliant nation;
- (d) a great and dynamic economy; and
- (e) a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens.

In formulating the National Policy on Education in 1977, the Federal Government of Nigeria expressed awareness of the fact that *“education is the most important instrument of change in any*

society". And that "any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution".

To bring about meaningful changes in the Nigerian society through educational revolution, Government then adopted, among other things, *"policies which were to be directed towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels".* And affirmed that *"the Federal Government shall undertake to make life-long education the basis for the nation's education policy and that any stage of the educational process after primary education, an individual will be able to choose between continuing his full-time studies, combining work with studies, or embarking on full-time employment without excluding the prospect of resuming studies later on... the education system will be structured to develop the practice of self-learning".*

3.0 The Genesis of the National Policy on Education

In summary, what is now known as the National Policy on Education was the outcome of the 1969 National Curriculum Conference which was attended by a cross-section of Nigerians. The conference was an expression of the general dissatisfaction with the then existing education system which was labelled as 'irrelevant to national needs, aspirations and goals'.

After the National Curriculum Conference, further deliberation took place on what a national policy on education for an independent and sovereign Nigeria should be. The final tangible outcome of the seminar was a document published in 1977 which was a revised draft document using comments and observations from the various states, interest groups and stakeholders.

Before we proceed further, two observations need to be made here and which bears tremendous significance in relation to the authenticity and relevance of the content of the document and the way and manner the Policy was implemented.

First, it took the nation about 8 years to evolve a national policy on education; enough time for most issues treated in the document to have become out-dated by the time it was published, even though some of them still remain relevant to date!

Second, the UPE, a very important segment of our education was in fact started even before we had the National Policy on Education. Your guess is as good as mine regarding how relevant the policy was for the UPE and if its implementation was synchronised with the policy!.

It is note-worthy that since the publication of the first edition in 1997, at least three other editions have been published notably in 1981, 1998 and 2004 respectively in order to keep pace with developments in several sectors of education and the national economy reflecting innovations and emergence of globalisation. Some of these changes and innovations included the following:

- (a) The lifting of the suspension order on Open and Distance Learning Programme by Government;
- (b) The revitalisation and expansion of the National Mathematical Centre (NMC);
- (c) The establishment of Teachers Registration Council (TRC);
- (d) The introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into the school curriculum;
- (e) The prescription of French Language in the primary and secondary schools' curriculum as second official language;
- (f) The prescription of minimum number of subject to taken by SSCE candidates;
- (g) The integration of basic education in the programme of Quaranic schools, to ensure equal opportunity and effective implementation of UBE;
- (h) The repositioning of science, technical and vocational education in the scheme of national educational for optimum performance; and
- (i) A general contextual change to reflect the state of professional practice in education.

4.0 Open and Distance Learning (ODL) as Part of Education for Development in the NPE

Quite interestingly, right from the onset of the NPE in 1977, Open and Distance Learning had been identified as an integral part of education to be used for socio-economic development of the nation. It recognised ODL as a distinct sector of education to be organised nation-wide and given individual flexibility in the development of the human resources towards national development. For instance, the 1977 edition of the NPE stated unambiguously and emphatically that *“maximum 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, or open universities, or part-time and work study programme”*. The Policy stipulated a system which encompasses education for all, education for life, life-long learning, life-wide education, adult education, mass education, media-based education, self-learning, personalised learning, part-time studies, and much more. From my own perspective, it is all these variants now known as open and distance learning that the Policy

anticipated, without any limitation or exclusion, as long as the variant contributes to *“equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels”*.

What the NPE seemed to be saying, since 1977, was that any attempt at total national development through education could only become successful if it is effectively linked to capacity building through ODL. This is significant not only for the nation, but also for the practitioners, ODL students and others interested in a balanced, comprehensive national development which takes all segments of the nation into consideration. It is simply saying that no one should be left behind in the quest to develop the nation through capacity building of its human resources!

My observation about this is that right from 1977, the NPE had wanted ODL to be mainstreamed and not treated as a poor cousin of face-to-face formal full-time classroom-bound education.

What is open and distance Learning and how did it begin? Why is ODL so germane to national development and what can it do for a nation beyond (the limitation of) what full-time studies can do?

5.0 What is Open and Distance Learning?

What transformed into “Distance Education” in the 70s and 80s and is now called “Open, Distance and e-Learning” started as “Correspondence Study”, then “Correspondence Education” in the 18th Century. At different times of its history, Distance Education was also known as, “Home Study”, “Off Campus Study”, “Independent Study”, “Distance Study”, “Telematic Study”. It was at one time or the other also christened as “Distributed Learning”, “Online Learning”, “Self-paced Learning”, “Blended Learning”, “Technology-enabled Learning”, “Virtual Learning”. There are many more. I cannot recall what type of learning and instruction would have as many names transformed or transmuted from one to another within such a short time of its history and emergence. These transition or transformation in name was a reflection of the continual and continuous dynamic foment within the field. Each name or label depicted, an incremental rise in the acceptance of, and interest in, the field;

the tremendous amount of work being done; and the continual modernisation of the tenets of the field of education. Given the rate at which Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has influenced and intertwined with distance learning, I dare predict that we have not heard or had the last yet. Several more rebranding of the field will emerge in not too distant future.

However, we need not be overly concerned with the name while neglecting the substance and content it represents. The interesting thing is that in spite of the various transformation in names and nomenclature, ODL continues to retain, without serious changes or differences in its essential meaning, what it means to practitioners, stakeholders and students alike.

Open and distance learning, essentially means a form of instruction by a mode other than the face-to-face method, where there is physical separation between the teacher and the learner, and instruction takes place through a variety of media including print and modern ICT. This has always been the working definition of this type of learning and instruction through the ages beginning from the 18th century when this field of studies and knowledge began.

Open and distance learning is a cost-effective instruction that is independent of time, location, pace and space. It can be used for a variety of learning situations, including primary, secondary, tertiary, vocational and non-formal education and thrives on economies of scale. It focuses very much on quality assurance, well designed instructional packages, and thrives on exceedingly well structured and resourced student support. The aspect of open learning in the ODL pertains to the flexibility of and access to instruction in order to ensure broad availability of educational opportunities to all. Openness and access disregard age, previous level of academic achievement, and other factors which creating artificial barriers to education as a life-long pursuit.

6.0 How Did Open and Distance Learning Begin?

The history of open and distance learning is as detailed as the field itself and can engage volumes of documentation. Suffice it to say here that we will only summarise the aspects of the history with relevance to Tertiary education as it concerns this Round Table Conference.

The earliest record of distance teaching was the effort by Anna Tickner and Caleb Phillips to teach the new method of Short Hand through correspondence. In 1728, the Boston Gazette newspaper had an advert from Caleb Philipps seeking for students wishing to learn Short Hand through weekly mailed lessons.

The literature has it that the first distance education course in the modern sense was pioneered by Sir Isaac Pitman in the 1840s, to teach a system of shorthand by mailing texts transcribed into shorthand on postcards and he also received transcriptions from his students in return for correction. It is on record that Pitman was the first to introduce the innovation of student feedback on assignments, tests and examinations. This was the first record of using the postal system in England for correspondence study in the 1840. This early beginning led to the establishment of the Phonographic Correspondence Society in 1843 which formalised correspondence studies, and later led to the establishment of Sir Isaac Pitman Colleges across England. The first correspondence school in the United States, called the Society to Encourage Studies at Home, was founded in 1873.

With regard to Tertiary education distance programmes, the University of London was recorded as the first university in the world to offer distance learning degrees with its External degree programme established in 1828 and was chartered in 1858. Charles Dickens, the popular English Playwright and Novelist, labelled the University of London as "People's University" because it provided access to higher education to students from less affluent backgrounds.

In the United States of America, the first President of the University of Chicago, Professor William Rainer Harper started distance learning degree programmes in 1882. This concept of using correspondence school courses to promote education was copied by Columbia University. As far back as the 1906, the popularity of correspondence tertiary education grew so large that enrolment reached 900,000 at the International Correspondence Schools, Scranton, Pennsylvania. This tremendous success was attributed to sending out complete textbooks instead of single lessons, and the use of 1200 aggressive in-person salesmen, as the new form of pedagogy.

The regular technical school or college aims to educate a man broadly; our aim, on the contrary, is to educate him only along some particular line. The college demands that a student shall have certain educational qualifications to enter it, and that all students study for approximately the same length of time, and when they have finished their courses they are supposed to be qualified to enter any one of a number of branches in some particular profession. We, on the contrary, are aiming to make our courses fit the particular needs of the student who takes them.

At the onset of the 20th century, education was a high priority in the USA and their schools and colleges witnessed great expansion. Older or working adults interested in further education attended night schools such as the YMCA school in Boston which later transformed into the Northeastern University.

ODL at the tertiary level spread across the world and to Australia where they specially took advantage of ODL to conquer instruction across their large expanse of distances. As a result, the University of Queensland established its Department of Correspondence Studies in 1911. Africa was not left out. The University of South Africa, transformed from being an examining and certification body, into a distance education institution in 1946.

In 1938 a global association catering for distance education, called The International Conference for Correspondence Education (ICCE) held its first meeting. The ICCE later became the modern day International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) with headquarters in Stockholm, Sweden.

The emergence of dedicated universities for ODL called Open University started with the United Kingdom Open University founded by the then serving Labour Party government under Prime Minister Harold Wilson. Planning commenced in 1965 under the Minister of State for Education, Jennie Lee, who established a model for the OU as one of widening access to the highest standards of scholarship in higher education, and set up a planning committee consisting of university vice-chancellors, educationalists and television broadcasters, chaired by Sir Peter Venables. Sir Walter Perry was appointed the OU's first vice-chancellor in January 1969, admitted its first 25,000 students in 1971, and adopted a radical open admissions policy.

The Open University broadened the scope of the correspondence programme and helped to create a respectable learning alternative to the traditional form of education. It has been at the forefront of developing new technologies to improve the distance learning service as well as undertaking research in other disciplines.

The successful experiment of the UKOU began the establishment of other open universities around the world. For instance, Athabasca University, Canada's Open University, was created in 1970 and followed a similar, though independently developed, pattern. These were followed by the Spain's National University of Distance Education in 1972 and Germany's FernUniversität in Hagen in 1974. There are now dozens off open universities around the world including the Indira Gandhi National Open University, Malaysian Open University, the National Open University of Nigeria and several others, both public and private.

It must again be observed that as far back as 1920 certain characteristics of ODL took firm grounds in tertiary education around the world. For instance, ODL offered flexible programmes, embraced open learning and provided free vocational programmes. They provided individualised instruction for learners, programmes cost were very low so as to be affordable, and employed the pedagogy of what was labelled as 'testing, recording, classification, and differentiation'.

All "open universities" use distance education technologies as delivery methodologies though some require attendance at local study centres or at regional "summer schools". Some open universities have grown to become 'mega-universities', a term coined to denote institutions with more than 100,000 students.

Shortly after the emergence of open universities, open colleges and open polytechnics were established in different parts of the world. The establishment of open colleges started in 1976 when Bernard Luskin launched Coastline Community College as a college beyond walls, combining computer assisted instruction with telecourses, in the USA.

Open Polytechnics started with the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand in 1990 but started in 1946 as the Technical Correspondence School and in 1963, became the Technical Correspondence Institute (TCI). The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand become the first specialist national provider of open and distance learning at tertiary level.

The history and evolution of distance education has been marked by three main issues. The first is **access**: to allow students who would otherwise be denied educational opportunities to gain access to courses. The second is **equivalence and integrity**: students taught at a distance should receive an equivalent education and an equivalent qualification with the same integrity as those earned through the conventional mode. The third is **excellence**: quest for excellence in quality of learning materials, teaching, support services, academic and administrative systems or professional development of staff. As the resolution of these issues continue to dominate the theory and practice of distance and open learning, many countries in the world, especially those developing, including Nigeria, became increasingly attracted to this form of education.

7.0 Brief History of Open and Distance Education in Nigerian Institutions

Nigeria also had some unique experience with correspondence studies before and after independence. These included the following:

- The Oxford University of the United Kingdom's extra mural studies at the University College, Ibadan which commenced in 1947 to enable a good number of Nigerians thirsty for higher education, but who are unable to get a place in the limited admissions into the University College, Ibadan, to do so through correspondence study.
- Many Nigerians sought admission as students of Correspondence College in Universities and Institutions in the United Kingdom while others registered as external candidates for the General Certificate of Education (GCE) both Ordinary and Advanced Level of the University of London and Cambridge.
- The Rapid Results College and Wosley Hall correspondence studies may be cited as the first set of 'organised' Distance Learning Programmes in Africa. They are termed 'correspondence' because they had their studies mailed from England while the students equally mailed their answers overseas to be marked. They relied mainly on the postal system and there were no radio, tv, audio or video accompaniment.

- After gaining independence, the first organised distance learning programme was the English by Radio Programme of the Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation that began immediately after independence in 1960. It was immediately followed by the Educational Television Programmes of the then National Television of Nigeria (NTV). The English by Radio programme was a National Broadcast for both primary and secondary schools relayed during school hours. The programme formed an integral part of school activity. As such, school time-tables provided periods for students to listen and follow instructions with students' workbook.

The discussion of all the aspects of the history of open and distance learning in Nigeria is beyond the scope of this paper hence I am restricting the discussion to a summary of ODL at the tertiary level.

It is on record that open and distance learning mode was first employed at the tertiary level in Nigeria at Ahmadu Bello University when it began the University of the Air in 1972. The university subsequently used it for the Teachers In-Service Education programme (TISEP) in 1975. The University of Lagos also began distance learning in 1974 with the Correspondence and Open Studies Unit (COSU) in response to the growing demand of working adults in line with the global trends. The Unit subsequently became the Correspondence and Open Studies Institute (COSIT) which was later restructured into the present Distance Learning Institute (DLI). The University of Lagos was the first tertiary institution to operate the dual mode system.

In 1978, in response to the massive vacuum of qualified and trained teachers to service the Universal Primary Education programme launched by the Gowon Military administration in 1977, the National Teachers Institute (NTI), located in Kaduna, was established and operates the single mode programme for upgrading the qualification of under-qualified teachers as well as the continuing education of teachers using distance learning techniques. The activities of NTI are supervised by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) which carries out periodic quality assurance and accreditation exercises of NTI's National Certificate in Education Distance Learning programmes in partnership with The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) on capacity building. As far back as 1976, Nigeria took a decision to make provision to massify access to higher education by setting up a planning committee to advise on the setting up of an open university. A Presidential Planning Committee on the Open University System for Nigeria, with Professor Afolabi Ojo as Chairman, (who

later became the Vice Chancellor of the NOU) was setup and inaugurated on 1st May, 1980 by the then Honourable Minister of Education, Dr I C. Madubuike with far reaching terms of reference including "to draw up a plan of operation to enable the open university reach an enrolment target of 100,000 in five years (1985)". In spite of the total commitment of the Committee to its task, the Act setting up the university was not passed by the National Assembly until 20th April 1983. The President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Alhaji Shehu Shagari assented to the bill on 22nd July, 1983.

The National Open University (NOU) thereafter went into full-scale activities of screening candidates for various courses in 1984. Unfortunately, Alhaji Shehu Shagari who could be described as the founding father of the National Open University at that time was kicked out of office in the December 31, 1983 via a coup de-tat by General M. Buhari. For some inexplicable reasons, the announcement suspending the NOU was made on April 25, 1984 during a budget speech. Logically, one would think that such an announcement had something to do with lack of funds by government. But it would have been questionable as Nigeria was making a lot of harvest from the sales of its crude oil more than ever before at that time. Whatever the reason, Nigeria had not only lost several years of the use and practice of ODL as a result of the suspension of NOU, the country still could not wish a way the mounting need for hundreds of thousands of its citizens seeking access to higher education. In effect, it meant that the unmet demand for higher education which began before independence was mounting instead of being solved!

Today, the flagship tertiary institution for Open and Distance Learning in Nigeria is The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) established formally in 2002. It is a landmark development in several respects: it was timely for the thousands of otherwise qualified Nigerians who needed a University education but were denied access to the existing conventional universities that could only admit less than 10 percent of applicants; it offers a total of 101 undergraduate, sub-degree certificate, diploma and post graduate (PGD, Masters, Ph.D.) programmes in Arts and Social Sciences, Business and Human Resource Management, Education, Law, Science and Technology and has two special Units: The Centre for Lifelong Learning and Workplace Training and The Regional Training & Research Institute for Open and Distance Learning(RETRIDAL) jointly established by NOUN and the Commonwealth of Learning in 2003 to identify and meet the needs of ODL related research and capacity building in the west African sub-region.

It is important to note that the non-formal education sector has been receiving increasing attention within the framework of Universal Basic Education and inclusion of all, especially the disadvantaged, hard to reach and special needs groups in Nigeria. These include the nomadic communities of herdsmen and migrant fisher folk. The key national non-formal education agencies that are charged with the responsibility of actualising the relevant provisions of the Nigerian Constitution 1999, The National Policy on Education (1998, 2004), The UBE Act 2004, and the ODL provision of the 2009 Roadmap for Nigerian Education Sector are the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC), The National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE) and the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC). The NCNE now focuses on delivery of literacy/basic functional education to the Nomadic pastoralists, the migrant fishing communities and migrant farmers as a cost-effective strategy to provide access to all nomadic populations. It also aims to reinforce the implementation of the Nomadic Education Programme (NEP) for adults, pupils in nomadic schools and out-of-school children. Currently, instruction and learning in nomadic communities are facilitated through interactive Radio programmes, on-line and e-learning techniques in partnership with COL, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the World Bank.

8.0 Justification and Critical Relevance of ODL to Nigeria

There are long and short term benefits of embracing distance education in Nigeria. From the aforementioned, it is clear that there are obvious advantages to the government in using open and distance learning mode to complement the traditional methods of education in Nigeria. Amongst the many advantages which the government and the good people of Nigeria stands to benefit can be grouped into the following areas:

- access and equity for comprehensive national development;
- alleviation of capacity constraints for economics, human resources and rural development;
- education for all especially to reduce or totally eliminate illiteracy and poverty;
- capacity building for human resource development especially in areas of acute deficiencies such as vocational and technical education, science and technology;
- life-long and life-wide education in order to build a learning and knowledge-based society;
- access to, and capitalising on, emerging market opportunities both within the African region and globally;

- avenue for transforming our higher education sector to make our institutions respond to contemporary changes, developments and needs of Nigeria;
- providing the answer to the perennial problems of teacher education;
- appreciating, educating the citizens about, and using information and communication technologies (ICTs) to accelerate national and community development and provide an organised entry into the global information superhighway;
- generating spin-off effects on other sectors of national development such as raising development in telecommunications, information technology industry, broadcasting, postal and informatics and the development of many education-related small-scale industries; and
- alleviating budgetary constraints as expenditure on open and distance education has been shown in other countries to be as low as 30 per cent of the total cost of the conventional form of education beyond the take-off costs.

In the words of the *Communiqué of the National Workshop on Distance Education in Nigeria* which was held in September 2000 at Abuja, the advantages of distance education in a nutshell is that it ‘can enhance education as a form of human resource development, and satisfy the exceptionally large demand for education by our huge and rapidly expanding population which is still mainly rural, remote, under-represented, and marginalised through resources, location, economic and other reasons. Distance education will enable Nigeria to provide access for all and achieve equitable representation by taking the distance out of education.’

9.0 Three indices of indispensability of ODL for Nigeria

All the above listed justification for ODL in Nigeria can be grouped, supported and argued from three major and significant areas which I call the three indices of indispensability. All these, as can be seen from the brief discussion on each, combine to inform the dire need for a viable option to face-to-face classroom bound higher education in Nigeria.

9.1 Demographic changes

Africa, of which Nigeria is a significant part, due to its population is undergoing a series of profound shifts in a number of areas including its economy, political terrain and demography. Africa’s 1 billion inhabitants – projected to grow to 2.3 billion (mostly youth) by 2050, is the world’s largest and most

populous continent, with about 15% of the world's humans. According to the statistics of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Welfare (DESA), as quoted by African Development Bank (2014), by 2040 Africa will have the world's largest workforce, surpassing China and India. Africa is also the world's youngest region, and in the mid 2011 the continent had the world's 10 youngest countries by population. Within the continent, East and West Africa will be the youngest regions. A large "youth bulge" in which 60% of the population is made up of the youth is growing very rapidly. On education, the DESA data show that 5.3 million African youth graduate from high school (only 23% of the children are enrolled in primary education). 38.4 million children would enter the primary school by 2017.

The phenomenal global uptake of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) as a strategic vehicle for expansive and comprehensive development through enhanced access to education and training have shown dividends in many parts of the world. Developmental outcomes in the developed economies and in Asia have highlighted the importance of open learning and distance education in helping to solve challenges of social dislocation, poverty, conflict, and marginalisation, as well as achievement of the human development goals especially with regards to Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) now replaced by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Many of the countries of the developing world did not achieve the Education for All (EFA) goals by 2015. In economically poorer countries, an estimated 72 million children are not in school. It is also recorded that about 758 million adults still lack basic literacy skills – more than three quarters of whom live in only 15 countries. Nigeria, as an E9 country (one of the world's 9 most populous developing countries), has its own fair share of this statistics as follows:

- Nigeria's population grows by 2.7 % annually according to the UN Bureau of Statistics and the UN Population Division. It is projected that our population will double by the year 2066.
- Currently we have over 110 million youth under the age of 25 years and should rise to over 200 million in 50 years' time.
- 22.1million out of 42.1 million Nigerian children are in primary schools;
- Out of 33.9 million Nigerians eligible for secondary education, only 10.4 million are attending.
- Nigeria, according to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2013, has the highest rate of out-of-school children in the world.

- Nigeria requires about 1.4 million primary and secondary school teachers and 456,500 tertiary education teachers (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2013, ES NCCE, 2012), and
- Of all the students who sat for SSCE examinations, from 2006 to 2016, less than 25 per cent passed with credits in Mathematics and English.

9.2 Rising enrolment

While all the advantages listed in Section 8.0 on Justification above can be translated into core needs of Nigeria, the realities of current development in Nigeria indicated that four main areas can be regarded as critical, high priority needs. These are:

- massive higher education provisions
- teacher education to service the universal basic education (UBE)
- primary education
- national network of technology infrastructure to enhance community and rural development as well as provide avenues for distance education.

It is an open secret that the formal classroom-bound higher education provisions in Nigeria have failed to cope with the tremendous need for higher education. The data available for 10 years ago indicated that our institutions of higher learning (universities, polytechnics, colleges of education) have only been able to cope, on the average, with about 17 per cent of admission requirements as illustrated by Figures 1, 2 and 3 below. Information on the current situation is that not much progress has been made as we are only able to accommodate about 25 % of those who apply for places in our higher institutions.

As can be discerned from the Figures, over 80 per cent of those who apply to our institutions of higher learning cannot be accommodated, not necessarily because they are not qualified but due to gross inadequacies in resources and facilities. There is a limit to which any one classroom or lecture theatre can accommodate at any one particular time and location.

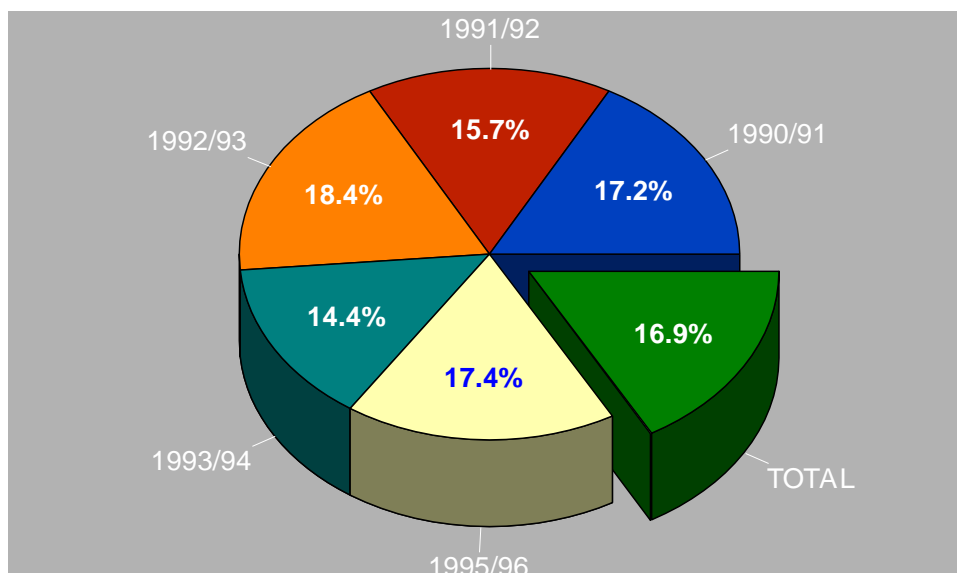


Figure 1: Provisional admissions as percentage of total applications into Universities

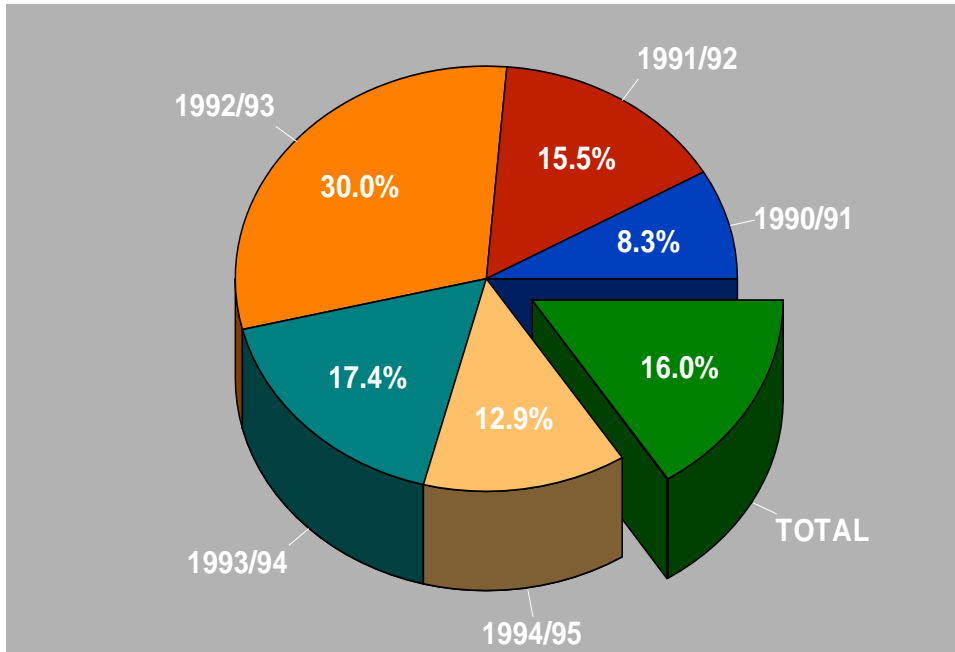


Figure 2: Provisional admissions as percentage of total applications into Polytechnics

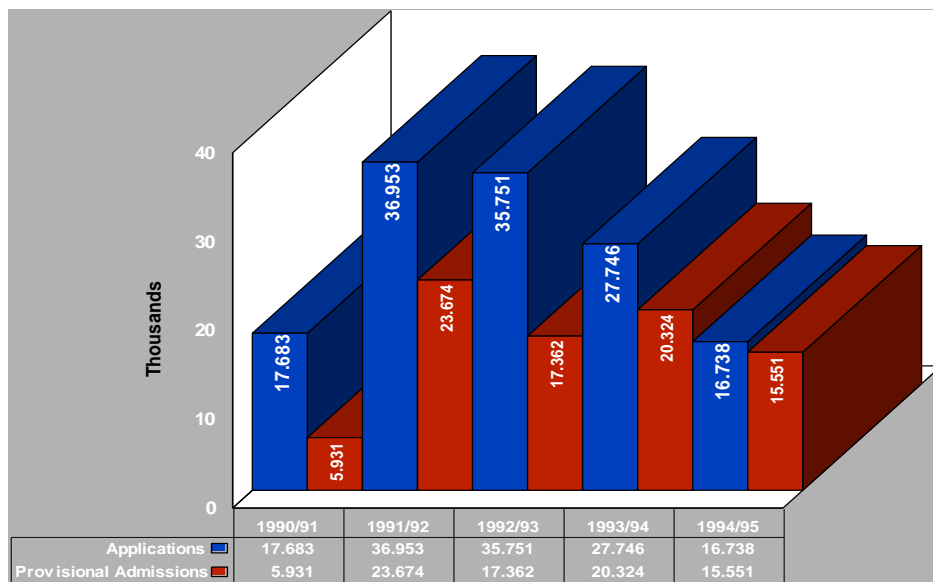


Figure 3: Provisional admissions as percentage of total applications into Colleges of Education

In spite of the discouraging SSSCE and NECCO annual examination results, Nigeria continues to have huge and continually increasing number of applicants to the Joint Admissions and Matriculations

Board (JAMB) for admission into tertiary institutions. On the average, out of over 1.5million Nigerians seeking admission to tertiary institutions, only about 26.5 per cent are successful.

9.3 Lifelong learning

The third index of indispensability is life-long learning which has taken the world by storm and now making its way to mainstream educational provisions in many countries of the world.

Lifelong Learning is characterised by making learning a continuous lifelong activity, learning through a flexible, easily accessible mode, development of a 'Learning' or 'Knowledge Society, a global movement towards ODL, and the fact that we all need to make to cope with the constant change in life.

The need, therefore, to successfully manage our daily living in today's world calls for making learning a continuing lifelong activity. Lifelong learning should therefore not be seen as a privilege or a right but a necessity for every individual - young or old- to meaningfully live with the astronomic pace of change we face daily in the classroom, on the job, in the home, in the immediate community, and in the worldwide society.

The Way Forward: Rescuing Nigeria from herself

Taken together, all the chilling consequences and frightfully disturbing details and statistics listed out above point clearly to one thing: Nigeria must re-strategise, re-focus and re-tool herself in readiness to avert the ominous dark clouds hovering over our in the use of education for national development in the 21st century. Given the huge numbers of unmet demand for education at all levels starring us in the face, there will not be enough resources to build all the classrooms, all the furnishing and all the infrastructure needed to meet the needs of the population. Besides, there will not be time and people to train all the teachers and lecturers and other ancillary staff needed to work in the educational establishments. The only answer, known to nations ready to confront their educational needs, that we know is ODL.

Unfortunately, time is not at the mercy of Nigeria and while population and lack of infrastructure and other resources are overtaking our strides of achievement made so far in education and indeed in

ODL, a lot must be done within a very short time to effectively arrest the impending implosion in education, and by implication, in other aspects of our national life.

In order to guarantee a rosy future for ODL in Nigeria and is being used effectively to tackle our national development issues through human resource development, several things must be done. I shall limit the discussion of the issues to FOUR, especially those relating to the legislative agenda at the National Assembly.

Solution No 1

Expanding existing ODL institutions and the provision of facilities and spaces using reliable statistics of those needing higher education in Nigeria.

Given the facts as stated earlier, Distance Education in Nigeria could be said to be at the primary stage. All over the world, ODL is at the 5th stage – that is the stage of the use of sophisticated Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). For Nigeria to benefit from the expected gains of ODL there is a need to leap frog to this 5th stage of ODL in order to cope with the demands and delivery of DE. For over a decade now, the nation had become used to the often quoted statistics of those who registered and sat the JAMB UME examination and the very few number that eventually get admitted into the universities. The message is loud and clear: there are only approximately 25% as available spaces. The NOUN and other Distance Learning Centres and institutions by their mandate can serve the country well in absorbing most of those candidates that are not able to gain admission into the conventional institutions.

It is evident in Nigeria that the results of candidates in the final public examinations like WASC/SSCE, and NECO especially candidates in public schools often have been abysmally disappointing. The document on the Roadmap shows that less than 24% of candidates who sat for these examinations between 2000-2004 made the required five credits including Mathematics and English (p.56). This means that in actual fact, not all candidates who registered for the UME are ready, and qualified for admission into conventional universities. This is where the need for new statistics arises. The nation needs to be told what percentage of those applying for UME are qualified to go into a closed system the type our conventional universities represent. Once we have this new statistics, there is need to carefully examine how Open and Distance Learning (ODL) can come to the rescue. These will have to be backed by law to be enacted by the National Assembly.

Solution No.2

Need for Integration of Distance Learning to the Education System

Open and distance learning in Nigeria, in reality, is still in its infancy and at the periphery of the education system. This makes distance learning under-valued and underused. Integration of

distance learning mode with the conventional face-to-face mode will reduce the resistance to the innovation and will do much to overcome the wrong perception that distance education is inferior. The entrenchment of distance education in all facets of our education, as has been done in other countries, will offset the notion that distance education is of inferior status and is likely to overcome the attitudinal barriers and institutional resistance to distance learning especially among professional groups who argue that educational quality cannot be maintained, distance learners cannot adapt, and that time tested methods are better. By the enactment of a law, ODL must become mainstream as has been done in the Philippines recently. Our ODL policy, as part of the National Policy on Education requires remodeling urgently for a comprehensive review of the philosophy and goals of ODL in a country such as ours with abundance of resources to use education as a developmental strategy.

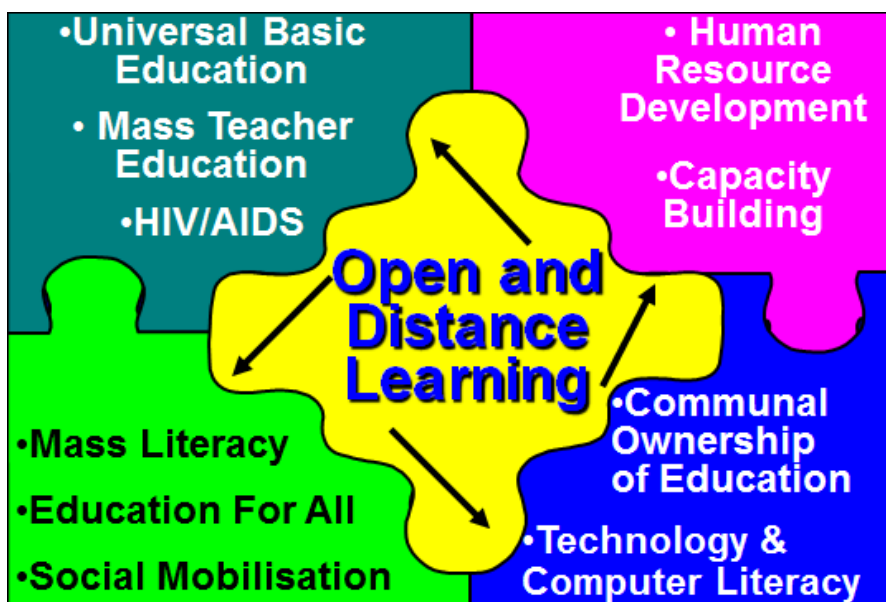


Figure 4: The versatility of ODL as Central focus for Solving National Educational Needs

ODL must be tailored to our national needs; it must be used to enhance access to flexible, equitable, cost effective education; it must be directed towards political expediency, public purpose and nation’s focus; it should now be government’s priority as a means to achieving the goals of COP21, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Agenda 2063 (AUC/ENECA/NEPAD), and Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 2016).

Solution No. 3

A new paradigm required: Open School and Open Polytechnic

After nine years of basic education and three years of senior secondary, students who failed to make the required credits at the end of the senior secondary are not often allowed to repeat classes by going back to secondary school to attend classes again and re-sit the examination. They are expected to fend for themselves and re-take the examinations. For many candidates and their parents, this is a source of huge economic loss, if not wastage. In the country today, there are millions of children in this category. We need research to know the actual figure. But more importantly is that we need a new paradigm to approach the situation, handle the issue and solve the problem. This is where, using ODL, the Open Schooling strategy comes into focus. The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) has emphasised that “open schooling is neither a second chance nor a second choice possibility but is the only option that can help us to achieve *Education for All*” (COL, 2008).

In a similar vein, a country that needs to develop all its resources and potential must critically consider its middle level human resources. At the moment the economic development of Nigeria is limping because of the dearth of qualified and well trained technicians and technologists to adequately shoulder the development of the technical backup for all our sectors especially the oil and gas which Nigeria so heavily depends upon. At the moment the technicians who work in our oil and gas sector come from overseas including countries such as South Africa, Malaysia, China and the Philippines. What other countries have done is to use ODL through the establishment of Open Polytechnic, to develop its human resources in this area. Nigeria must of necessity look in this direction as it has tremendous advantages for us. New Zealand, the first country to establish an Open Polytechnic, and all others which have emulated them, has wonderful success stories to tell. All these plans are contained in the Federal Ministry of Education Blueprint and Implementation Plan for the national Open & Distance Learning programmes for the nation. I humbly invite the National Assembly to adopt the Blueprint and craft its content into Law for immediate implementation.

Solution No 4

Establish an ODL coordinating and regulating agency

It is clearly obvious that for the large-scale mass education Nigeria needs to embark upon, and the

need to put in place an open and distance learning system robust enough to allow for a comprehensive and cost-effective use of the infrastructure to be laid, a structured measure of nationally coordinated effort is implicated. The successful implementation of the open and distance learning system in Nigeria involves undertaking a variety of tasks and activities that need to be coordinated on a very gigantic scale. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, the Communiqué of the National Workshop on Distance Education in Nigeria organised by the Federal Ministry of Education and the Office of the Special Adviser on Education to Mr. President from 27th – 29th September in September 2000 called for such a coordinating body. The National Policy on ODL has stated that such a body be created while the Federal Executive Council of 28th April, 2004 approved its establishment. The Commonwealth of Learning (COL), at its Forum on a Decade of Open and Distance Learning in the Commonwealth held at Abuja from 18 to 20 May 2009 strongly recommended the establishment of such a coordinating and regulatory body in each member country.

Following a Ministerial approval for the setting up of a body to advise Government on how to refocus and repackage ODL in Nigeria, the then Permanent Secretary, Federal Ministry of Education, Professor Oladapo A. Afolabi on 7th January, 2010, inaugurated a 37-member Advisory Committee on ODL (NACODE) to review on-going efforts and suggest measures on refocusing ODL in Nigeria. The Committee's Terms of Reference were as follows:

- TOR 1:** To recommend and develop a set of comprehensive guidelines for advocacy and collaborative partnerships, including resource mobilisation strategies, among federal, state, local governments and other stake holders in the effort to actualise the national goals for education through open and distance learning.
- TOR 2:** To suggest cost effective routes, stating the potential advantages and disadvantages of each route, and outline their cost implications for building and strengthening capacity of existing institutions providing open and distance learning.
- TOR 3:** To design a strategic and sustainable action path for the participation of, and collaboration, with the organised private sector and other non-governmental organisations in providing quality open and distance education in Nigeria.
- TOR 4:** To develop the rationale, policy, and strategic objectives for an inter-governmental platform for the participation of media houses, information and communication technology providers, publishers and other relevant bodies in enhancing the practice of open and distance learning.

- TOR 5:** To recommend and describe the relationship arrangements, with implementation options, between the existing educational regulatory bodies and institutions offering open and distance learning programmes in order to ensure parity and maintenance of standards.
- TOR 6:** To identify and recommend the establishment of new open and distance learning institutions, including but not limited to open school, open polytechnic and open college of education with a view to expanding and enhancing access to education pursuant to the realisation of the goals of Education For All, Millennium Development goals and Vision 20-2020.
- TOR 7:** To recommend and suggest the modalities for the establishment of an agency to manage, regulate and promote the growth and development of ODL activities in Nigeria and to suggest a viable organogram for such an agency to effectively articulate a clear, concise and pragmatic vision of open and distance learning appropriate and relevant for the 21st century and beyond.

The 65-page report of the Committee and a draft Act, are awaiting attention by the National Assembly to enact into Law. Several countries, including India, Malaysia and Thailand and the Philippines have done this to their national advantage. When established, the agency will amongst its other coordinating roles oversee institutional services which include the National Open University of Nigeria, National Teachers Institute, Open Polytechnic, Open School, Distance Learning Centres and all other ODL related institutions and agencies in Nigeria. Central coordination will reduce overhead costs, maximise and encourage the use of shared resources, present a common front to the outside world and enable the government to keep a finger on current state of development at any particular time.

As quality is heavily involved in distance education delivery a central coordination will assure quality and set out desirable standards. The coordinating body should not be too rigid to deny flexibility in the system. It should devolve some responsibilities to the regional headquarters and seek consensus on matters before decisions are taken or implemented.

As recommended by the national workshop on distance education in Nigeria held in September 2000, government has, in the *Blueprint of National Open and Distance Learning Programmes* as approved by the Federal Executive Council on 27 March 2002, established the National Open and Distance Learning Planning Office in Abuja as a primer of a coordinating agency that was to eventually develop into the National Open and Distance Education Commission (NODEC). NODEC is

to regulate and promote the growth and development of ODL in Nigeria and to articulate a clear, concise and pragmatic vision of distance learning in a bid to provide Education for All in Nigeria. Due to bureaucratic obstacles this has not taken off and now has been temporarily merged with the Abuja Liaison office of NOUN. With good will and government determination, the agency could start from there in earnest.

Once set up through a Law to be enacted by the National Assembly, NODEC should immediately undertake the review of the Laws governing the National Open University of Nigeria, and National Teachers Institute, while it works on enacting new laws for the establishment of an Open Polytechnic, an Open School, Distance Learning Centres and all other ODL related institutions and agencies in Nigeria.

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