Human Capital Development in Nigeria Through Open and Distance Learning: Whither Federal University of Oye-Ekiti?

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1.0   Introduction

I need to place on record my unreserved gratitude to Professor Kayode Soremekun, the Vice Chancellor of the Federal University of Oye-Ekiti for the invitation to address this Special (Extra-Ordinary) session of the Senate of the University – the highest and most distinguished academic body of the University. I must also record my tremendous admiration for his great foresight and tenacity in wishing to implant the culture of open and distance learning (ODL) at this University, only a few weeks after taking up the reigns of administration at this university. It shows clearly that his priority lies with the current global movement of using ODL for mass instruction as is being done by world class hitherto single mode –face to face (f2f) traditional classroom-based formal institutions of higher learning. Examples of such forward-looking institutions, which believe that the future of educational provisions lies in the dual mode (Croft, 1992) include Massachussetts Institute of Technology, Harvard University, University of London, Deakin University, University of Liverpool, The University of Southern Queensland.

I must thank Prof Atere, The Director of The Distance Learning Centre for being so persistent in ensuring that I honour the invitation of the Vice Chancellor to be today in spite of other competing invitations to be honoured this week.

But I must say that I greatly value your presence today because this lecture would not have taken place if you decide as individuals or through the collective decision of Senate not to be here. I know how powerful Senate is and indeed how tenacious they can pass and implement a resolution, especially if it has to do with being anti establishment. Your presence, more than anything else, indicate that you have voted to make your university toe the line of being one of the emerging great universities which believe in the new future of university education. You are demonstrating your commitment to the dual mode form of instruction and by faith believing that this is one virile way your university can carve out a niche for, and distinguish, itself as one of the 21st century top-rated universities in Nigeria and the world.

Let me at the onset of our conversation put on the table as clearly as can be, the perspective through which I am making this address. I have available to me a number of perspectives to make this address. I could address you as a fellow academic, a member of the Senate of a University, a former

Vice-Chancellor of an ODL University, a Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of Council of a University, an academic administrator who was once at the helm of affairs of a regional higher education group, to mention but a few. Some people could interpret this to mean that I am enforcing my own ideas pretty much like the way a sale marketer cleverly imposes his or her preferences to convince the buyer, even when the real need to acquire the ware.

But I could choose to address you and introduce the issue of ODL using the perspective of certain imperatives of the Nigerian and global society. These include the socio-economic, the demographic realities, rising enrolment, the global movement towards lifelong learning, the principle of equality, the principle of utility, and indeed the constitutional provision in Nigeria.

I have chosen to use the latter perspective because it is logical, objective and most professional. While using this perspective, I would however, make use of my personal experiences in any of my previous positions itemised above to bring home to you the issues being argued and to illustrate or support the integrity of the perspective.

2.0   Cornerstone of Development

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.

3.0   National Policy on Education (NPE) & Open and Distance Learning

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 germaine to national development and what can it do for a nation beyond (the limitation of) what full-time studies can do?

4.0   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.

5.0   The Genesis of Open and Distance Learning

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.

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 to Canada, the northern neighbour of the USA, at Queen's University in Canada in 1889 and far 'down under' 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 of open universities around the world including the open universities of Holland, Portugal. Costa Rica, Colombia; Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University in Thailand; Indira Gandhi National Open University of India; Universitas Terbuka of Indonesia; and Universitas Nacional Abierta of Venezuela; 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.

6.0   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.

7.0 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.'

8.0   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.

8.1 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 I 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.

8.2 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.
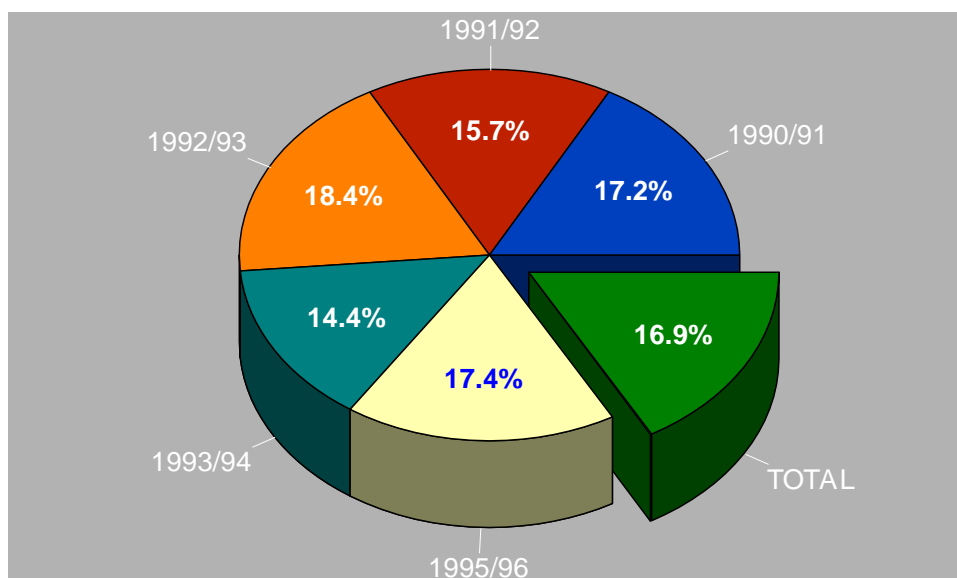

Figure 1: Provisional admissions as percentage of total applications into Universities
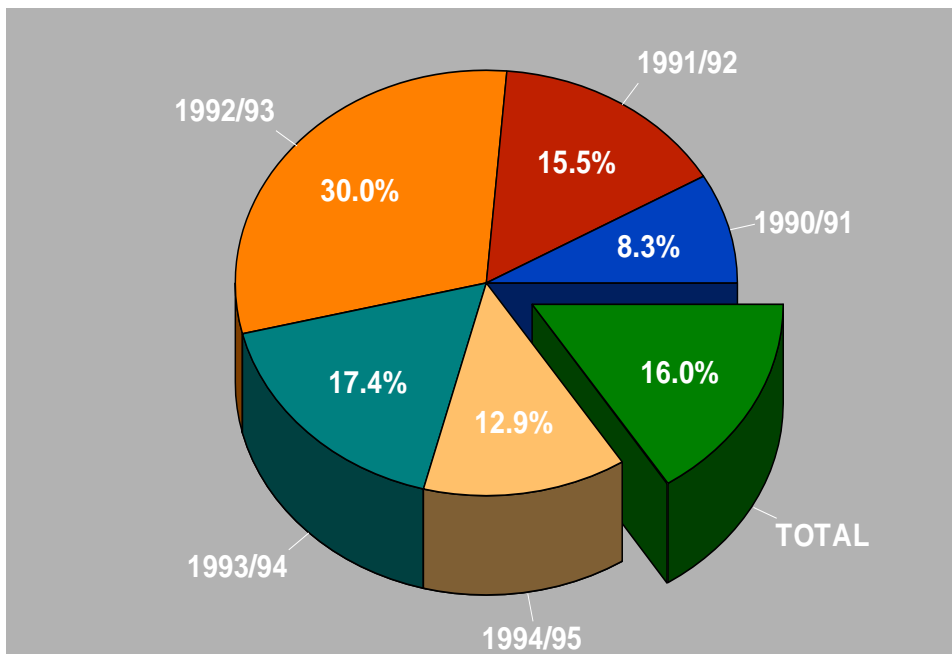
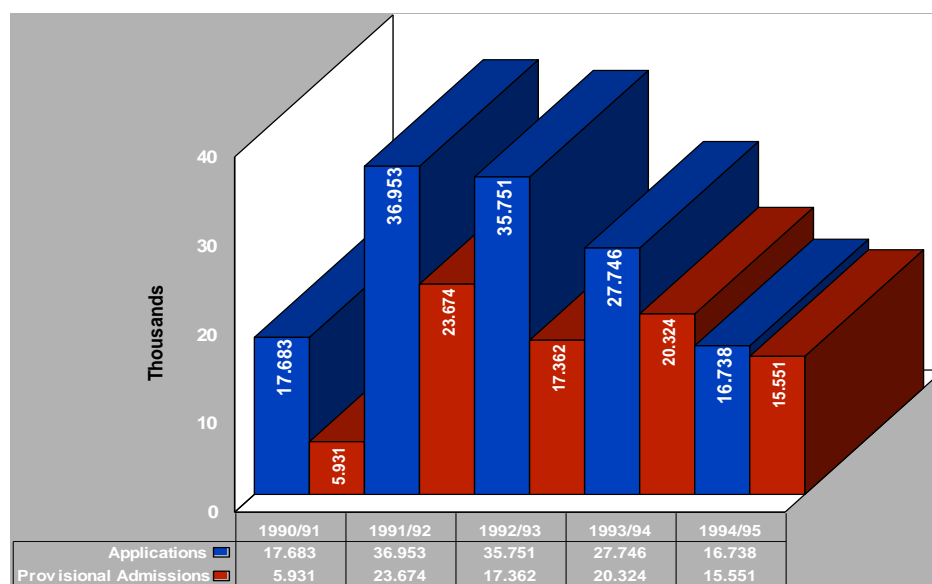**Figure 2: Provisional admissions as percentage of total applications into Polytechnics**

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.

8.3 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.

9.0   Why FUOYE Should Join the ODL Train

9.1   Obeying the directives of the NPE

As presented earlier, the National Policy on Education has, in a number of sections, included the need to position our education to take care of teaching and learning through ODL. Indeed, the latest edition of the NPE has got a section dedicated to ODL. What is required is the urgent remodeling for a comprehensive implementation of ODL in a country such as ours with abundance of resources to use education as a developmental strategy.
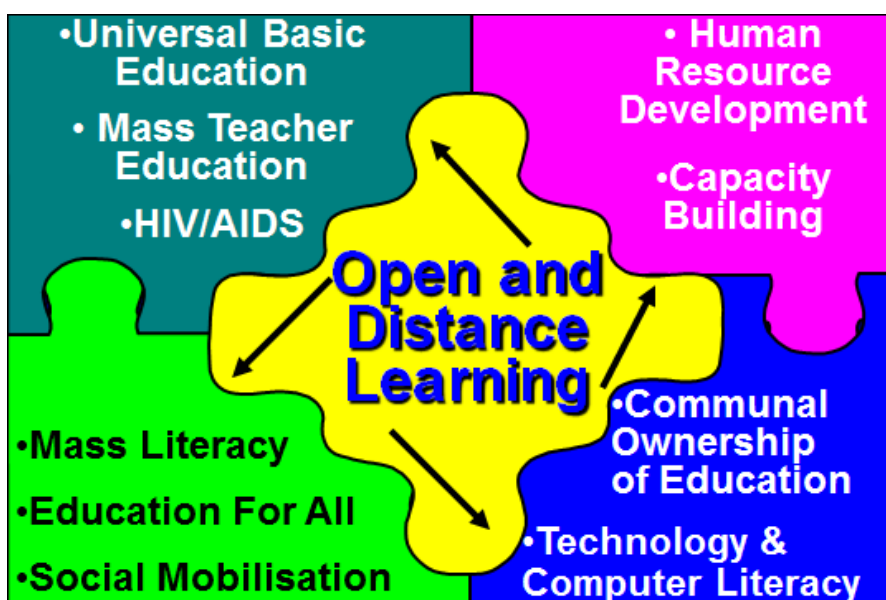

Figure 4: The versatility of ODL as Central focus for Solving National Educational Needs

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. The various institutions of higher learning should now implement ODL as dual mode institutions in order to obey the policy provisions in the NPE.

9.2 Implementing the Declaration of the African Higher Education Summit

An African Higher Education Summit held recently in 2015 in Dakar, Senegal to deliberate upon how to move higher education forward in Africa. The summit's action plan calls for an increase in enrolment ratio to 50% for Africa, up from 8% for sub-Saharan Africa today. A realistic avenue to tremendously increase enrollment in higher education is through the use of ODL. 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). All institutions of higher learning in Nigeria should subscribe to the use of ODL as a means of achieving all these goals

9.3 Raising the Internally Generated Revenue of the University

Current developments in this country and the world at large indicate very trying times ahead, especially in the economic sector and financing higher education. The dwindling revenue being generated from the sale of petroleum and the long road to developing new revenue yielding avenues, the signs are evident that that difficulties abound in the ability of government to finance higher education. Engaging in ODL, where participating students are made to pay the real cost of studying through this mode should be a robust and legal way for universities to generate revenue to help finance some of their critical needs. IF implemented and well managed, FUOYE should reap some financial gains through the offerings of ODL to train interested students.

9.4 Building the capacity of the various cadres and sectors of the University Staff

In universities where ODL has been added to its repertoire of teaching and learning mode, experiences have shown that it greatly contributes to the building of the capacity of staff in various ways. For instance, it trains them in all academic matters related to ODL. The non-academic staff get trained in the management and running of ODL. The culture of the University changes markedly to allow for comprehensive development of the expertise of all sectors of staff.

9.5   Increasing the University's Carrying Capacity

Due to the nature of classroom-based higher education, the carrying capacities of the various universities are always quite low. The total carrying capacity for all the 144 Universities in Nigeria is only 695, 449. This is at the backdrop of a total of the 2016 JAMB's candidates which stood at 1, 592, 305.

Currently the total student population of FUOYE is about 4,000. Its carrying capacity is 1,500 and the 2016 JAMB applicants is 6225. Imagine of the total number applying is admitted! This will increase the carrying capacity, increase the total population of the University and greatly boost the revenue generation capacity of the University. These can only happen if the ODL system is introduced at FUOYE.

9.7   Carving out an Academic Niche and Becoming a Centre of Excellence

Given the young age of the university and the obvious limitations it faces in a population of 144 Universities, FUOYE will have a lot of challenges making itself known within the academic circle in Nigeria and beyond. What may be possible and would help raise the profile of the university is to carve out a niche for itself using the platform of ODL. Once it carves out this niche and it begins to develop in it, it will only be a matter of time before the university is classified as Centre of Excellence is some ODL offerings.

10.   Addressing the Myths Surrounding ODL

In order to give a dog a bad name and hang it, several myths circulate globally about ODL. These are often and easily crafted especially where the traditional classroom-based teaching and learning operates and its proponents do not like any challenge to their usual day-to-day culture. For want of time, a few of the myths will be discussed.

10.1   ODL being a Poor Cousin of Formal Traditional Higher Education

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. Examples from universities which operate ODL have shown that it produces the best as shown by the Open University of the UK which is consistently ranked well above Cambridge and Oxford Universities in the production of lawyers and ensuring students are satisfied with their customer service. The University of Southern Queensland is adjudged as the university in Australia that produces the best engineers (and it is by ODL).

10.2   It has Poor Quality Assurance Culture

No system of instruction has got a more entrenched and versatile quality assurance culture like ODL. Quality assurance is done at every step including course material development, evaluation, facilitation and others. In a dual mode institution, the quality culture of the traditional system often shapes that of the ODL. What has now occurred is the development of the quality assurance toolkit for ODL which can now use universally applied across board.

10.3   It has a large Capital Layout

Whereas it is true to an extent that there is a heavy capital outlay involved in ODL, this occurs in so far as course material development and information communication technology are concerned. But ODL operates in an economy of scales situation. The larger the number of students, the cheaper the unit cost. The economy of scales completely thins out when the number hits a few thousands and the unit cost can be reduced to a few naira per head of students.

10.4   Science, Mathematics and Engineering Cannot be Taught Through ODL

Initially ODL began with the arts and social sciences and became well developed to the disadvantage of the science subjects. But today there is hardly any subject that cannot be taught through ODL. While some subjects use simulations, others use the face to face laboratories hired or borrowed from other institutions or study centres. In fact, the University of Southern Queensland has been reputed to produce the best engineers through the ODL in Australia.

10.5   ODL runs a Parallel Culture to the Traditional University System

In spite of the myth which claims that universities do not change and stick to a permanent culture, all universities change and evolve according to the dictates of the time. What often happens in a dual mode institution is for the best of the strengths and experiences of both the traditional and the ODL cultures to mix and in partnership strengthen each other. The literature has it that there at least four cultures existing in contemporary universities. These are: 'the collegial culture, the one traditional universities believe they espouse; the developmental culture, common in distance teaching institutions, which focuses more on teaching and learning than on scholarship and research; the managerial culture, which seeks to 'manage' the university and emphasizes quantitative measurement; and the negotiating culture, resulting from the collective bargaining process'. What should normally occur is for the collegial and the developmental cultures to mix and form a single entity that prevail in the new environment.

11.0   Conclusion

The discussion above has presented some arguments supporting the commencement of ODL at the Federal University Oye-Ekiti due to the various reasons given. What is now required is for the University community to rally round the Vice Chancellor in implementing this dream of propelling FUOYE to the next level of development. We must understand that there will be challenges but with commitment and resilience, they can be surmounted.

A blueprint, which will dovetail into the University Strategic Plan, should be crafted detailing its focus, areas of operating and its implementation strategies. A timeline should be given to realise each of its components.

Engaging in ODL at FUOYE gives credibility and fruition to the prophecy of Cindy Jacobs which was made in October 2002 in Guatemala City, Guatemala. Part of the prophecy includes the following:

> 'There is going to be a revival in Nigerian Universities and this revival will be of a large magnitude. That the revival in the universities will affect the secondary schools and primary schools. And God will change Nigeria to the next generation.'

Engaging in ODL, in order to massify educational access in Nigeria, is a very significant way for FUOYE to bring Cindy Jacobs prophecy to come true with its attendant advantages to the University, its immediate community and Nigeria as a whole.

Thank you and my very best wishes.

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