

**OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION (OPDE):
A STRATEGY FOR SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Education has been viewed by many scholars as the bedrock of national development. The pundits, in this research, disclose Open and Distant Education (OPDE) as a strategy for societal development. Distance education is the education of students who may not always be physically present at a school. Today it involves online education. Courses that are conducted are either hybrid, blended or 100% distance learning. OPDE is facing a lot of challenges ranging from lack of consistency, power supply, accessibility to telecommunication facilities and poor economic situation in the country. The Federal Government of Nigeria is admonished to provide funding for OPDE. Stakeholders and non-governmental institutions should invest in OPDE. The government should also improve access to telecommunication services for OPDE.

Keywords: Open and Distance Education, Strategy, Development, Nigeria

Introduction

Education is sine qua non to both human and societal development. It is also the fulcrum in which the development of the society hangs and the bedrock to national development. Education is a sure means to ending illiteracy, ignorance, poverty and starvation, unemployment, diseases, human discrimination, inequalities and social injustices of all sorts in the society. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2007) views education as an ‘instrument par excellence’ for social change and transformation. Education is generally an instrument for human capital development and national building. It is an essential tool for human empowerment and skills acquisition. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013) further foresees education as an investment for economic, social and political development; and aggregate tool of empowerment for the poor and the socially marginalized groups. For these reasons, various strategy plans have been engendered in the Nigerian education sector to meet the educational needs of every citizens in the country. One of the strategies is the full operations and implementation of open and distance education as an education system that provides opportunities for human capacity improvement and bridges educational gaps existing within the Nigerian society. Open and Distance Education (OPDE) recognized by the Federal Government creates equal opportunities for citizens to acquire higher education while still retaining their jobs. Its slogan is ‘work and learn’.

Open and distance education (OPDE) according to FRN (2013) is a mode of education delivery where learners and teachers do not necessary need to be in physical contact. The programme possesses high range of flexible learning environment that enhances access to

tertiary education. The programme has the capacity to deliver variety of skills and uses variety of media and technologies to provide quality education for large number of learners. A lot of benefits have been derived from operating open and distance education (OPDE) system in the country. However, this programme still suffers some challenges which need adequate attention from its stakeholders for effective service delivery and programme sustainability. Matters were discussed in this paper under several sections in order to enable readers understand the issues that have been raised concerning open and distance education as a strategy for societal development. By the end of this paper, readers should be able to give a clear conceptual meaning of education, open and distance education, strategy, society, development and societal development. Readers should be able to determine the characteristics of OPDE and explain the rationales for OPDE. Readers should be able to mention institutions of OPDE in Nigeria and discuss the learning strategies involved in OPDE. Readers should also be able to discuss the benefits of OPDE as a strategy for societal development and likewise, explain the challenges inhibiting the operations and administration OPDE in Nigeria.

Concept of Education

Education as defined within the context of this paper is any formal, informal or non-formal activity engaged by individuals in the society in order to equip them with the rightful skills, attitudes, knowledge, information and competences that will enable them participate and function effectively in socio-economic activities in the environment which they live. According to Hamilton (2013), education is the knowledge or skill obtained through a learning process. Education gives us knowledge of the world around us and changes it into something better. It develops in us a perspective of looking at life. It helps us build opinions and have points of view on things in life. The main purpose of education is to provide for the fullest possible development of each learner for living morally, creatively, and productively in a democratic society. Usually, a degree or diploma is conferred by an educational institution such as a college or university in order to verify that the recipient has satisfactorily completed a course of study (Hamilton, 2013). Dewey (1916, 1944) cited in the Wikipedia visualized education as the process of facilitating *learning*, or the acquisition of *knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habits*. Education is carried out using educational methods and techniques that include *storytelling, discussion, teaching, training* and directed *research*. The function of education for human development in the society is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Other functions include: to develop the intellect, to serve social needs, to contribute to the economy, to create an effective work force, to prepare students for a job or career, to promote a particular social or political system.

Yero (2002) described the meaning of education using different scholars' definitions. For him, in ancient Greece, Socrates argued that education was about drawing out what was already within the student. (As the word education comes from the Latin "educere" meaning "to lead out"). At the same time, the Sophists, a group of itinerant teachers, promised to give students the necessary knowledge and skills to gain positions with the city-state. To this group, education is defined as "to develop the knowledge, skill, or character of a person". Webster Dictionary defines education as the process involving

educating or teaching something that is really useful. Thus, from all these definitions, the purpose of education is to develop the knowledge, skill, or character of students (Yero, 2002). Knowledge is a body of information that exists “out there”—apart from the human thought processes that developed it. However, there is considerable research leading others to believe that knowledge arises in the mind of an individual when that person interacts with an idea or experience. The purpose of education according to Yero (2002) is to implant a will and facility for learning; it should produce not learned but learning people. The truly human society is a learning society, where grandparents, parents, and children are students together. Other purpose of education is to teach a student how to live his life - by developing his mind and equipping him to deal with reality. The training he needs is theoretical, that is, conceptual. He has to be taught to think, to understand, to integrate, to prove. He has to be taught the essentials of the knowledge discovered in the past and he has to be equipped to acquire further knowledge by his own effort. Education also teaches individuals rather how to think, than what to think—rather to improve their minds, so as to enable them to think for themselves, than to load the memory with the thoughts of other men (Yero, 2002). The general philosophy of education as indicated by the FRN (2013) is based on the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and the provision of equal opportunities for all citizens of the nation at all levels of education both inside and outside the formal school system. Education can take place in formal or informal settings and any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts may be considered educational. Education frequently takes place under the guidance of teachers, educators, supervisors and school heads. Most times, learners may also be allowed to educate themselves. The methodology of teaching is called pedagogy. Education is commonly divided formally into such stages as pre-school or kindergarten, primary school, secondary school and then college, university, or apprenticeship. A right to education has been recognized by some governments including the Nigerian government and the United Nations. One of the strategies which the Nigerian government is currently using to provide education to the citizen is through open and distance education (OPDE).

Concept of Open and Distance Education

The term open education or learning means that tertiary education and learning is accessible by every person. Onwe (2013) opined that the concept of ‘open’ simply means open entry and access to learning opportunities and the removal of barriers to learning opportunities. Others argue that open learning can be substituted for flexible learning. Onwe also looked at open learning as any form of learning in which the provider enables individual learners exercise choice over any one or more of a number of aspects of learning. Open learning/education refers to policies and practice of openness in entry requirements (with minimal or no restriction on qualifications), choice of courses, place of study and time, etc. It is an educational philosophy where learning can happen anywhere, any time from any resource, and therefore, this can be seen as a practice in face-to-face institutions. The Open University is an example of open learning (Common Wealth of Learning, 2015). According to UNESCO (2002), the two terms open education or learning and distance education represent approaches that focus on opening access to education and training provision, freeing learners from the constraints of time and place, and offering flexible learning opportunities to individuals and groups of learners.

Open and distance education (OPDE) is also known as Open and distance learning (OPDL) which is one of the most rapidly growing fields of education and its potential impact on all education delivery systems has been greatly accentuated through the development of Internet-based information technologies, and in particular the World Wide Web. UNESCO further defined distance education (DE) as any educational process in which all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner, with the effect that all or most of the communication between teachers and learners is through an artificial medium, either electronic or print. By definition, in distance education the normal or principal means of communication is through technology. Obviously, teachers in conventional classrooms may use technology as a supplement to their teaching, but since it is not their principal means of communication the classroom is not considered to be distance education. Obi (2012) described OPDE as an organization and delivery of instruction to learners in different locations. It allows individuals to acquire knowledge and skills without being confined to the walls of the school. OPDE can be further defined as an approach or strategy of imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes at all levels of education which is made possible at a distance through various communication and other technology as well as special organization and administrative management of specialized or expert agency. Holmberg cited in Obi (2012) also defined OPDE as various forms of studies at all levels which are not under the continuous immediate supervision of tutors with students in lecture rooms or the same premise, but which nevertheless benefit from the planning, guidance and tuition from tutorial organization. The California Distance Learning Project (CDLP, 1997) however defined open and distance education (OPDE) as an instructional delivery system that connects learners with educational resources. Open and distance education (OPDE) provides educational access to learners not enrolled in educational institutions and can augment the learning opportunities of current students. The implementation of OPDE is a process that uses available resources and will evolve to incorporate emerging technologies.

Other definitions of OPDE as cited in the California Distance Learning Project (CDLP, 1997) are: OPDE is conventionally defined as any educational or learning process or system in which the teacher and instructor are separated geographically or in time from his or her students; or in which students are separated from other students or educational resources. Contemporary open and distance learning (OPDL) or (OPDE) is effected through the implementation of computer and electronics technology to connect teacher and student in either real or delayed time or on an as-needed basis. Content delivery may be achieved through a variety of technologies, including satellites, computers, cable television, interactive video, electronic transmissions via telephone lines, correspondence and others. Open and distance learning or OPDE does not preclude traditional learning processes; frequently it is used in conjunction with in-person classroom or professional training procedures and practices. It is also called distributed learning, online learning or e-learning.

Traditionally, UNESCO (2002) identified that governments have introduced open and distance education provision in order to:

- i. increase access to learning and training opportunity;

- ii. provide increased opportunities for updating, retraining and personal enrichment;
- iii. improve cost-effectiveness of educational resources;
- iv. support the quality and variety of existing educational structures; and
- v. enhance and consolidate capacity.

Ofoefuna (2012) pointed out the reasons for the introduction of OPDE, which is as a result of population explosion, knowledge explosion, a means through which education will reach the un-reached. It is also a way of eradicating poverty, ignorance and promoting lifelong learning in the society. Therefore, OPDE is designed to provide vacancies for number of applicants seek admissions into formal higher education institutions. Since there is call for knowledge explosion as a result of many inventions and new discoveries, individual needs to constantly update their knowledge, then OPDE can be is important to bridge knowledge gap. OPDE provides education for eradication of ignorance and poverty in the society. The general philosophy of OPDE in Nigeria which makes it an educational process necessary for human and societal development is based on the fact that “people can work and learn” at the same time. Its essence is to bridge existing ‘knowledge gap’ existing in the Nigerian society.

Obi (2012) opined that the general philosophy of OPDE was to meet up with educational needs of citizens and as an instrument to achieve educational goal. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013:50) highlighted the philosophy of Open and distance (OPDE) as an education delivery:

- a. where learners and teachers need not be in physical contact;
- b. which possesses high range of flexible learning environment;
- c. that enhances access to tertiary education;
- d. that has the capacity to deliver variety of skills; and
- e. which uses a variety of media and technologies to provide quality education for large number of learners.

The philosophy of OPDE has given rise and birth to the programme’s goals which has been indicated by the Federal Government in the national policy on education document. The goals of OPDE in Nigeria as stated by FRN (2013:50) includes that OPDE shall be to:

- a. provide more access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities;
- b. meet special needs of employers and employees by mounting special courses for employees at the workplace;
- c. encouraging internalization especially of tertiary education curricula;
- d. ameliorate the effect of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing Nigerian experts as teachers regardless of their locations or place of work; and
- e. encourage lifelong learning opportunities.

In pursuance of the above goals the Federal Government will ensure that programmers for OPDE are equivalent in status to those offered by conventional face to face mode of delivery in appropriate tertiary educational institution. The Federal Government will also encourage and regulate OPDE practice in Nigeria; and strengthen the existing coordination agencies in OPDE (FRN, 2013). In Nigeria, the National Open University of Nigeria – NOUN and National Teacher Training Institute – NTI are examples of educational institutions that offer programmes in OPDE. Others include sandwich programmes, correspondence/online study, weekend and part time programmes offered by some tertiary institutions and adult education programmes offered by non-formal education sector (Obi, 2012).

Concept of Strategy

Strategy as referred here by the authors implies using various workable plans, methods and approaches in order to achieve educational goals. It is a plan of action designed to achieve a long term or overall aim or goal of an educational activity. Strategy according to the Business Dictionary (2018) is a method or plan chosen to bring about a desired future, such as achievement of a goal or solution to a problem. The term is derived from the Greek word of generalship or leading an army which involves the art and science of planning and marshalling resources for their most efficient and effective use. Simister (2011) defined strategy as how one achieves his own objectives by winning the hearts, minds and business of customers by out-thinking and out manoeuvring competitors. According to Simister, strategy is a word of military origin, which refers to a plan of action designed to achieve a particular goal. In military usage, strategy is distinct from tactics, which are concerned with the conduct of an engagement, while strategy is concerned with how different engagements are linked. How a battle is fought is a matter of tactics; the terms and conditions that it is fought on and whether it should be fought at all is a matter of strategy, which is part of the four levels of warfare. Building on the work of many thinkers on the subject, one can define strategy as a comprehensive way to try to pursue political ends, including the threat or actual use of force, in a dialectic of wills. Strategy determines the direction and scope of an organization over the long term, and it should determine how resources should be configured to meet the needs of markets and stakeholders (Simister, 2011).

Michael Porter, a strategy expert and professor at Harvard Business School, emphasized the need for strategy to define and communicate an organization's unique position, and says that it should determine how organizational resources, skills, and competencies should be combined to create competitive advantage. Strategy is the direction and scope of an organization over the long-term, which achieves advantage for the organization through its configuration of resources within a challenging environment, to meet the needs of markets and to fulfill stakeholder expectations (Simister, 2011). Strategy plans have been designed for full operations, administration and implementation of OPDE. According to Ofoefuna (2012), strategies for operating OPDE programmes in Nigeria can be through; (i) the traditional method which involves the use of study centre model, radio broadcasting model, and the vacation contact model popularly called sandwich programme. (ii) the modern strategy for operating OPDE programmes involves the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). It involves both (a) synchronous learning which is

opposite of asynchronous learning, where learner interacts with teachers and/or learners online at the same time from different place. (b) asynchronous learning which is learning online at different time and/or place using an online learning platform. Example of asynchronous learning is use of discussion forums and email for learning.

Concept of Societal Development

A society according to the Wikipedia (2018) is a group of people with common territory, interaction, and culture. A society is a group of people involved in persistent social interaction, or a large social group sharing the same geographical or social territory, typically subject to the same political authority and dominant cultural expectations. According to Luhmann (1992), the term "society" which came from the Latin word 'societas' generally designates persons belonging to a specific in-group. In anthropology, the term is used to refer not only to a group of people but also to the complex pattern of the norms of interaction that arise among them. Society exists only where social beings behave towards one another in ways determined by their recognition of one another. Other definitions of the society have been given by Luhmann (1992) as follows; society is a complex of groups in reciprocal relationship, interacting upon one another, enabling human organisms to carry on their life activities and helping each person to fulfill his wishes and accomplish his interests in association with his fellows.

From the structural point of view, society is the total social heritage of folk-ways, mores and institutions; of habits, sentiments and ideals. The following two definitions view society from its functional and structural aspects respectively. According to MacIver cited in Luhmann (1992), society is a system of usages and procedures, of authority and mutual aid, of many groupings and divisions, of controls of human behaviour and of liberties. This ever-changing complex system we call society. It is the web of social relationships. According to Giddings also cited in Luhmann (1992), society is the union itself, the organization, the sum of formal relations in which associating individuals are bound together. Societies are in regards characterized by patterns of relationships (social relations) between individuals who share a distinctive culture and institutions; a given society may be described as the sum total of such relationships among its constituent of members. In the social sciences, a larger society often evinces stratification or dominance patterns in subgroups.

Development on the other hand is the process of improving the quality of important aspects of all human lives. It differs from underdevelopment which is commonly characterized by low levels of living which includes low income, inequality, poor health and inadequate education. Development according to Thomas (2000) is a specified state of growth or advancement; a new and advanced product or idea; an event constituting a new stage in a changing situation. Thomas further explained three ways the word 'development' is used.

Development as a Vision:

A vision or description of how desirable a society is. Development as a historical process: social change that takes place over long periods of time due to inevitable processes. For example, arguments have been made that both capitalism and communism are unavoidable

results of progress. Development as action: these are deliberate efforts to change things for the better. An example is, providing food aid to alleviate hunger. Development has a history of being linked with capitalism with 'Good Change' commonly associated with industrialization and modernization on the basis of free markets. Therefore, development is closely bound with ideologies and values. Here, development could be seen as a social change that breeds human progress and growth in the society. Development is not purely an economic phenomenon but rather a multi-dimensional process involving reorganization and reorientation of entire economic and social system (Rashid, n.d). Rashid further viewed development from three different perspectives:

- i. development increases in availability and improvements in the distribution of food, shelter, education, health, protection, etc. through relevant growth processes.
- ii. with development there is improvements in levels of living, including income, jobs, education, etc. by creating conditions conducive to the growth through the establishment of social, political and economic systems and institutions which promote human dignity and respect.
- iii. with development there is expansions in the range of economic and social choices available to individuals and nations e.g. varieties of goods and services.

Given the definitions of society and development, societal development therefore connotes and signifies a process of change and progress of human beings living within the society. According to the World Animal Net, societal development is defined in the broadest social terms as an upward directional movement of society from lesser to greater levels of energy, efficiency, quality, productivity, complexity, comprehension, creativity, choice, mastery, enjoyment and accomplishment. Heinz-Herbert (2014) views societal development as a normative concept that can be defined as the change or advancement of major conditions of societies and people's lives in a direction considered to be desirable based on prevailing values and goals of development. Thus, in the retrospect development inculcates progress which means that present conditions of life and society are considered as an improvement compared to the past, in the prospect it means that future conditions are envisaged to be better than those of present times. Development of individuals and societies results in increasing freedom of choice and increasing capacity to fulfil its choices by its own capacity and initiative. Development proceeds rapidly in those areas where the society becomes aware of opportunities and challenges and has the will to respond to them. Increasing awareness through any form of education accelerates the process. Increasing understanding of the potential to achieve change, and giving the tools to make this happen, increase the likelihood of change (World Animal Net). The primary aim of OPDE is to sustain individual and societal improvement. Education, therefore, plays a pivotal role in both individual advancements and social progress, which are important aspects of societal development.

Characteristics of Open and Distance Education

Mohammed (2012) using a synthesis of the Commonwealth of Learning and ADB (1999), Valentine (2002), Galusha (2008) and the Encyclopedia Britannica.com (2012) revealed the following salient features/characteristics of open and distance education as:

i. **Spatial and/or Temporal Separation:** Separation of teacher and learner in space (geography) and time. The separation in space and time of teaching and learning functions is a basic characteristic of distance education. However, the separation is not always permanent, and the nature and duration of teacher-student contact varies according to the policies of institutions. One might like to argue that in conventional system also all learning does not take place in the presence of a teacher, and hence what is the difference? In fact, the difference lies in duration of separation. In the conventional system, by and large learning takes place in the physical presence of a teacher in the classroom barring few instances of project work, library use and self-reading. Teachers and students either live on the campus or meet regularly for most part of the year. Whereas, in open and distance education, the learner is basically separated from the physical presence of the teacher except for few occasions of contact in counseling and tutoring sessions, summer schools or personal contact sessions. This physical distance that separates the teacher from the student is the defining principle in open and distance education.

ii. **Institutional Basis:** Learning is done in an institution not by unrecognised self study or in non-academic environment. The institutions many not offer traditional classroom-based instruction but they are eligible for accreditation by the same agencies as those using traditional methods. People learn a great deal through their individual efforts from reading books, TV, friends, attending seminars, lectures, etc. Can these be called open and distance education? Of course not, because these lack the perspective of a systematic teaching strategy. Open and distance education is an offering of courses by an educational institution, that develops courses and consciously facilitates learning by the students at a distance. As in private study, it is individualized but it shares the administrative characteristics of on-campus/conventional education. An educational institution plans, designs, develops, delivers and supports the courses and programmes, example is NOUN. This is a very Important distinction to be remembered when one talks of student-centred education.

iii. **Use of Mixed Media Course-ware:** These include print, radio, TV, video and audio cassettes, computer-based learning and telecommunications. In the conventional system the content is basically transacted through the word of mouth in the classroom, and use of overhead projectors and audio-visual aids amongst others. On the other hand, open and distance education is basically dependent on the use of all the available and possible mechanical or electronic media - print, audio, video, teleconference, broadcast, computer, etc. for educational communication. The educational communication, in open and distance education takes the form of an integrated approach where a number of media are used to teach the student from distance. In the classroom teaching, the word of mouth is the mainstay, whereas in open and distance education, media other than word of mouth are the mainstay.

iv. **Interactive Telecommunications especially between Teacher and Learner.** Also between student and students forming learning communities. E-mails, calls etc. are used. Social networking media like Facebook, YouTube, etc also used. This means that in OPDE, there is room for a two-way channel of communication. It is important to note that, recognizing the benefits of dialogue between the learner and the teacher in Open and Distance Education emphasizes two-way communication through telephone, teleconference, counseling sessions and assignments.

v. **Possibility of Face-to-Face Meetings**for tutorials, learner-learner interaction, library study, laboratory/practice sessions/exams etc.

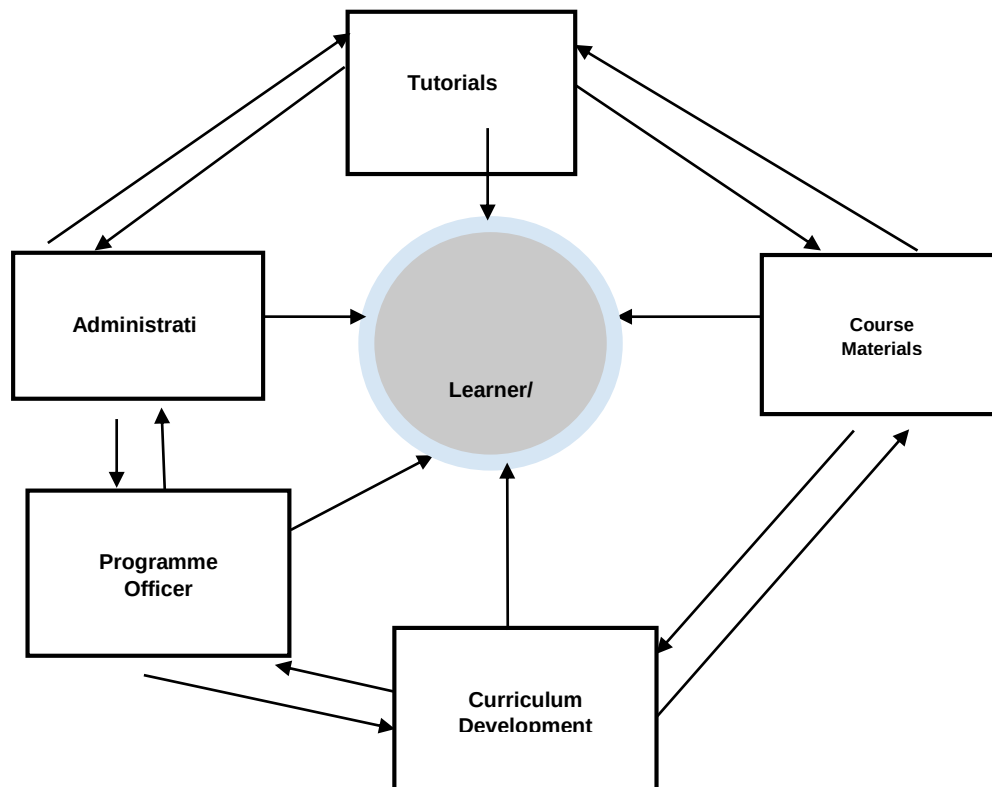
vi. **Use of Industrialized Process:** In large scale OPDE operations, division of labour and tasks is used for different aspects of the course. Otto Peters introduced the concept of "industrialized distance education" after analysing its similarities with industrial practices. The mass production and distribution of learning materials, the division of labour, the logistical aspects of administering and coordinating the activities of large population of students and counsellors, and the layouts of operational units require the use of the principles and practices of an industry. However, many educators believe that it is not possible to apply the rigid scheduling of industrial system to creative activities like course development. For this reason, they emphasize the need for human elements in the system. Peters is not against this approach. What he sees as 'industrial' refers to the operational growth from correspondence to 'distance' education.

vii. **Learner-Centred Education:** Open and distance education is also attributed as learner-centred education, where the learner is the main focus of all teaching-learning transactions. This emphasizes that the design and development of courses are learner-centred as opposed to teacher centredness in conventional system. The courses are prepared keeping in view the learners' needs and requirements. A learner-centred approach also requires the learner to be matured and independent to take the responsibility of learning from varieties of learning experiences through different media.

i. **Separation from Learning Groups:** Group learning is a common feature of the conventional education system. But in open and distance education, the learners are separated from each other and the possibility of learning group and cooperative peer learning is minimum. However, it is possible to provide group learning opportunities in open and distance education as well through contact programmes. Also, due to the advent of computer technologies, it is possible to provide group learning opportunities through e-mail and computer mediated conferencing (CMC). In spite of these the learner is quasi-permanently absent from the learning group. The basic distinguishing feature of an Open and Distance Learning institution and its academic programmes has been summarized by Onwe (2013) as follows: apart from flexibility, easy access, and cost effectiveness, Open and Distance Learning/ Education programmes are learner/student-centred. They differ from those of the conventional university system where both instructional activities and course materials are lecturer-centred. It follows that academic programmes in an OPDE institution seek to satisfy the needs of learners, not the other way round. An individual can

now appreciate the importance of needs assessment in for OPDE programmes. A simple model of the distinguishing features of an OPDL programme has been illustrated by Onwe (2013) in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: The Learner-Centred Model of an OPDL Institution



Source: Onwe, O.J. (2013). Policies and practice of open and distance learning models in the sub-Saharan African countries: A literature survey. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, 3 (8), 122-135. Retrieved from <http://www.aijcrnet.com/>.)

Rationales for OPDE as a Strategy for Societal Development in Nigeria

There are basic rationales for the implementation of OPDE. Onwe (2013) identified three basic rationales for the implementation of OPDE as:

- i. To increase access to education and skills for the employed, housewives and school drop-outs which is cause by the demand and high increase in the rate of literacy. Every individual in the society wants to acquire advanced knowledge from higher education in order to become employed, secure better jobs or get promoted at the workplace.
- ii. To increase access to tertiary education in a variety of subjects due the admission problems preventing a lot of workers and individual from been admitted in the conventional tertiary institutions.

- iii. To provide quality education. Quality education in essence focuses on relevance and maintaining high standards in the education system. Educational programmes and courses offered in OPDE are relevant to the existing social needs.

Having the above rationales in mind, the Federal Government has equally made tremendous efforts for the smooth operations of OPDE programmes in Nigeria. After a national workshop on open and distance education, held at the ECOWAS secretariat in September 2000, in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), the Federal Government of Nigeria developed a plan for a decade of open and distance education in Nigeria, with the following objectives in mind, among others (Association for the Development of Education in Africa, ADEA, 2002; Onwe, 2013):

1. Enactment of a national policy on open and distance education, as a component of the national policy on education.
2. Establishment of a solid institutional framework for open and distance education in Nigeria, following a carefully conducted needs assessment studies.
3. Establishment of open and distance education as a core component of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme to jump-start the UBE delivery process.
4. Reopening of the National Open University of Nigeria to address access and equity issues in higher education.
5. Provision of higher education to a minimum of one million qualified candidates through the distance and open learning modes involving public and private sector participation, in areas of high manpower needs.
6. Establishment of a national open school (secondary) to address access and equity issues in secondary education.
7. Training of 20,000 open and distance education operators including course writers, support service providers, producers, managers, instructional designers and technicians.
8. Establishment of a virile ICT-driven distance education delivery system.

Institutions of OPDE in Nigeria

To achieve the set goals and objectives of OPDE, several institutions have been recognized to provide OPDE in Nigeria. Nevertheless, Onwe (2013) also indicated that Nigeria has, through the National Universities Commission (NUC), accredited the following open and distance learning institutions, among others:

1. The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN).
2. The Centre for Distance Learning (CDL), Obafemi Awolowo University.
3. The Distance Learning Institute (DLI) of the University of Lagos.

4. The Distance Learning Centre (DLC) of the University of Lagos.
5. The National Teachers' Institute (NTI), Kaduna.

These institutions have well-stated policies based on the UNESCO's major components of open and distance education systems. Their mission, programmes and curricula, teaching and learning strategies, learning materials and resources, communication between teachers and learners, interaction between learners, support delivered locally, the delivery system, the student and tutor sub-system, staff and other experts, effective management and administration, the requirements of housing and equipment, and evaluation have been clearly stated (Onwe, 2013). The National Universities Commission observed, however, that a critical appraisal of the scope of the practice of open and distance learning at any level of education in Nigeria against the backdrop of the long-standing recognition of its potentials for increasing access to education reveals some mismatch between policy and practice. With respect to open and distance learning education, the national policy specifies that the open and distance learning mode of education shall not be applicable to academic disciplines in a university that lacks capability for such discipline. Such disciplines approved by NUC to operate OPDE as cited in Onwe (2013) include: (i) Education; (ii) Administration/Management Sciences; (iii) Social Sciences; (iv) Arts/Humanities; (v) Sciences and Applied Sciences (Onwe, 2013).

Learning Strategies involved in OPDE

Open and Distance Education (OPDE) increases access to learning opportunities through various learning strategies. Well organized OPDE accommodates multiple learning styles and strategies. The instructional mode and delivery at the OPDE just like that of National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) is by the distance learning strategies applicable to an open learning environment. The instructional mode and delivery has been designed to provide opportunity for Nigerian working people to acquire knowledge, skills and techniques relevant to their jobs and their future career prospects. Open and Distance education (OPDE) also serves learners who are not likely to attend traditional classroom instruction (effectiveness). Some of the learning strategies involved in OPDE have been mentioned by UNESCO (2002), Kirtman (2009), Otto (2010), FRN (2013), Onwe (2013) and among many others as follows:

i. **The Examination Preparation Model:** Though this model appears non-famous in the literature, its prerequisite is a university which limits itself to holding examinations and conferring degrees, and which abstains from teaching. The students or learners have to teach themselves. This model was institutionalized when the University of London Was founded in the mid 19th century for the benefit of those persons who could not afford to be enrolled at Oxford or Cambridge University.

ii. **The Correspondence Education Model:** This is the oldest and most widely used model. It is a combination of the examination preparation model and a regular teaching by presenting written or print texts, and by assignments, their correction, and by a regular and *ad hoc* correspondence between the teaching institution and the students. The model is

simple and relatively cost-effective to administer. It is used to a great extent by distance teaching Universities that are multi-media and open. The University of South Africa is a good example of the universities that use this model.

iii. **The Multiple (Mass) Media Model:** This model emerged in the 1970s. It is characterized by a regular and integrated use of radio and television, together with print materials and the systematic support of the students by means of study centres. This model supported the movement toward open learning and open universities.

iv. **The Group Distance Education Model:** This model is similar to that of the multi-media model, as radio and television are used as teaching media, especially for transporting lectures held by professors. But these lectures are received by groups of students (not individual students) attending obligatory classes where they follow the explanations of an instructor, discuss what they have heard and watched, do their assignments and take their tests. No special printed teaching material is developed and distributed, except for customary lecture notes. This model is prominent in China, Japan, and Korea.

v. **The Autonomous Learner Model:** This model provides for freedom to develop independent learning. In the model, the students do not only organize their learning themselves, but they also tackle the task of drawing the curricula. They set their own learning objectives and decide on strategies and media they want to apply. Here, the tradition of expository teaching does not apply. Instead, professors function as advisers and facilitators who meet the students regularly and through interviews. In these meetings, the students present, discuss and negotiate their objectives and plans.

vi. **The Network-Based Model:** This model is presently emerging as part of the digital transformation of our work. It provides the possibility of working in a digitalized learning environment. Here, the students have access to even the remotest teaching programmes and data bases carrying relevant information. Thanks to the Black Berry innovation.

Open and Distance Education as a Strategy for Societal Development in Nigeria

In the light of the experiences of the past ten or more years, there is today recognition of other related benefits derived from OPDE as an educational strategy for societal development in Nigeria. Some of these as highlighted by UNESCO (2002) are:

- i. balancing inequalities between age groups
- ii. extending geographical access to education
- iii. delivering educational campaigns and other education for large audiences
- iv. providing speedy and efficient training for key target groups
- v. expanding the capacity for education in new and multidisciplinary subject areas
- vi. offering the combination of education with work and family life
- vii. developing multiple competencies through recurrent and continuing education
- viii. enhancing the international dimension of educational experience and

ix. improving the quality of existing educational services.

Jegede (2009) opined that OPDE provides education for all, promotes lifelong learning, and improves on the economies of scale in education management. These definitions have three things in common: flexibility, cost-effectiveness, and learner-centred. It can thus be said that at its best, Open and distance learning can be described as a flexible, cost-effective, and learner-centred educational system. It is learner-centred as it aims at providing answers to academic questions and problems of learners, not the other way round. OPDE provides students with opportunities to learn by practising in a two way communication platform. Students are able to explore, communicate, analyse and share information and ideas with one another. It reduces travel expenses and costs. Video conferencing costs are substantially less than travelling and participants will never have to leave their office. It increases the productivity. Saves time and be more productive. Video conferencing brings work to an individual's office instead of taking it abroad, allowing the individual to maintain access to important people, tools and resources that make the individual's job easier. Open and distance education has unique ways to interact. For example, the online collaborative tools can enhance a meeting like (document sharing and white board applications give individuals hands-on experience; text-messaging let individuals to easily manage large group meetings. Open and distance education can reach geographic boundaries. It is easy to meet with anyone, anywhere. Open and distance education saves money by eliminating travel, accommodations, food and gas. It enhances individual meetings in ways that cannot be done in person. Students can take classes at multiple universities and as a result of OPDE more teachers are adopting video conferencing as a method of enhanced communication and instruction. Online open and distance programmes typically give more options to the students in selecting a course of their choice. As distance education is accessible to even the students from remote areas, distance learning is benefiting a large mass (Mohammed, 2012).

Onwe (2013) identifying the important benefits of open and distance learning as a strategy for human and societal development in Nigeria, noted that the programme is characterized by the following societal expectations, among others:

- i. Making education less expensive
- ii. Enabling more people take part in cultural life
- iii. Relieving the overcrowded traditional universities
- iv. Enabling more people to study while working
- v. Encouraging lifelong learning
- vi. Making people gain more qualifications to enable them survive in today's employment world and
- vii. Opening up access to university for students without formal entrance qualifications.

The potentials of OPDE as a strategy for societal development in Nigeria as indicated by Maggio, Chenail and Todd (2001), Stanton (2001), Stebnicki and Glover (2001),

Goldstain, Ben-Gal and Bukchin (2007), Kirtman (2009), Or (2010) and other scholars in the Wikipedia includes that OPDE can expand access to education and training for both general populace and businesses since its flexible scheduling structure lessens the effects of the many time-constraints imposed by personal responsibilities and commitments. Devolving some activities off-site alleviates institutional capacity constraints arising from the traditional demand on institutional buildings and infrastructure. Furthermore, there is the potential for increased access to more experts in the field and to other students from diverse geographical, social, cultural, economic and experiential backgrounds. As the population at large becomes more involved in *lifelong learning* beyond the normal schooling age, institutions can benefit financially, and adult learning business courses may be particularly lucrative.

Open and Distance Education programmes can act as a catalyst for institutional innovation and are at least as effective as face-to-face learning programmes, especially if the instructor is knowledgeable and skilled (Maggio, Chenail & Todd, 2001; Kirtman, 2009). Open and distance education can also provide a broader method of communication within the realm of education. With the many tools and programmes that technological advancements have to offer, communication appears to increase in distance education amongst students and their professors, as well as students and their classmates. The open and distance educational increase in communication, particularly communication amongst students and their classmates, is an improvement that has been made to provide distance education students with as many of the opportunities as possible as they would receive in in-person education. The improvement being made in open and distance education is growing in tandem with the constant technological advancements (Stanton, 2001; Kirtman, 2009). Present day online communication enables students to associate with accredited schools and programmes throughout the world that are out of reach for in-person learning. By having the opportunity to be involved in global institutions via distance education, a diverse array of thought is presented to students through communication with their classmates. This is beneficial because students have the opportunity to "combine new opinions with their own, and develop a solid foundation for learning". It has been shown through research that "as learners become aware of the variations in interpretation and construction of meaning among a range of people [they] construct an individual meaning, which can help students, become knowledgeable of a wide array of viewpoints in education. To increase the likelihood that students will build effective ties with one another during the course, instructors should use similar assignments for students across different locations to overcome the influence of co-location on relationship building (Kirtman, 2009; Orr, 2010). The high cost of education affects students in higher education, to which open and distance education may be an alternative in order to provide some relief. Open and distance education has been a more cost-effective form of learning, and can sometimes save students a significant amount of money as opposed to traditional education.

Open and Distance Education may help to save students a considerable amount financially by removing the cost of transportation. In addition, Open and Distance Education may save students from the economic burden of high-priced course textbooks. Many textbooks are now available as electronic textbooks, known as e-textbooks, which can offer digital textbooks for a reduced price in comparison to traditional textbooks. Also, the increasing

improvements in technology have resulted in many school libraries having a partnership with digital publishers that offer course materials for free, which can help students significantly with educational costs (*Kirtman, 2009*). Within the class, students are able to learn in ways that traditional classrooms would not be able to provide. It is able to promote good learning experiences and therefore, allow students to obtain higher satisfaction with their online learning. For example, students can review their lessons more than once according to their need. Students can then manipulate the coursework to fit their learning by focusing more on their weaker topics while breezing through concepts that they already have or can easily grasp.

When course design and the learning environment are at their optimal conditions, open and distance education can lead students to higher satisfaction with their learning experiences (*Stebnicki & Glover, 2001; Goldstain, Ben-Gal & Bukchin, 2007; Kirtman, 2009*). Studies have shown that high satisfaction correlates to increased learning. For those in a healthcare or mental health distance learning program, online-based interactions have the potential to foster deeper reflections and discussions of client issues as well as a quicker response to client issues, since supervision happens on a regular basis and is not limited to a weekly supervision meeting. This also may contribute to the students feeling a greater sense of support, since they have ongoing and regular access to their instructors and other students (*Kirtman, 2009*). Open and distance learning may enable students who are unable to attend a traditional school setting, due to disability or illness such as decreased mobility and immune system suppression, to get a good education. Children who are sick or are unable to attend classes are able to attend them in "person" through the use of robot proxies. This helps the students have experiences of the classroom and social interaction that they are unable to receive at home or the hospital, while still keeping them in a safe learning environment. Over the last few years more students are entering safely back into the classroom thanks to the help of robots. An article from the *New York Times*, "A Swiveling Proxy Will Even Wear a Tutu", explains the positive impact of virtual learning in the classroom, and another that explains how even a simple, stationary tele-presence robot can help.

Open and distance education may provide equal access regardless of socioeconomic status or income, area of residence, gender, race, age, or cost per student. Applying universal design strategies to distance learning courses as they are being developed (rather than instituting accommodations for specific students on an as-needed basis) can increase the accessibility of such courses to students with a range of abilities, disabilities, learning styles, and native languages. Distance education graduates, who would never have been associated with the school under a traditional system, may donate money to the school (*Kirtman, 2009*).

Open and distance learning may also offer a final opportunity for adolescents that are no longer permitted in the general education population due to behaviour disorders. Instead of these students having no other academic opportunities, they may continue their education from their homes and earn their diplomas, offering them another chance to be an integral part of society (*Kirtman, 2009*).

Bušelić (2012) also explaining the benefits of OPDE as a strategy for societal development expressed that open and distance learning is a contributing force to social and economic development in the Nigerian society. It is fast becoming an essential part of the mainstream of educational systems in both developed and developing countries. The globalization of distance learning provides many opportunities for countries for the realization of their education system-wide goals. The growing needs for continual skills upgrading and retraining and the technological advances have led to an explosion of interest in distance learning. Open and distance learning offers a myriad of advantages which can be evaluated by technical, social and economic criteria. Also, open and distance learning methods have their own pedagogical merit, leading to different ways of conceiving knowledge generation and acquisition (UNESCO, 2002, p. 65). Open and distance learning increases access to learning and training opportunity for citizens in the country, provides increased opportunities for updating, retraining and personal enrichment for workers, improves cost effectiveness of educational resources, supports the quality and variety of existing educational structures, enhances and consolidates capacity (Bušelić, 2012).

Another advantage of open and distance learning is its convenience because many of the technologies are easily accessible from home. Many forms of distance learning provide students the opportunity to participate whenever they wish, on an individual basis, because of distance learning flexibility. This kind of education is quite affordable, as many forms of distance learning involve little or no cost. Open and distance learning is also multi-sensory. There is a wide variety of materials that can meet everyone's learning preference for individual development. In fact some students learn from visual stimuli and others learn best by listening or interacting with a computer program. Also, open and distance learning can offer increased interactions with students. In particular, introverted students who are too shy to ask questions in class will often "open up" when provided an opportunity to interact via e-mail or other individualized means (Franklin, Yoakam & Warren, 1996, p. 126). There are some other related benefits of open and distance learning such as: balancing inequalities between age groups, geographical expansion of education access, delivering education for large audiences, offering the combination of education with work or family life, etc.

Challenges Inhibiting Effective Implementation of OPDE in Nigeria

Despite the benefits of OPDE as one of the effective education strategy plan for societal development in Nigeria, still the programme suffers some defects and challenges. Reports of Bušelić (2012), Onwe (2013) and others have revealed the challenges inhibiting smooth operations of OPDE in Nigeria. Bušelić (2012) opined that while there are countless open and distance education advantages, there are also various disadvantages of open and distance learning, that students and institutions should be aware of before engaging in any open and distance learning programme.

Open and distance learning requires advance planning. Both the instructors and students involved in distance learning will need to make sacrifices, at times, in order to get things done on time. Open and distance learning, although affordable, may come with hidden costs (for example extra shipping and handling costs). Open and distance learning does not

offer immediate feedback. In a traditional classroom setting, a student's performance can be immediately assessed through questions and informal testing. With Open and distance learning, a student has to wait for feedback until the instructor has reviewed his or her work and responded to it. Compared with traditional course delivery method, open and distance learning demands a disproportionate amount of effort on the part of instructors. Namely, teaching distance courses includes not only the time required for actual delivery of course materials, but it must also involve a great deal of time dedicated to student support and preparation. Also, time spent on e-mail correspondence is very significant. Open and distance learning does not always offer all the required coursework online for every degree programme. In fact, physical classroom attendance is mandatory for the completion of some degree programs. Open and distance learning degrees may not be acknowledged by all employers although most employers do. Students who want to work for a specific employer upon graduation should be sure of that employer's perspective about online education. Open and distance learning does not give students the opportunity to work on oral communication skills. Students in open and distance learning courses do not get the experience of practising verbal interaction with professors and other students (Bušelić, 2012).

Another challenge of open and distance learning is social isolation. Open and distance learners may feel isolated or miss the social-physical interaction that comes with attending a traditional classroom. However, many open and distance learning participants have reported that this sense of isolation has been decreasing with the use of communication technologies such as bulletin boards, threaded discussions, chats, email, and video conferencing. The most important issue regarding open and distance learning is instructors' preparedness and students' attitude. If students do not perceive the technology as useful, they will be not receptive to distance education. Also, the inability of teachers to develop the necessary skills, to adopt a positive attitude, and to develop the needed pedagogy are other important problems affecting the creation of distance learning community. There is connection with pedagogy, personal experience, open and distance learning. When a teacher is somewhat reluctant to use technology or views it in a negative way, pedagogy may suffer. Many researches proved that many educational initiatives failed because they had little impact on teacher's beliefs or practices. The method of introducing computers to faculty is another factor in the personal development of technological pedagogy. Faculties may also experience other barriers such as time needed to learn the technology, frustration with malfunctioning technology, much lead time to prepare the distance learning materials, less time for research, and added monetary costs to work with technology at home and at the office (Bušelić, 2012).

Yusuf (2009:25) outlined these challenges as follows:

1. Lack of Consistency in Programme/Policy Implementation: It is a known fact that success in any educational policy is contingent on the involvement of all stakeholders and sponsorship of funding agency, that is, the government. A succeeding government truncated the attempt at Open University in the early 80's. Thus, successive governments in

Nigeria must not only allow the continuation of open and distance education programme, it must be supported through adequate fund.

2. Problem of Electricity: Since successful distance education cannot be assured without the use of communication and technological tools (e-mail, fax, Internet, television, radio, etc.), then the problem of electricity comes into focus. Several rural areas in Nigeria are yet to have electricity, while the urban arrears experience epileptic power supply. This will create problems for effective integration of most technological media in the delivery of open distance education programme. Poverty among Nigerians makes alternative sources of electricity non-visible to most Nigerians.

3. Poor Telecommunication Facilities and Lack of Access: Just like electricity most Nigerians do not have access to telephone and other telecommunication facilities. Even, telephone lines in the urban centres are not adequate to serve the teeming population. Services for those who have access are in most cases epileptic. These may make the integration of telecommunication in the delivery of open and distance education difficult. In addition, poor state of telephone has led to increase in dial-up cost for most Nigerians. Even with the recent introduction of GSM in August, 2001, access is still limited and services are yet to be perfect and service charge may make GSM unattractive for distant learners.

4. Poor Postal System: The postal system in the country is not yet up to international standard, in terms, of safety of goods, quick delivery of correspondences, accessibility to remote areas, and so on. Although of recent improvements have been made in the post services by NIPOST, the level of services, cannot guarantee efficient two-way communication between distant learners and distance education institutions.

5. Poor Economic Situations and its Effects on Middle Level Manpower: The poor state of the nation's economy has pauperised most Nigerians. Even an average middle income earner cannot afford basic technological and communication gadgets. Thus, computer related telecommunication facilities might not be useful for most Nigerians, as computer is still a luxury in institutions, offices and homes. This may make the integration of necessary on-line resources (e-mail, newsgroups, world-wide-web, etc.) into open and distance education in Nigeria difficult.

6. Poor ICT Penetration: Like most African countries basic ICT infrastructures are inadequate. A study by Nigerian Information Technology Professionals in America in 2002 indicated that given current ICT penetration it may take Nigeria 50 years to catch up with America on the aspect of Pc count per households. The most significant problem is the high cost of purchasing PCs.

When all these challenges inhibiting full operations and administrations of OPDE in Nigeria are curbed and eradicated, the programme will make great significant impact in the lives of Nigerian which will as well breeds societal development. Based on this, suggestions have been made for way forward for efficiency in the administration of OPDE.

Suggestions

Below are the following suggestions for improving the sustainability of OPDE in Nigeria:

1. The Federal Government should provide adequate funding and budget for OPDE institutions.
2. The ICT policy should effectively be implemented and integrated in OPDE institutions in order to promote teaching and learning efficiency and effectiveness.
3. Both staff and students should be trained to appropriately utilize technology in the OPDE institutions. Students should also make personal effort to receive ICT training in their field.
4. Managers of OPDE institutions should ensure that quality education is promoted in their institutions.
5. Use of practical should effectively be incorporated in some disciplines in order to expose students to practical training for more skills acquisition in their area.
6. Federal and State Governments should make effort to improve the epileptic electricity/power situation in the country.
7. Non-governmental institutions and financial institutions should support adequate financing of OPDE in Nigeria.
8. Government should improve access to communication industries such as postal services and telecommunication industries in the country by ensuring that they render effective services to users.

Conclusion

Open and distance education(OPDE) which is equally known as open and distance learning (ODL) has been internationally and locally recognized by the Federal Government of Nigeria as an effective strategy for societal development. The programme has a lot of benefits on societal development and this has extensively been discussed in the chapter. Full implementation of OPDE in Nigeria will entail eradicating the challenges inhibiting effective operations and management of this education system. For Nigerian societal and human development, therefore, priority attention should be paid to the administration and management of OPDE in the country.

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