

Instructional Technology and Distance Education in Nigeria

Historical Background and a Critical Appraisal

Titilola Obilade

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to examine the use of instructional technology in distance education in Nigeria and to trace the historical origins of distance education in Nigeria. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. It is located in West Africa and bordered by

Niger to the North, Benin to the West, Cameroon to the East and the Atlantic Ocean on the South. One-third larger than the state of Texas (Infoplease, 2011), it is the sixth largest country in the world. Nigeria had a population of 167 Million in 2011 (National Population Commission Nigeria, 2011). It has 36 states and a Federal Capital territory. The fifth largest producer of crude oil in the world, it has been a member of Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) since 1971 (2010/2011 OPEC Statistical Annual Report). Oil is responsible for 20% of its gross product.

English is the official language. Nigeria has over 250 ethnic groups and more than 300 languages (National Commission for Mass Literacy, 2008). The literacy level among the male population is between 40.9% and 82.6% (National Commission for Mass Literacy, 2008). In the female population, the literacy level is between 14.6% and 74.7%. In the adult population, for those aged 15 years and above, the percentage range of females that are literate is between 14.6% and 62.8% while for males, it is between 40.9% and 81.3% (National Commission for Mass Literacy, 2008).

There have been various definitions of distance learning and e-learning (Oguzor, 2011; Olusola & Alaba, 2011). In this article,



Titilola Obilade,
Department of Learning Sciences
and Technologies (0313), 205 War Memorial
Hall, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24061.
E-mail: obilade@vt.edu

e-learning is defined as delivery of instruction through electronic media. Distance education is defined as a form of learning that involves less physical contact than the traditional classrooms and communication through electronic means or print. These electronic means include mobile telephones, e-mail, CD-ROM Packages, video-phone system, computer, digital library, and radio and television broadcasts.

In Nigeria, students involved in distance learning are sometimes referred to as sandwich students or part-time students (Adesoye & Amusa, 2011). They are usually workers or students who were not able to gain admission into a university, as the entrance examinations into the various universities are highly competitive and spaces are limited (Adesoye & Amusa, 2011). They usually take a correspondence course during the year. During this time, the instructional materials may be sent through mail or the student drives to designated centers to pick up the study materials and use the library resources. At Olabisi Onabanjo University and Tai Solarin University of Education, in addition to the distance education, the students get face-to-face instruction for a period of a few weeks while the full-time students are on the semester break (Adesoye & Amusa, 2011).

The first education ordinance took place in 1882 while Nigeria was still a protectorate under the British government. These ordinances were revised and several educational policies were established because the Nigerian government wanted to close the gaps in educational disparities among the over 300 ethnic groups in Nigeria (Fabunmi, 2006). Nigeria has 36 federal universities, 37 state universities and 45 private universities (NUC, 2011).

The earliest offering of distance education in Nigeria was in the 1930s, when some Nigerians had to take courses through correspondence from British universities (E nukwu & Ojogwu, 2006). Distance education between Nigeria and Britain progressed until the establishment

of the first Nigerian university, the University of Ibadan in 1948. By 1950, the University of Ibadan began a part time course for workers in the faculty of education.

The establishment of distance education took off in various universities under different names. At the University of Lagos, in 1973, a distance education unit was established under the name "Correspondence and Open Studies Unit." As distance education developed this name was later changed to "Correspondence and Open Studies Institute" in 1983. In 1997, for the first time at the University of Lagos, the name of the Correspondence and Open Studies Institute was changed to "Distance Learning Institute."

In 2002, Nigeria's first open university, National Open University became fully functional. The National Teacher Institute is the second national establishment that caters to distance education in Nigeria (Adesoye & Amusa, 2011). Other institutions that provide distance education include University of Lagos, Olabisi Onabanjo University, and Tai Solarin University of Education (Adesoye & Amusa, 2011; E nukwu & Ojogwu, 2006).

The mode of delivery of instructional materials at the National Open University is through television and radio broadcasts, through physical transportation of the printed materials, and through "electronic transmission of materials in multimedia (voice, data, graphics, video) over fixed line (telephone or leased lines) terrestrial and VSAT [very small aperture terminal] wireless communications" (E nukwu & Ojogwu, 2006, p. 190).

CHALLENGES

Distance learners are unable to access the Internet on a 24-hour basis because of the bottlenecks in the development of infrastructure by the Nigerian government (Ofulue, 2011). Several Nigerian researchers have concluded that the main challenges facing information communication

technology in distance education is the high cost of Internet connections, the inconsistent electric power supply, and the long hours that distance learners (in the Open University) have to commute to the study centers to get the print materials and use the library resources (Ofulue, 2011).

In Nigeria, distance education is not just for students at tertiary institutions. Distance education can be effectively used to reach elementary school children in rural areas (Isiaka, 2007). According to a report cited in Aderinoye, Ojokheta, & Olojede (2007), a 2000 report by the Federal Ministry of Education stated that there were 9.3 million nomads and 3.1 million of these were children who were of school- and preschool age. The literacy rate of the pastoral nomads is 0.28%. The nomads have a mobile school that is easy to assemble and disassemble. Radio and television broadcasts are being used to teach the nomadic children. Mobile telephones are now being proposed to supplement the radio and television broadcast.

In a survey of 215 distance learners from three open and distance learning institutions in 2008, print media was the most common form of instruction (60.5%) (Ofulue, 2011). This was followed by radio (13%), e-mail (10.2%), text messaging (8.4%), television (6.5%), online learning (4.7%), and teleconferencing (3.7%). When the respondents were asked to identify the challenges faced in distance education, 35.8% identified lack of access to information communication and technology equipment, and 31.6% identified financial constraints as a major factor. Lack of electricity was identified as a major constraint by 26% of the respondents, while 20% identified lack of Internet as the major challenge. Some of the ways the respondents coped with these challenges included reading all the course materials and attending tutorials, participating in peer group discussions, and using Internet at cybercafés and at work. The author concluded that 60.9% of the distance learners

had to print hard copies of learning materials or make photocopies of learning materials.

Adeoye and Wentling (2007) examined the relationship of culture and the use of e-learning. The 24 study participants were international students attending a university in the United States and came from 11 different countries. Two of the participants were from Nigeria. The study concluded that there was no relationship between the national culture and the use of e-learning. However, there was a relationship between uncertainty avoidance and the use of the e-learning system. Those who were not familiar with the e-learning system spent more time on the system.

In a study involving 301 lecturers from federal universities, Okore (2011) concluded that among lecturers, the use of information technology for communication was the same for both females and males, irrespective of their rank. In addition, she concluded that the gender of the lecturer was not a barrier to the development of information technology in the Nigerian academic field.

Agbonlahor (2008) conducted a study in 2003 to find out the attitudes of older professors to information technology. She surveyed 718 lecturers from ten of the federal and state universities in Nigeria. The results showed that there was no difference in the attitudes of the lecturers with respect to their academic ranks. The results also showed that the female lecturers were more anxious on the use of information technology. Lecturers from the medical sciences and veterinary group scored highest on the enjoyment scale of information technology use, while lecturers in the education and agricultural departments were the least anxious about the introduction of information technology. The implication of studies on attitudes to information technology is that the results can be used in the planning and designing of systems that would be acceptable to the user (Davis, 1993).

Similarly, in a study on web-based learning among pathologists, the results showed that 83.7% of the study participants used the Internet for their literature reviews, 67.6% used it for tutorial, and 19% used it for chats (Ekanem, Olasode, & Jombo, 2009). There were 37 study participants. These study participants had practiced for more than 10 years and they all lived in urban and semiurban areas in Nigeria. Ninety-two percent of the participants agreed that web-based learning had improved the quality of their practice. The implication of this study is that the results can help in the planning and in the development of the use of instructional technology in learning and teaching (Davis, 1993).

Some private universities in Nigeria are advocating for e-learning as part of the system and not just for administrative purposes. In some universities the electronic portal is made available for payment of fees and registration of students. It is not made available for teaching. Some of these universities are now advocating for a personal learning system (Awodele, Idowu, Anjorin, Adedire, & Akpore, 2009).

The University of Lagos, a federal university, has a student population of 30,000 and 3000 academic and administrative staff (Okiki, 2011). The students are able to register for their courses online. The university has subscribed to Moodle, Blackboard, and Makau e-learning systems. It is possible to access the portal through the university system.

However, the University of Lagos faces a lot of challenges in the area of e-learning. These challenges range from the prohibitive cost of hardware to the "maintenance culture" (Okiki, 2011, Para.18).

This article has set out to examine the historical background of distance education in Nigeria. It has described the state of distance education in Nigeria today and has also highlighted the challenges peculiar to the Nigerian situation.

CONCLUSION

Although Nigeria started distance education in the 1930s, distance education in Nigeria has not reached its full potential. Distance education began as a result of correspondence courses between students from the university of Ibadan and universities in Britain. Distance education is the only way to effectively reach nomadic children and children in rural areas (Aderinoye, Ojokheta & Olojede 2007; Isiaka, 2007).

Various articles cited in this article have identified the political situation and poor infrastructure as contributory factors to the poor development of distance education in Nigeria (Enukwu & Ojogwu, 2006; Ogunzor, 2011; Okiki, 2011).

The recommendations from this article are to strengthen the existing infrastructure and to lower the costs of Internet access.

REFERENCES

- Aderinoye, R. A., Ojokheta, K. O., & Olojede, A. A. (2007). Integrating mobile learning into nomadic education programs in Nigeria: Issues and perspectives. *The International Review of Open and Distance Learning*, 8(2).
- Adeoye, B., & Wentling, R. (2007). The relationship between national culture and the usability of an e-learning system. *International Journal on E-learning*, 6(1), 119-146.
- Adesoye, A. E., & Amusa, O. I. (2011). Investigating the information needs of sandwich and part-time students of two public universities in Ogun State, Nigeria. *Library Philosophy and Practice*. Retrieved from <http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/~mbolin/adesoye-amusa.htm>
- Agbonlahor, R.O., (2008). Individual characteristics as correlates of attitudes to information technology among Nigerian university lecturers. *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science*, 18(2), 131-146.
- Awodele, O., Idowu, S., Anjorin, O., Adedire, A., & Akpore, V. (2009). University enhancement system using a social networking approach: extending e-learning. *Issues in Informing Science and Information Technology* 6, 270-283.

- Davis, F. D., (1993). User acceptance of information technology: System characteristics, user perceptions and behavioral impacts. *International Journal of Man-Machine Studies*, 38(3) 475-487. doi:10.1006/imms.1993.1022
- Ekanem, B. I., Olasode, B. J., & Jumbo, G. (2009). Web-based used learning as an important bridge in information divide in contemporary practice of pathology in the developing world: Findings from Nigeria. *Internet Journal of Third World Medicine*, 8(2), 10.
- Enuku, U. E., & Ojogwu, C. N., (2006). Information and communication technology (ICT) in the service of the National Open University in Nigeria. *Education*, 127(2) 187-195.
- Fabunmi, M., (2005). Historical analysis of educational policy formulation in Nigeria: Implications for educational planning and policy. *International Journal of African and African American Studies*, 4(2) 1-7.
- Infoplease. (2011). Nigeria: Geography. Retrieved from <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0107847.html>
- National Population Commission Nigeria. (2011). Nigeria's over 167 million population: Implications and challenges. Retrieved from <http://www.population.gov.ng/>
- National Universities Commission. (2011). Universities in Nigeria. Retrieved from http://www.nuc.edu.ng/pages/universities.asp?ty=3&order=inst_name
- Ofulue, C. I., (2011). Survey of barriers affecting the use of information communication technologies (ICTS) among distance learners: A case study of Nigeria. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 12(3), 142-154.
- Oguzor, N. S., (2011) E-learning technologies and adult education in Nigeria. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 6(4) 347-349.
- Okiki, C. O., (2011) Information communication technology support for an e-learning environment at the University of Lagos, Nigeria. *Library Philosophy and Practice*. Retrieved from <http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/~mbolin/okiki3.pdf>
- Okore, A. M., (2011) Demographic and socio economic attributes as determinants of information and communication technology use for scholarly communication in Nigerian universities. *Library Philosophy and Practice*. Retrieved from <http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/~mbolin/okore.pdf>
- Olusola, A. J., & Alaba S. O. (2011). Globalization, information and communication technologies (icts) and open/distance learning in Nigeria: Trends, issues and solution. *The Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 12(3), 66-77.
- OPEC. (2011) Countries producing oil. Annual statistical bulletin 2010/2011 edition. Retrieved from http://www.opec.org/opec_web/static_files_project/media/downloads/publications/ASB2010_2011.pdf
- UNESCO. (2008). The development and state-of-the-art of adult learning and education national report on Nigeria. National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education. Retrieved from http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/INSTITUTES/UII/confintea/pdf/National_Reports/Africa/Africa/Nigeria.pdf

******SAVE THE DATE******

 **Presidents' Forum**



10TH Anniversary Annual Meeting of the Presidents' Forum

"Scanning the Horizons for Distance Learning:

Extending Access to Knowledge, Employment and Prosperity"

Hosted by the Presidents' Forum and United States Distance Learning Association

October 8, 2013 (Tuesday)
8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

U.S. Chamber Commerce Hall of Flags
1615 H Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20062

Join national experts who are influencing policies in the academic and distance education arena to examine and discuss the evolving promise and policy issues associated with distance learning. Connect and interact with colleagues, providers and technology academicians and business professionals who are grappling with defining the next steps to safeguard the institutional and academic integrity of online learning providers while re-doubling efforts to reach visioning means to reach under-served and under-skilled learners.

Information: http://www.usdla.org/2013_policy_forum/

info@usdla.org 617-399-1770