

## ANALYSIS OF THE INVENTORY AND OPERATION OF THE OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING EDUCATION THROUGH ICT IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*Distance learning, which allows learners to study at their own pace and in their own style, has been a major mode of acquiring needed education all over the world. With advances in information and communication technology (ICT), distance learning has become synonymous with ICT mediated learning (popularly referred to as e-learning), one of the basic pillars that support open and distance learning today. This study, therefore, took a comprehensive inventory of the Nigerian Universities that have a full open and distance learning programme and examined the structure and the mode of operation of the programmes in relation to the policy document of the Nigerian University Commission on distance learning. This aspect of the study was to establish the extent to which Nigerian universities have exploited the opportunity provided by ICT to engineer and sustain overall development through education. The study also investigated the administrative capacities and competence in running the programmes through in depth interview of the members of the administrative unit set up for the operation of the programmes in different Nigerian Universities. The study also interviewed a sample of the current beneficiaries of the programmes across the Nigerian Universities that run the programme in order to determine the quality assurance and learners support services structured in the programme in the various Nigerian Universities. The study established that Nigerian Universities are yet to take the advantage of the ICT for engineering and sustaining national development through education. The few universities that claim to have open and distance learning programmes could not be considered as meeting best practices in running distance learning programmes. The failure in this regard is attributed to the non-availability or poor infrastructural facilities that could support the full implementation of open and distance learning programmes. The study primarily recommends that there should be a match between the policy and practice of Open and Distance Learning in Nigeria in a way that will ensure global best practices.*

**Keywords:** Development, Open and distance Learning, Education, Information and Communication Technology, Inventory, Operation

### Introduction

The formal education system supposed to be one of the ways in which people could be encouraged to adopt new ideas and beliefs, and therefore the best route to attaining national or sustainable development. It supposed to be through education that mass literacy

could be achieved. Indeed, various participatory studies have consistently confirmed that the best way to attain development and, and through which individuals can escape poverty and for halting the transmission of poverty across generation, is education (Watkins, 2000). As Watkins (2000) also noted, development now is associated with new economy driven by knowledge and skills acquisition. Thus there is an utmost and urgent need for African countries to increase opportunities for the educational attainment of individuals if they are to compete successfully in the fast pace of market economies, and thereby consequently achieve development and eradicate poverty and dependence (World Bank, 1999). It is the educational attainment that will enhance skills acquisition for individuals in the developing nations, which, will in turn, increase national growth since national growth, according to Watkins (2000), largely depends on education and not really on the stock of capital and natural resources. So failure to raise the educational attainment of their population will not only cost developing countries in terms of national growth, it will also widen the gap between them and developed countries, making it more difficult for them to catch up (Watkins, 2000). Indeed, it is through higher education that information, skills and knowledge that can drive development are provided to individuals in society (Morss & Murray, 2005). Thus, education, particularly higher education, is a tool of change and development. It is the means through which an individual in a society is open to change or innovation, and through which they aspire for better life.

Invariably higher education in Africa is becoming elusive to the majority of people that desire to have it. This is as a result of the limited access to such education. In Nigeria for example, about 1.7 million school leavers seek admission into Universities for higher education annually. Out of this, only 10% have the opportunity of gaining admission into the University of about 128 in number (Nick, 2013). The only means of elevating this problem is in the provision of alternative access through Open and Distance Learning Education. Meanwhile, the number of Nigerian universities that provide this opportunity is not known, and thereby it is difficult to assess how the Nigerian Universities have been able to exploit Information Communication Technology in implementing robust open and distance learning programmes that will not only provide access to the majority of Nigerians that desire to go for higher education, but that will also bring about sustainable development.

### Objectives

To this end, this paper aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- (i) To establish a comprehensive inventory of the Nigerian Universities that run full Open and Distance Learning programme.
- (ii) To examine the structure and the mode of operation of the open and distance learning programmes in relation to the Nigerian University Commission's policy.
- (iii) To investigate the administrative capacity and competence of Nigerian Universities to run the open and distance learning programmes.
- (iv) To establish the extent to which Nigeria Universities have exploited Information Communication Technology to engineer and sustain development through education.

### Research Questions

- (i) How many Nigerian Universities run full open and distance learning programme?

- (ii) What are the structure and the mode of operation of the Open and Distance Learning programmes in relation to the Nigerian University Commission's policy?
- (iii) What is the nature and level of the administrative capacity and competence of Nigerian Universities to run the open and distance learning programmes?
- (iv) To what extent have the Nigerian Universities exploited Information Communication Technology to engineer and sustain development through education?

#### Review of Pertinent Literature

Open and Distance Learning education is a process in which a significant portion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and time from the learners (Creed, 2001). Indeed, it is a form of organized education and learning process that is based purely on the use of teaching and learning materials provided to students outside the traditional mode of learning in classes for the purpose of removing constraints of learning associated with the traditional mode of education such as access, entry, place, pace and method of study. It is on this basis that UNESCO (2007, p. 7) has defined open and distance education as an "open 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". Keegan (1999, p.23), perhaps, has provided one of the most comprehensive definitions of distance education by highlighting its six basic defining elements. He observes that distance education is characterized by: the separation of learner and tutor as opposed to face-to-face teaching; the influence of an educational organization which distinguishes distance education from private study; the use of technical media, e.g. print, audio, or website to unite tutor and learner; the provision of a two-way communication so that the student may engage in dialogue with the tutor; the possibility of occasional meetings for purposes of interaction and the self-directed nature of the learner's involvement.

From another perspective, Freeman (1997, p.1) considers open education as "...a system where learners are substantially responsible for their own learning but are still formally enrolled in a system which includes other learners. In this regard, Freeman (1997, p.2) provided three basic types of open learning systems. These include, self-paced individual-based system, where the learners learn at their own pace. The major constraint in this type of open education, according to Freeman (1997), is that learners would be at different points in their courses and there is limited student-tutor contact, even if there is any. It also includes paced campus-based system, where study term or semester is followed. According to Freeman (1997) it also includes paced home-based system, where all learners are at the same point in their courses at the same time. This makes it possible for the organization to send out course materials to everyone at the same time. Deadlines for assignments and assessment dates can be fixed for everyone. So, open and distance learning is a distinct and coherent form of education, which is focused on new delivery method with a unique pedagogical philosophy (Levy, 2003) that emphasizes student-centeredness (Mudasiru, 2006).

Scholars seem to have agreed on the rationale and invariably the advantages of open distance learning. Gunton (2003) argued that distance and open learning is increasingly becoming a preferred means of enabling governments to increase access to education. It is

thereby, to them, the veritable means of responding to demands of equity of opportunity to participate in learning and meet the ever-changing human resources needs that could possibly set any nation onto the road of development. Thus the greatest advantage of open and distance learning is in its provision of opportunity for those who could not gain admissions into institutions of higher learning or those that are already gainfully employed to gain higher skills and knowledge with which they could add to the value of development of their society. For the government and educational policy makers, according to Nwaocha and Inyama (2012), the system is a panacea for the perennial problem of provision of equitable and accessible education in an affordable and cost effective way. So, in a way, it raises the internally generated revenue of higher institutions of learning, but more than that, it helps in producing manpower with little stress, and in attaining mass literacy (Borishade, 2007).

The achievement of the objectives of open and distance learning is now remarkably easy owing to the integration of the Information Communication Technologies (ICT) in its process, method and delivery. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) uses the term ICTs, or Information and Communication Technologies, to describe: "...the tools and the processes to access, retrieve, store, organise, manipulate, produce, present and exchange information by electronic and other automated means. These include hardware, software and telecommunications in the forms of personal computers, scanners, digital cameras, phones, faxes, modems, compact disc (CD) and digital versatile disc (DVD) players and recorders, digitised video, radio and TV programmes, database programmes and multimedia programmes" (UNESCO, 2003, p.20, Anderson, 2003 p.8). Therefore, open and distance learning is, essentially, being delivered in this new era of technological advancement, using a variety of print and electronic systems either through synchronous communication (learning in which all parties participate at the same time) or through asynchronous communication (learning in which parties participate at different times). The main systems are mediated by correspondence, audiovisual means (television and radio), multimedia (audio and text files), and the Internet.

Meanwhile, the integration of ICT into open and distance learning process and delivery, which is determined by a combination of factors such as political, administrative, organizational, strategic, cultural and professional, essentially, actually determines the degree or extent of the success of open and distance learning in different environments for entrenching and strengthening developmental goals (Carril., Mercedes., Nuria., 2013). Moore and Tait (2005) considered the arrays of factors as referring to the elements of the structure of open and distance learning that determine whether or not the system of education can strengthen and support the developmental aspiration of a nation. Such elements, as identified by Moore and Tait (2005), include strategic planning, administration, staffing and training, control and monitoring for quality, policy, organization and culture, course development, support structure, teaching and learning, processes and challenges. According to the template that Annie (2013) developed from a study of literature on the organization of open and distance learning process, to make open and distance learning successful in supporting developmental aspirations, its establishment, organization and delivery must be based on four basic stands of attention, including strategy, policy, systems

and challenges. As is explained in the template, open and distance learning must be built on noble goals, vision, mission and mandate; it must have a structure built on a system of ICT, support services, financial services, sound human resources and teaching and learning method, and challenges of infrastructure must be eliminated. This, no doubt, is likely to be a big challenge and problem of implementing open and distance learning education in developing nations like Nigeria. Various studies on the implementation of open and distance learning in Nigeria have documented challenges that connect with the elements in Anne's template. Nwaocha and Inyama (2002) for example, classified such challenges into internal and external factors. As will be discussed shortly, this study confirms many of such challenges or problems impairing the successful implementation of open and distance learning education in Nigeria.

### Open and Distance Learning in Nigeria

The need for an open and distance learning education has always been recognized in Nigeria for the overall development of the nation through which poverty could be eradicated with equal opportunities to education by all Nigerian citizens. Therefore, open and distance learning is not a recent initiative in Nigeria. According to Akinpelu (1982), the Department of Adult Education at the University of Ibadan began a distance learning programme in 1960. He stated this began as a correspondence that pilot test open and distance learning in science subjects with a view of extending it to other areas of study and professional that needed on the job training. As the programme expanded, it was redesigned and renamed as 'Correspondence Courses Leading to University Degrees and Diplomas'. This initiative, according to Owoeye (2004) was motivated and cued by the British Correspondence Programmes that had been conducting correspondence courses for interested Nigerians through 'Rapid results' as well as others where courses in business related subjects and administration were obtained. University of Lagos took the same cue from Ibadan to begin a correspondence that started as a Unit, the Correspondence and Open Studies Unit (COSU), in 1973. Open Studies Unit (COSU) in turn was to transform a decade later in 1983 into the Correspondence and Open Studies Institute (COSIT), with the granting of the latter with some measure of autonomy and enhanced scope of operations.

Although open and distance education began as a correspondence programme in Nigeria, it changed in forms and formats as it was growing in popularity and demand. It took the form of sandwich programme to enable teachers and professionals on the job to gain higher skills and certificates; part time teacher training programme (PTTP), National Teachers Institute (NTI), conventional universities designing dual mode of learning consisting of distance education and conventional classroom teaching and learning, and eventually Open University System (Adebayo, 2007).

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) was first launched in 1983 but was suspended in 1985 by the military government. President Olusegun Obasanjo re-launched it in 2001 and NOUN is currently providing instruction for some 60,000 students as at 2002 (UNESCO, ODL Paris 2002 report). Indeed, NOUN is the first fully fledged university that operates in an exclusively open and distance learning (ODL) mode of education. The University focuses mainly on a distance teaching and learning system, and delivers its

course materials via print in conjunction with information and communication technology. The National Open University of Nigeria currently has 23 study centers, which are stratified into the six geopolitical zones of the nation.

The justification for the adoption and popularity of open and distance learning is premised on the need to provide all Nigerians equal access to education in order to stimulate national growth and development, which is in line with the main objective of the National Policy on Education. The objective indicates that "maximum efforts shall 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, e-learning and work study programmes" (FRN, 2004). A report from the National Universities Commission (NUC) indicates that Nigerian conventional university system can only accommodate only 20 percent of the 1.5 million applicants that vie for a place in Nigerian universities every year. A more simple statistics puts it that only 18 candidates out of every 100 applicants for university education are able to obtain admission yearly into the limited number of federal institutions in Nigeria. This statistics demonstrates the limited access that Nigerians have to higher education. It also confirms UNESCO's view that if developing nations are to rely solely on traditional or conventional methods of delivering higher education, the objective of education for all is far from being achieved in any reasonable time-frame. As Moore and Tait (2005) had suggested, a developing nation like Nigeria needs to find new methods that will dramatically improve both its children's schooling and its continuing education system. Nigeria has then recognized that the way forward is to make greater use of open and distance learning, whether in the form of print-based distance learning courses, interactive radio, computer-based learning or web-based learning. As Moore and Tait (2005, p. 19) noted "these methods offer more education for the same unit of resource, easier access and higher quality than can be obtained by traditional methods in countries with poorly financed education systems". Perhaps this is why the National Universities Commission (NUC) has stipulated as a matter of policy that students enrolment into the open and distance learning mode of tertiary education is set at 35 000 students by 2015. The extent, in terms of quantity and quality, to which Nigerian universities have keyed into this objectives of stimulating nation growth or development by expanding access to higher education through open and distance learning that is supported by ICT is the focus of the study this paper is reporting.

### Methodology

This study adopted a combination of descriptive survey and in-depth interview. The descriptive survey was used to take an inventory of the Nigerian universities running ODL programmes, taking a count (simple quantitative/frequency) of such universities. This was carried out by administering a simple telephone questionnaire on the principal officer in the Academic Unit of all Federal and State universities. The questionnaire consisted of simple open ended questions that interrogated the principal officers on whether or not their universities run Open and Distance Learning programmes. In-depth interview was adopted to examine (qualitatively) the quality of the ODL programmes in the Nigerian Universities running such programmes in terms of their adherence to the NUC's policy document on ODL, organization, mission, structure, mode of operation, student support and other



services, challenges. It was also intended to establish whether or not such programmes contribute to the development aspiration of the country by exploring the extent to which the programmes provide access to higher education as well as quality education that can raise the standard of manpower development for national growth. The interview was conducted for selected respondents that included staff in charge of the Open and Distance Learning programmes in the selected universities and students running the programmes in the universities.

A total of 49 respondents were interviewed in this study. The respondents in this study was this small because the study adopted qualitative approach that does not require large sample so as to facilitate the management of the thick data that can emanate from such approach. Seven respondents – four staff and three students - were selected from each of the seven main Nigeria University running a full Open and Distance Learning programme for the interview. So, the participants in the interview included essentially the principal officers in charge of the programmes and students running the programme in each of the seven Nigerian universities running a full open and distance learning programme. The interviews with the participants were also conducted through telephone. The participants, particularly the students, were selected through snowballing process. In other words, the participants that were interviewed were selected through a network that involved a principal officer in each of the selected universities introducing the researcher to three students running the programme in his or her university.

## Findings and Discussion

### Research Question 1: Inventory of the Nigerian Universities running Open and Distance Learning programmes

Findings from the inventory of the Nigerian universities running open and distance learning establish that, out of the 104 universities in Nigerian university system (27 Federal, 36 State and 41 Private), as at the time the field work was conducted, there is only 1 registered (National Open University of Nigeria - NOUN) single mode (ODL dedicated) university and six other dual mode universities running open and distance learning education. The six registered dual mode institutions are: University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, ObafemiAwolowo University, University of Abuja, Ahmadu Bello University and University of Maiduguri. Student enrolment in the dual mode universities stand at 50,000 students, while the National Open University of Nigeria has an enrolment of about 70,000 students. Meanwhile, more than 90 percent of other Nigerian universities are proposing to begin the dual mode system of higher education by applying for NUC accreditation.

Table 1: Enrolment in the Nigerian universities running open and distance learning programmes

Universities	Enrolment	Percentage
National Open University of Nigeria	70,0000	58%
University of Ibadan	10,000	8%
University of Lagos	15,0000	13%
ObafemiAwolowo University	8,0000	7%
University of Abuja	7,0000	6%
Ahmadu Bello University	5,0000	4%
University of Maiduguri	5,0000	4%
Total	120,0000	100%

Source: Field Work: 2012

Table 1 shows that a relatively small number of Nigerians are being given access to education through ODL because a few Nigerian universities are running such programme. Besides, the few universities running ODL are able to admit only few students perhaps because of their limited capacities. The implication of this finding is that Nigeria is yet to optimize or has not fully exploited the use of open and distance learning mode not only for enhancing access to education, but also for human capacity development and overall development of the nation.

Nevertheless, the current position of the NUC is that, apart from NOUN (the single mode ODL dedicated institution), all Nigerian universities intending to run open and distance learning should reapply for accreditation, including the already six existing and registered dual mode institutions identified earlier. This new directive, as found in this study, was motivated by the wide gap existing between policy and practice of open and distance learning, and by its objective of seeking to bring ODL practice to comply with the global best practices. Some of the attributes of the best practices, as stipulated in the NUC reviewed guidelines, include philosophy, admission, curriculum, pedagogy, learning resources, evaluation and assessment, staffing, learner supports, resources, and employer feedback.

As is confirmed by this study, open and distance learning that is being practiced presently in Nigeria does not conform to the desired attributes of the best practices in ODL, thereby diminishing its values for engendering human capacity building and consequently national development. As it stands currently, there is a wide gap between the noble desire of using ODL to assist in national development and its practice. The current practice of ODL in Nigeria could be rightly described as an analogue style of ODL, which can be largely considered as part time or correspondence study. Apart from the University of Lagos that is found to be close to delivering ODL in line with the best practices and NUC guidelines, others, even including the dedicated ODL University (NOUN), are not adequate in many respects.

Research Question 2: The structure and the mode of operation of the open and distance learning programmes in relation to the Nigerian University Commission's policy



Only few of the NUC policy guidelines are implemented in the delivery of open and distance learning in the few Nigerian universities running ODL, thus a failure to adequately exploit it for true national development in terms of quality manpower or human capacity development. The majority of the students that were interviewed confirmed that there is little or no face to face intervention. Even at the national open university of Nigeria that operates study centers, there is little or no face to face class room lectures, rather the study centers serve as a socio-support mechanism. However, student in all the universities running open and distance learning programme, have limited access to ICT. This is in contravention of NUC policy guideline. As it is also confirmed by the students, students are provided well written study guide and resources, and the guides are adequately interactive, comprehensive, accessible and contemporary. However, the guide line on the ratio of 1 lecturer to 50 students is not generally and adequately implemented in all the universities that were studied. Information and Communication Technology is also not found to be adequately used to deliver open and distance learning education and this has reduced the quality and frequency of feedback on assignment and examination. As one of the students interviewed put it,

*Open and distance learning education in Nigeria is absolutely unimpressive. Like me in the National Open University of Nigeria, the initial belief with which I entered for the programme was that I would be having the opportunity of meeting a facilitator regularly, but I can tell you that I am disappointed because third year into the programme, I have not met a single facilitator even for once. What I deal with every semester is a pack of material that I found difficult to digest and then appearing at the end of the semester for examinations. This has not really helped in improving the quality of education we receive through the programme. Even when we are made to believe that we will be having interaction through ICT, I have actually not experience this as well except that I get my assignment online.*

The summary of the view of the students on the operation of ODL in Nigerian universities is summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2: View of students on the dimensions of operation of open and distance learning programmes in Nigerian Universities

Operation Dimensions	Views of Students		Total
	Yes	No	
Face-to-face intervention	19 (90%)	2 (10%)	21 (100%)
Access to ICT	15 (71%)	6 (29%)	21 (100%)
Interactive Resource Materials	20 (95%)	1 (5%)	21 (100%)
Ratio of 1 lecturer to 50 Students	17 (81%)	4 (19%)	21 (100%)
Use of ICT to deliver ODL	19 (90%)	2 (10%)	21 (100%)

Source: Field Work: 2012

Research Question 3: Administrative capacity and competence of Nigerian Universities to run Open and Distance Learning programmes

The Results of the interview with the administrative staff of the seven Nigerian universities running ODL, including NOUN, established that, on paper, all the universities have sound efficient administrative structure for their ODL in terms of mission, vision, policies, processes, and learner support services, and particularly, use of ICT. However, in practice, the universities confirmed the inadequacies of the structure to achieve the noble objectives of using ODL for initiating sustainable development. The failure in this regard is attributed to the non-availability or poor infrastructural facilities that could support the full implementation of open and distance learning programmes.

For example, the senior staff of the ODL at ObafemiAwolowo University who was interviewed noted that:

*Our ODL is fantastic as we try to operate it in line with the global best practices. There are occasional visit of instructors to the receive centers for personalised attention, tutorials and conduct of examinations. The University has also put in place quality control mechanisms that will ensure the standard of the programmes and sustain the quality of university education as prescribed by National Universities Commission (NUC), the Nigerian Education Regulatory Agency. So we can say we have adequate capacity to run the programme. Notwithstanding the issue of general infrastuctural problems in the country is a big hindrance to ensuring best delivery of open and distance learning education. (6, December, 2012).*

The interviewee from the University of Lagos (28, January, 2012) disclosed that the mission of the Institute of Distance Learning at the University of Lagos is to provide opportunities for higher education for those already in some gainful employment; to widen and diversify access to a flexible, innovative and cost-effective system of education to the ever increasing number of learners who, either did not have the opportunity of University education or for some other reasons cannot engage in full-time studies. The philosophy on which the Institute is founded is premised on the concept that it is to the ultimate advantage of a nation if as many of its people as possible who are qualified are given the opportunity of obtaining University education, especially if such people are already in some gainful employment. As the interviewee noted, the mission is being pursued with a strong administrative structure and sound learner support with adequate use of ICT.

However, students running open and distance learning in the university as well as in other six ODL Universities refuted the above claims, noting that in practice, the structure on ground for ODL is inadequate, and sometimes, not even available. According to one of the students:

*There is no doubt that the University (UNILAG) has a good plan and structure for its ODL programmes, but the plan is not working as it is expected or desired. There is little or no learner support. Students have to struggle to register, to access course materials and it is like you are on your own. Although ODL is an independent learning process, students must have access to all facilities and must be directed and support to make the whole learning process interesting and rewarding (13, January, 2012).*

#### Research Question 4: ICT and its Deployment in the ODL programme.

The claim of one of the senior staff at Obafemi Awolowo University on the deployment of ICT in the running of open and distance learning programme is revealing, though controversial. The claim is briefly encapsulated in the following quote

*OAU Distance Learning draws on the historical strength in curriculum development and competent academic staff for the moderation of courses, and we also possess unparalleled experience in the area of information networking technology. The Centre is currently on 96 mbps by 512 mbps dedicated internet link through VSAT. Following the establishment of the University's Information Technology and Communication Unit (INTECU) in 1996, the Centre is connected to the campus-wide network through a dedicated fiber optic link, OAUNET, which extends internet connectivity to locations throughout the extensive campus. Center for Distance Learning possesses a core of highly qualified technical personnel in different aspects of Computer and Communication Engineering and available infrastructure, Collaborative Environment, and rich content linked to educational goals. The Distance Learning Programme at Ife uses a multimedia technology that supports electronic instructional delivery mode (e-learning), as well as independent learning or correspondence. The technology permits the transmission and reception of lectures and instructional packages in form of text, graphics, audio and video formats and viewed online by students in classroom settings at remote receive centers. With easy-to-use internet access software such as Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment (MOODLE), students can retrieve lectures and assignments, and during the class, students have the opportunity for real time interaction with distant instructors using a combination of email, computer conferencing and chat (6 December 2012).*

As strong as the administrative structure of University of Lagos (UNILAG) Institute of Distance Learning is, which is the closest to the framework of NUC, as entrenched in its reviewed guideline for ODL, a majority of the students of the programme (about 65%) who were interviewed disclosed that the use of ICT for the delivery of the programme is inadequate. It is their opinion that the programme still remains a form of correspondence and part time programmes because little online course materials are available. As one of the students noted

*As it were, the programme is useful only to the extent that it provides a shortcut to obtaining certificate, which is most valued in Nigeria of today, and not the skills acquisitions that can make Nigeria attain sustainable development. Distance Learning as is being provided is no more than the old correspondence programme or part time programmes where little or no ICT is deployed for quality and quantity course content that can develop the beneficiaries and the nation as a whole (8, February, 2012).*

A similar opinion is expressed by a cross section of the students (about 70%) of the National Open University of Nigeria. Although the University has comprehensive course contents online, and a good administrative structure with study centers spread across the regions of

the country, real and independent learning through the course contents is not practicable because the University provides little or no learner support.

Interrogating the factors that might be responsible for the inadequacies in the use of ICT for ODL in Nigeria as well as the failure of the administrative structure of the programme, which looks sound in all the universities involved in this study, the study identified some external and internal factors that need to be given attention if ODL is to be run to attain sustainable development in Nigeria. As one of the interviewees in this study put it:

*ODL, in real sense, and in relation to adequate use of ICT for its quality delivery for human development, cannot be run successfully and effectively in Nigeria until certain infrastructures are put in place. Such infrastructures include power and high and extensive fibre optic internet connectivity. Our ODL will remain nothing but a mere part time programme, or at best, correspondence programme, if power outage persists unfixed and if the digital divide remains widening. Even if the ODL institutions claim to use ICT to use adequately, can we be sure that students are able to access their course materials when they have to deal with epileptic power and internet supply.*

The above opinion seems to summarize the challenges of ICT in open and distance learning for sustainable development in Nigeria. It, indeed, corroborates Obemeata's (2000) conclusion in his study on the problems of implementing ODL in Nigeria that the use of ICT is the bane of the operation of ODL in Nigeria and this is as a result of the infrastructural problems in the country. This, indeed, corroborates Obemeata's (2000) conclusion in his study on the implementation of ODL in Nigeria.

### Conclusion

Open and Distance Learning has been proved to be the veritable method that can offer more education for the same unit of resource, easier access and higher quality than can be obtained by traditional methods in countries with poorly financed education systems. It is the best way to extend opportunities for individuals to develop themselves and thereby contribute to the sustainable and overall development of their country through increased skill acquisition and human or manpower development. However, only few universities in Nigeria are providing such opportunities. Besides, open and distance learning programme, as it is being practiced presently in Nigeria, does not conform to the desire attribute of the best practices in Open and Distance Learning programme as it is entrenched in the National University Commission. This thereby diminishes the value of open distance education for engineering development in Nigeria. The failure of open distance learning education in its operation and ability to engineer development is attributed to certain inherent infrastructural privations in developing nations like Nigeria, such as power and internet deficiency. This, of course, constitutes major challenges to the use of ICT for proper and adequate delivery of open and distance learning.

As it were, Open and Distance Learning in Nigeria merely provides a shortcut to obtaining certificate, which is most valued in Nigeria of today, and not the skills acquisitions that can make Nigeria attain development.

## Recommendations

Based on the major findings above, the researchers in this study recommend the following:

- (i) All Nigerian universities should start and operate open and distance learning as a dual mode along with their conventional face to face mode of delivery to take full advantage of ODL in expanding the access of all Nigerians to quality higher education for the main purpose of increasing manpower or skill acquisition that can engineer and strengthen the country's match towards development
- (ii) The operation of such ODL should be tightly built on adequate use of ICT
- (iii) There should be a match between the policy and practice of ODL that should be in line with global best practices
- (iv) Learners should be provided with regular and proper support in areas of registration, access to course materials, advice and counseling so that they will not be left absolutely alone in their learning process
- (v) Quality concerns in ODL should be addressed through the administration of end-of-semester exams that are administered in face-to-face settings.

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