

TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED DISTANCE EDUCATION: AN INNOVATION BASED STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT VIA QUALITY TERTIARY EDUCATION

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Abstract

Demand for tertiary education in Nigeria has become unprecedented in recent years. Globally, Open and Distance Education mediated by technology has been used to improve access to education. In Nigeria, Open and Distance Education (O.D.E) has a rich history from colonial period to the establishment of National Open University of Nigeria, the National Teachers' Institute and now Distance Learning Centres being set up in conventional universities using technological innovations. This paper provides a conceptual framework and a historical exposition of Open and Distance Education in Nigeria. It expounds the developmental stages of O.D.E and challenges faced by O.D.E implementation in Nigeria. The paper posits the critical position of technology enabled Distance Education as an innovation-based strategy for African sustainable development. The paper recommends the creation of a National Policy on Open and Distance Education and makes a case for an Open and Distance Education regulatory agency to regulate the practice of both open education and Distance Education in Nigeria to make it at par with Global Best Practices.

Keywords: Open and Distance Education, ICTs, Technology-enabled Distance Education, Innovations, Sustainable Development

Introduction

Education plays a key role in human development. It has been seen as an important tool in the development of any human society, which perhaps makes true the saying that, no nation can rise above the quality of education its citizens receive. The United Nations Development Programme (1991) describes development as a process that goes beyond the improvement of quality of life: it encompasses better education, higher standards of health and nutrition, poverty reduction, cleaner environment, increasing access to and equality of opportunity, greater individual freedom, and the facilitation of a richer cultural life, which are all truly desirable ends in themselves. Indeed, the right to education for all was enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights over sixty years ago (UNITED NATIONS, 1948). It is therefore, not surprising that many countries are making concerted effort to ensure that all their citizens have the opportunity to be educated. This is in line with the recent notions of "Education for All (EFA)", the "Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the notion of lifelong learning (UNESCO, 2002) all of which place emphasis on global commitment to provide quality basic education for all children, youth and adults alike (Kabir, 2016). According to Aderinoye and Ojokheta (2004), education is the key that unlocks and protects the full spectrum of human rights. The link between education and development plays a key role in determining the direction and intervention policies of development agencies like the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), British Council, Literacy Enhancement Assistance Program (LEAP), and many others.

The number of accredited Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Nigeria as at March 2016 was 434 (Kabir, 2016). Within the last two years however, the number has risen to 590: The

National Universities Commission (NUC) website listed 40 federal universities, 44 state universities and 68 private universities as accredited degree-granting institutions at end of 2017; The National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) recognized 107 polytechnics, 27 monotechnics, and 220 colleges; and The National Commission for Colleges of Education (N.C.C.E) recognized 84 teacher training colleges in Nigeria at end of 2017 (WENR, 2017). But in spite of this increasing number of tertiary institutions in Nigeria, the problem of access has not been resolved, as less than 20% of eligible candidates gain placements into these institutions yearly (NUC website). International agencies like UNESCO, UNICEF and World Bank; and governments all over the world have been making serious commitments to make education accessible to the citizenry and thus eradicate inequalities, poverty, hunger and higher level deprivation in educational endeavors, through Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) projects. Indeed, in order to achieve these goals, a lot of attention and priority has been given to the Open and Distance Learning programmes as stated in UNESCO (2002, p. 10) that open and distance learning will be an important innovation in future educational systems.

The Concept of Open Education and Open Learning

The idea of opening opportunity for education is an old one and has emerged in different ways in different countries, but the particular connection to distance education that can be documented, can be traced directly to the American visionary, Charles Wedemeyer. Kabir (2016) explained that Wedemeyer promoted a simple but powerful belief that, access to education should be and could be "open", with his realization that conventional face-to-face instruction would not be sufficient to attain the vision of providing access to education for all, unless the barriers of time and space associated with face-to-face teaching are removed. Wedemeyer thus popularized the concept "distance education", which he called "independent study".

Distance education, has indeed evolved from a philosophy called "Open learning" or Opening access to education (UNESCO, 2002). The concept "Open learning" refers to the aim of opening up education or access. Perraton (2007) defined Open learning as: "an organized educational activity, based on the use of teaching materials, in which constraints on study are minimized either in terms of access, or of time and place, methods of study, or any combination of these" (Perraton, 2007, p. 8).

According to Biao (2012), Distance education is a process whereby an individual or institution packages information in a learnable way with the view to helping another individual or group of individuals to learn at a distance. In line with the general aim of education, distance education employs all available media, methods and techniques to enable learners access needed information at a distance (Biao, 2012).

Yaya, (2006) cited a definition of Open Learning provided by The South African Institute of Distance Education (SAIDE) as:

An approach which combines the principles of learner centeredness, lifelong learning, flexibility of learning provision, the removal of barriers to access learning, the recognition for credit of prior learning experience, the provision of learner support, the construction of learning programmes in the expectation that learners can succeed and the maintenance of rigorous quality assurance over the design of learning materials and support systems (p. 60).

According to UNESCO (2002), it is not coincidental that many distance education institutions call themselves "open" universities, for example, the Open University of Hong Kong, the Open University of Tanzania, and the Open University of United Kingdom. However, the

concept of "open learning" should not be confused with distance education. Open learning is a philosophy aimed at widening access and personal choice in learning, in contrast, "distance education" refers to a form of delivery.

The Role of Nigerian National Policy on Education in Distance Education

The Nigerian National Policy on Education, 2004 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004) and the recently revised edition of the N.P.E (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013), regard education as a vital tool for achieving National Development. The National Policy on Education (N.P.E) has over the years recognized the place of open and distance learning as an innovation that will promote lifelong education and it also affirms that lifelong education shall be the basis of the nation's education policy.

Section nine of N.P.E (2004) equivalent to section six of the revised N.P.E (2013) (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013) states the goals of ODE as follows:-

- (a) To provide more access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied;
- (b) To meet special needs of employers and employees by mounting special courses for employees at the workplace;
- (c) To encourage internalization especially of tertiary education curricula;
- (d) To ameliorate the effect of external and Internal brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing Nigerian experts as teachers regardless of their locations or places of work;
- (e) To encourage life-long learning opportunities (p 34).

Subsection 116 of the revised NPE (2013) further stated that, "In pursuance of these goals, the Federal Government shall: ensure that programmes for open/distance education are equivalent in structure and status to those offered by conventional face-to-face mode of delivery in the appropriate tertiary educational institution; encourage and regulate open/distance education practice in Nigeria; and strengthen the existing coordinating agencies on Open/Distance Education.

History of Distance Education in Nigeria

(i) Early History

A comprehensive history of D.E in Nigeria thus dates back to the correspondence education as a means of preparing candidates for the General Certificate in Education, a prerequisite for the London Matriculation Examination. Kabir (2016) explains that the University of London has been termed the first "Open University" because of this move, students all round the world, were soon looking for tutorial support to supplement the bare syllabuses which they received on registration. UNESCO (2001), stated that the earliest recorded Nigerian 'distance student' sat for a University of London Matriculation examination by correspondence in 1887. However, in post-independent Nigeria, new home-grown correspondence courses were produced to complement the formal system, which could not meet increasing demand for access to education at all levels. Aderinoye and Ojokheta (2004) had stated that in spite of the establishment of the University College Ibadan in 1948, many of the pioneer academic staff of the University pursued their higher degrees through Distance learning mode, thus combining work with higher degree programmes.

Terhemba (2007) stated that in Nigeria however, the first indigenous distance education programme was probably the English by Radio programme of the Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation that followed independence in 1960. Terhemba (2007) further stated that Ahmadu Bello University Zaria had also operated a variant of distance education by pioneering the distance teaching of Grade III and Grade II teachers with a view to helping

them qualify for the next higher grade. The programme, which was mainly by correspondence, was termed Teachers-In-Service Education Programme (TISEP). COL (2001) also reported ABU's extensive use of radio and television to reach farmers via The National Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Services (NAERLS) programmes on crops, livestock, poultries, fisheries, and home economics.

(ii) Initial Attempts at formalizing Distance Education

The idea of a formalized D.E was conceived by the Department of Adult Education of the University of Ibadan and presented to the Senate of the University in 1976. Hence, the present-day Distance Learning programme started first as External Degrees and later changed to External Studies programme of the Department of Adult Education in 1988. The Centre's website stated that in order to keep pace with global developments, the name of the Centre was changed from Centre for External Studies to Distance Learning Centre in 2002, and that since inception, the Centre has graduated over 4,000 students (University of Ibadan, 2013).

The University of Lagos also has a well-defined programme of distance education. According to Terhemba (2007), its Correspondence and Open Studies Unit (COSU) was established in 1972, to offer courses to a much wider public than is possible through regular residence-based methods. The University of Lagos COSU, has been upgraded into an institute and renamed Correspondence and Open Studies Institute (COSIT) and later, University of Lagos Distance Learning Institute, as a result of incorporating Distance education techniques and its being accredited by the NUC.

The Centre for Distance Learning of Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), was established in August 2002, and charged primarily with providing qualitative tertiary education via the Open and Distance Learning mode to two categories of Nigerians: the teeming number of Nigerian youths who possess the requisite qualifications but are denied admission owing to problem of access; and working class people who are desirous of pursuing sub-degree and degree programmes while still retaining their jobs (University of Ife, 2013). The Centre's website further stated that the Distance Learning Programme in OAU uses 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 audio and video formats, viewed online by students in classroom settings at remote receive centers. OAU also uses Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment (MOODLE), where students retrieve lectures and assignments, and during the class, students have the opportunity for real time interaction with distant instructors via computer conferencing and chat.

The National Teachers Institute (NTI) Kaduna is regarded as the first independent institution dedicated solely to D.E (single mode D.E Institution) in Nigeria. This according to Terhemba (2007), marked the beginning of a new era of D.E delivery in Nigeria. UNESCO (2001) further stated that the NTI being the only dedicated distance teacher education institution has been providing print based courses to in-service primary teachers since 1984. The NTI has the responsibility of expanding the number of primary teachers and upgrading all unqualified teachers, and hence producing qualified teachers needed for the implementation of the UPE programme introduced in 1976 and the UBE programme introduced in 1999 (NTI handbook). Aderinoye and Ojokheta (2004) argued that the NTI has justified its *raison d'être* because over a period of eight years the institute contributed immensely in the growth of primary education teacher graduates from 45,150 to over 300,000:

To offer similar programmes, and much more, the University of Abuja established its Centre for distance Learning and Continuing Education in 1992. The aim of the Centre was to increase access to a large number of citizens interested in furthering their education.....Unlike the conventional methods, D.E is designed to democratize and liberalize education so as to facilitate the pursuit of knowledge without sacrificing one's career." (COL, 2001)

A number of international agencies which include: UNESCO, COL, LEAP have assisted several distance education institutions in the African region to develop and train their staff. For example, UNESCO and the COL lent their expertise in the establishment of the National Teachers Institute. Some other benefitting institutions according to Aderioye and Ojokheta (2004) included: the University of Ibadan, University of Abuja DLC and A.B.U Zaria, Sudan Open Learning Organisation (SOLO); various teacher training and tertiary institutions in Gambia, Zambia, Ghana, and Mozambique, and the launch and continuing support for the Virtual University in Kenya (The University Twinning and Networking Scheme (UNITWIN)). Today, the UNESCO Chair is the main source of exchange programmes taking place between the developing and developed institutions.

(iii) The National Open University of Nigeria and further developments

The National Open University of Nigeria is an Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institution, the first of its kind in the West African sub-region. Yaya (2006) stated that the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) was initially established on 22nd July 1983 but was suspended on April 25, 1984. However, the NOUN re-opened in 2001 and commenced its programmes in 2003/2004 session, it is at the moment the only single mode D.E full fledge University in West Africa. The NOUN was reopened due to the problem of access to tertiary education in Nigeria, because according to NOUN website, there were approximately 1.5 million applications per year trying to secure admission into universities while the Nigerian University system could only accommodate twenty percent of this number. Olulobe, Ubogu and Ossai (2006) reported that course delivery of the Open University is through a combination of web-based modules, textual materials, audio and video tapes as well as CD ROMs. The NOUN website further stated that the National Open University of Nigeria dedicates itself to preparing professionals in various disciplines through the distance learning mode by offering qualifications from Certificates, Diplomas to Post Graduate Diplomas and Degrees, designed to increase the access of all individuals to formal and non-formal education in a manner convenient to their circumstances.

Despite the enormous goodwill enjoyed by the NOUN after its take off, it was realized that NOUN was not doing enough to satisfy the ODL yearning of the Nigerian populace. This led to agitations for the establishment of more O.D.E Institutions in Nigeria and at the same time putting pressure on conventional Nigerian Universities, to run various degree and sub degree programmes by Distance Learning mode and hence increase access to tertiary education.

Another serious challenge was disagreement on the body that should be responsible for regulating O.D.E in Nigeria, and as COL (2001) put it, up to the first decade of the millennium, the practice of O.D.E in Nigeria was comatose. For Terhembe (2007), it was a case of many players in a field with no regulatory body. NOUN came into proper operation in 2003, but it was not until 2011 when the NUC ODE unit was created, that NOUN had the semblance of a regulatory body. Kabir (2016) reported that there is a unit in NUC responsible for carrying out some regulatory functions ((Kabir F.S (Interviewer) and Ikani D. (Interviewee), February 25 2013). However, it was argued that NUC had

neither a proper guideline, nor the statutory mandate to cover such functions, as stated by the then Minister of Education, Mr Sam Egwu during a Two-Day Advocacy Workshop held in April 2009 (NUC, 2009). The NUC Monday Bulletin, also quoted a report by the Vanguard Newspaper of 7th May 2009, stating that the Executive Secretary of NUC, Professor Julius Okojie refuted the Education Minister's claim, saying: "NUC has regulatory responsibility over all University Institutions in Nigeria including NOUN". NOUN argument was that, as an Open University which operates single mode ODE system, it should have a separate regulating body, while the NUC continues to regulate dual mode institutions.

(iv) Creation of the Department of Open and Distance Education, NUC

The Department of Open and Distance Education was established on the 26th of July, 2011 "as part of efforts of the National Universities Commission to tackle the perennial challenge of inadequate access in the Nigerian University system through the promotion and enthronelement of best practices in the delivery of quality university education using the instrumentality of the ODL mode" (NUC website, 2013). In addition, the NUC Guidelines (2009) had reported that only lip service was being done with respect to ODL for many decades in Nigeria despite statistics that show serious demand for ODE and also various reports that culminated in a "Ten year Developmental Plan for Distance Education in Nigeria". Indeed it was in response to the lip service, and with the Nigerian Government not coming up with a "Distance Education advisory body" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004), that NUC established the Open and Distance Education Department with the mandate of regulating ODE practice so as to make it at par with global best practice (NUC, 2013). In line with the vision and mission of the Department of Open and Distance Education, the major functions of the Department, according to the NUC website, include:

- (i) Promote and coordinate the orderly mainstreaming of the open and distance learning mode of delivering university education in Nigeria;
- (ii) Set and regulate the standard of open and distance learning practice in the Nigerian university system (NUS) in line with the provisions of the "Guidelines for Open and Distance Learning in Nigerian Universities"
- (iii) Advise the Federal Government of Nigeria on the desirability and conditions for the establishment of degree-awarding ODL institutions and academic programmes in Nigeria;
- (iv) Facilitate and strengthen the development of institutional and professional capacity for sustainable deployment of the ODL mode in the NUS;
- (v) Collaborate with appropriate Departments in the Commission to ensure the delivery of quality university education by the (ODL) mode;
- (vi) Liaise and collaborate with appropriate institutions in the public and private sectors within and outside Nigeria to ensure that the standard of ODL programmes and practice in the NUS are consistency with global best practice; and
- (vii) Engage in any other activities that will facilitate the optimization of the ODL mode in enhancing access to quality university education in Nigeria.

Since its creation, the Department of D.E has accredited five Nigerian universities to run Distance Learning programmes. The Ahmadu Bello University Zaria and Ladoko Akintola University were approved in 2016 and 2015 respectively. The Lagos State University secured its approval in early 2018. Within the last three months, Joseph Afe Babalola University and University of Nigeria Nsukka have also joined the fray of D.E delivery by securing NUC accreditation (NUC website, 2018). The Department of Open and Distance Education however, had earlier reviewed and certified activities of Nigerian universities already offering Distance Education prior to its creation. These universities include:

University of Lagos, Obafemi Awolowo University, University of Ibadan, the Federal University of Technology (renamed Modibbo Adamawa University of Technology) Yola, the University of Maiduguri and University of Abuja. This brings the number of universities with Distance Learning Centres to eleven. These institutions are all running as dual-mode D.E Institutions. At the moment, many Nigerian Universities including sixteen private universities have applied for license to offer Distance Education and are awaiting approval by NUC.

The DLC, Ahmadu Bello University, is indeed using innovative approaches in its delivery. Having started with one programme, the Masters in Business Administration, it uses technological innovations such as structured courseware, a Virtual Learning Environment (or LMS), the use of webinars for tutorial and address to students, and a 24/7 user support using technology, to mention a few. Indeed the A.B.U story is a success story with over 2,000 MBA students enrolled on the M.B.A programme, they have recently secured approval to run four undergraduate and one Post graduate Diploma programmes.

Challenges of Open and Distance Education in Nigeria

The domain of Open and Distance Education in Nigeria is indeed saddled with many challenges. The first and major challenge is absence of a national ODE policy. Aluede, Idogho and Imonikhe (2012) had stated that in Africa, there is a general lack of ODL policies. While governments authorize and license conventional and non-conventional tertiary institutions to dispense ODL programmes and courses, there are no national policies to guide the practice of the ODE system. Subsequently, the operation of those programmes end up being contrived by the sometimes inappropriate actions of regulatory agencies (Biao, 2012).

Additionally, Distance Education in Nigeria is delivered mainly by the traditional print media. For example, the use of electronic media in distance education in Nigeria, to the best of the researchers' knowledge was sparse. Of recent however, a shift in favour of electronic delivery has been noticed. For example, the use of VLE by A.B.U Zaria and university of Ibadan. Kabir (2016) also stated that some ODL institutions in Nigeria run solely on printed materials with minimal face-to-face meetings. Even radio and television as used in China Television University (CCTVU), United Kingdom and other nations, have not been fully embraced in Nigeria, apart from the NOUN which offers some lessons via these media.

The third challenge is the skepticism of the quality of graduates produced through the ODE system. Biao (2012) stated that there is a general suspicion on the quality of education received via distance learning due to inappropriate quality control of the programmes. Barasa (2011) further opined that the dearth of ODL quality assurance frameworks is another of the challenges faced by the African ODL environment. In Nigeria, graduates of the NOUN are not accepted for the National Youth Service. Also, the Nigerian Bar Association does not induct graduates of the NOUN into the Nigerian Bar. Indeed enforcement of quality assurance in ODE programmes will ensure parity of quality and parity of esteem with those run by the conventional mode.

A fourth challenge is that of relevance of ODE programmes. A guideline is needed such that ODL institutions do not replicate the programmes of conventional universities. There are also challenges of dearth of trained personnel, who have studied the Open and Distance Learning System. Biao (2012) stated that within ODL institutions in Africa, only a negligible portion of this personnel ever received formal training in the philosophy and principles of ODL. In Nigeria for example, none of the ODL Institutions offer a degree in ODE.

A serious challenge concerns the low level of utilization of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) within the area of ODL in Africa. Olusola and Alaba (2011) stated that ICT is yet to be fully integrated into distance and open education in the country due to factors such as: low ICT skills, poverty, epileptic supply of electricity, political bottlenecks, poor economy, culture, constant changing traditional values and language barrier. Indeed the steady supply of electric power is critical for successful utilization of ICT-based strategy in Distance Education.

In addition to all the above challenges, the challenge of lack of appropriate supervisory body is, for this author, the most critical challenge the practice of Distance Education faces at this period of its development. Many of the stakeholders in ODE believe that the National Universities Commission (NUC) does not have the mandate to regulate *all the actors in Nigerian O.D.E delivery*. NUC's mandate is to regulate conventional Universities which run a completely different structure from Distance Education.

The Need for Open and Distance Education Agency in Nigeria

The National Policy for Education, (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004) and the reviewed National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013), have since recommended the establishment of a distance education advisory and supervisory body. The essence of such an agency, is to among other benefits, bring the standard of Nigeria's D.E up to date with world standards where technology is integrated into D.E. The current practice where the National Universities Commission (NUC) regulates D.E practice is technically deficient as it lacks the mandate to regulate institutions such as NTI and Polytechnics who may wish to start running distance learning programmes. Having a separate institution that regulates O.D.E in Nigeria will promote the cause of D.E in the country, harmonize the regulations irrespective of the primary institution, and provide an avenue to create more awareness on the suitability of using appropriate technologies in distance education. Policy makers in a Distance learning system have to understand issues such as 'transactional distance' and create appropriate structures to reduce them, for the Distance Education system to be successful.

Yaya (2006) clearly stated that the National Open University of Nigeria, which is the only open institution in Nigeria is functioning as a D.E institution. The NTI, as the only single mode D.E teacher training Institution in Nigeria, suffers worse fate as discussed by Yaya (2006), because it does not have a regulating agency, or at worse, it is supervised by the NCCE, which is meant to supervise conventional colleges of Education. It is little wonder that the NTI is getting the whole concept of D.E delivery all wrong. As it is now, NTI delivers many of its programmes by lectures at weekends. This is a misnomer to the concept of D.E.

In addition to these, the process of accrediting universities to offer D.E is at the moment a cumbersome process, where it takes the National Universities' commission years to accredit a single institution. This has contributed to slowing down the resolution of the perennial problem of 'improving access'. In many other countries in the world, both developing and developed nations, ODE has separate accreditation agencies. Some few examples include: Distance Education and Training Council (DETC) in the United States, Distance Education Council (DEC) in India and Open and Distance Learning Quality Council (ODL QC) in the United Kingdom (Kocdar, 2012). The DETC is a national accrediting commission, specifically accredited by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and the US Department of Education to accredit only, or predominantly distance education institutions, both at school and post-secondary levels, including institutions that grant degrees (kilfoil, 2006). Kilfoil (2006) further stated that, in South Africa the CHE/HEQC is responsible for conducting

institutional audits and accrediting programmes, and they have entered into a contract with the South African Institute of Distance Education (SAIDE) and the National Association of Distance Education and Open Learning Organisations in South Africa (Nadeosa) for the purpose of accrediting Distance Education Institutions.

It has often been argued that in Nigeria, the disagreement of NOUN on its regulating body, is one of the fundamental reasons for the problems facing NOUN as the only Open University. Section 93 of the revised N.P.E (2004) required the Federal Government to "Establish an Open/Distance Education advisory body", but to date no such body has been established. The NUC is saddled with the responsibility of supervising an open university, for which it has no statutory mandate. The NTI suffers a worse fate because it is supervised by the NCCE, which is meant to supervise conventional Colleges of Education, and lacks the corresponding supervisory instrument which the NUC has been able to put in place. Most recently, on 16th July 2018, Nagarta Radio news broadcast reported the Executive Secretary of National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) Kaduna, Dr. Mas'ud Kazaure, stating that they are ready to start running courses in polytechnics by D.E mode of delivery. In the not too distant future Colleges of Education and other tertiary institutions will have to join in D.E delivery. Hence there is an immediate need for the establishment of an O.D.E supervisory body as clearly stated in the revised N.P.E (2004).

Conclusion

Open and Distance Education (O.D.E) has evolved as one of the most important educational innovations in Nigeria dating back to the days of correspondence education. Indeed, O.D.E, if well planned and implemented, will lead to achievement of greater access to tertiary education in Nigeria and the African sub region. It is indeed, one of the greatest educational innovations of the 20th century and remains the primary mechanism for sustainable development in an information-driven age, a tool that has the potential to bridge the gap between developed and developing communities and hence the digital divide. Advanced economies have integrated the D.E Model into their educational system, but in Nigeria there is a lot of feet-dragging with this respect. However, successful implementation of ODE will only be achieved if the right policies are created with adequate quality assurance, the right technologies are used, courses suited to ODL delivery are offered, and more especially if the sector is availed the required supervisory agency which, among other things ensures that world standards in the practice of D.E are adhered to. These would go a long way in increasing access to university education. Indeed the 21st century offers a lot of internal and external opportunities through which developing nations such as Nigeria, could use open and distance education as an innovative tool for sustainable development.

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