

ICTs and Distance Education in Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

Advances in information and communication technologies (ICTs) have posed complex problem for colleges and universities in Nigeria especially in their distance education programs (Ololube, 2006). Improving the quality of education through the diversification of contents and methods and promoting experimentation, innovation, the diffusion and sharing of information and best practices as well as policy dialogue are UNESCO's strategic objectives in education (UNESCO, 2002, 2005). As such, information and communication technologies (ICTs) literacy rate have become key tools that have a revolutionary impact on how we see the world and how we live in it. This phenomenon has given birth to the contemporary and advances in our ways of life. ICTs are having a revolutionary impact on educational methodology. However, this revolution is not widespread and needs to be strengthened to reach a large percentage of the population through distance education. In a complex society, many factors affect distance education. Hence an interdisciplinary and integrated approach is very necessary to ensure the successful development of Nigeria's economy and society (Mac-Ikemenjima, 2005).

The academic landscape in Nigeria includes the teaching and learning process, along with the educational programs and courses and the pedagogy or methodology of teaching; the research process, including dissemination and publication; libraries and information services; higher education administration and management, and distance education programs (Beebe, 2004). According to the national policy on education, in Federal Republic of Nigeria (1989), higher education refers to post-secondary section of the national education system which is given in universities, polytechnics and colleges of technologies including such courses as are given by colleges of education, correspondence colleges and such institutions as may be allied to them. The terms

of references for these institutions of higher education through the national policy on education are:

- The acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value-orientation for the survival of the individual and society.
- The development of intellectual capacities of individuals to understand and appreciate their environments
- The acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to develop into useful members of the community
- The acquisition of an objective view of the local and external environments (p. 22)

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) through its national policy on education detailed that the goal of distance education should be to:

- Provide access to excellence education and equity in educational opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied.
- Meet special needs of employers by mounting special certificate courses for their employees at their work place.
- Encourage internationalization especially of tertiary education curricula.
- Restructure the effect of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing Nigerian experts as teachers regardless of their locations or places of work (p. 45)

Thus, the federal government is convinced that for higher education to make optimum contribution to national development, ICTs are essential ingredient to foster its implementation. Though, the integration of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in distance education programs in Africa has not been encouraging and has been the topic of a good deal of debate globally. Although in Nigeria, the relationship

between the development of ICTs penetration and use in distance education programs and its diffusion into the programs in higher education is dependent upon a number of factors.

BACKGROUND

Regardless of the fact that there are relatively abundant researches on distance teaching and learning, studies on the impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs) on distance education in Nigeria are sparse. However, the use of ICTs by higher education institutions across the world is beginning to emerge fast over the last decade. Higher education institutions across the world have been adopting ICT teaching and learning technologies in an effort to create an environment for both students and their instructors to engage in collaborative learning environment and gain access to information (Ifinedo, 2006).

As such, every nation invests in education because it can produce unquantifiable benefits for individuals, organizations and the society as a whole. Education is provided through formal and informal means. In formal settings the conventional (face-to-face school instruction) and distance education (offered with separation in terms of physical location of instructors and students) have been used to provide educational opportunities to recipients. Open and distance education though not new in Nigeria has been given much prominence of recent. Many Nigerians benefited through the open education (correspondence) of Rapid Result College, and Exam Success Correspondence College, among others. It is also a means of providing access to basic information and tertiary education for Nigerians (Yusuf, 2006). Notwithstanding the keenness by the federal and state governments to guarantee open and distance education in Nigeria, the use and penetration of ICTs in distance education teaching and learning has been a major obstacle that may impede proper implementation of the program by institutions of higher learning. The evidence seem glaring that Nigeria is not yet ready in her preparedness to integrate ICTs in all spheres of her national economy.

For example, a recent study conducted by the Global Information Technology (2005), the report used the Networked Readiness Index (NRI), covering a total of 115 economies in 2005-2006, to measure the degree of preparation of a nation or community to participate in

and benefit from ICT developments. Nigeria was ranked 90th out of the 115 countries surveyed. United States of America topped the list, followed by Singapore, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Canada, Taiwan, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, etc. Likewise, Nigeria was ranked 86th out of 104 countries surveyed in 2004 which still shows a decline in Nigeria's preparedness to participate in and from ICT developments. Similarly, 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 (Iromanto in Yusuf, 2006).

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are indispensable and have been accepted as part of the contemporary world especially in the industrialized societies. In fact, cultures and societies are adjusted to meet the challenges of the knowledge age. The pervasiveness of ICT has brought about rapid changes in technology, social, political, and global economic transformation. However, the domain of distance education has not been unaffected by the penetrating influence of information and communication technology. Unquestionably, ICTs has impacted on the quality and quantity of teaching, learning, and research in distance education. Therefore, ICT provides opportunities for distance education students, academic and non-academic staff to communicate with one another more effectively during formal and informal teaching and learning (Yusuf, 2005). For this reason, distance education programs in Nigeria need to integrate ICTs into their agendas, because the quality of teaching using ICTs to gain access to information is known in virtually all countries to be a key predictor of quality student learning. Therefore, effective manpower training is crucial using ICTs, because ICTs are tools that on the one hand can facilitates human resources development, and on the other hand, helps us to take full advantage of the potential of technology to enhance quality student learning via distance education (UNESCO, 2003).

THE NATIONAL OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

The National Open and Distance Education University of Nigeria (NODEUN) first began in 1983 but was suspended in 1985 by the then military government. The resuscitation of NODEUN is part of the commit-

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