**Problems of Distance Education: implications for Teacher Education in Nigeria.**

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**ABSTRACT**

Education is a highly valued Instrument for National development and the Philosophy and Objectives of education in Nigeria is stipulated in the National Policy on Education. This has been the bedrock of any educational process in the country. In open and distance education, the mode of teaching is the one in which the learners are removed in space and time from the teacher. The goals of distance education in Nigeria are; provide access to quality 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 workplace, encourage internationalization especially of tertiary education curricula, ameliorate the effect of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing Nigerian experts as teachers regardless of their locations of places or work.

Distance Education in Nigeria is therefore providing opportunities to millions of individual who would not have been in school, workers and reduce brain drain through continuous professional development. Globalization has also brought lots of changes in socioeconomic life of many individual; this requires tackling with different forms of education, if the individual needs to strike a balance between the world of work and the world of education. While Teacher Education is geared towards quality planning and development of teachers. According to the Nigerian National Policy on Education (2004), the goals of Teacher Education are: produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational system: encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers: help teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and make them adaptable to changing situations: provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background for their assignment and make them adaptable to changing situations: enhance teachers, commitment to the teaching profession. The quality of teacher education is further

promoted by compulsory assessment of student teacher on field. The potency of the acquired pedagogical skills taught is tested because practicalizing of teacher's knowledge is very hard to be tested out of sight. This study therefore examined the problems confronting Distance Education in Nigeria and highlights its implication for Teacher Education. The author argues that the problems of Distance Education must be highly considered before Distance education will be involved in teacher education especially in Nigeria.

**Key words: Distance Education, Teacher Education, Problems, Nigeria**


**Introduction**

In Nigeria, University of Ibadan, Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) University of Nigeria Nsukka, and the University of Lagos (UNILAG) were required to attend to the tertiary education needs of the population, especially within their respective 'catchment' areas. Since the Nigerian population was, and still is, mainly rural and agricultural, extension courses were to provide farmers new skills to introduce them new methods. ABU and the University of Ibadan were early providers of such extension services (early to mid 1960s). However, the clientele of the University of Lagos was urban, and extension courses there were geared towards the attainment of university and professional courses. Currently and as a part the University's entrepreneurial thrust, distance education courses contribute significantly to UNILAG's resources. At ABU, the need to upgrade teachers' qualifications and skills became a prime objective since, by the late 1960s and early 1970s; it was obvious that the northern part of Nigeria was lagging far behind the rest of Nigeria in this area. Thus, ABU's Institute of Education introduced the Teacher In-service Education Programme (TISEP) to raise the quantity and quality of teachers in Northern Nigeria. At the end of TISEP studies, candidates sat for Grade III or Grade II Teachers Certificate. Later, when the National Council of Education ruled the National Certificate of Education (NCE) to be the minimum qualification for teaching at primary level, the Institute Started the NCE by correspondence programme.When in 1974, the then Head of State (Yakubu Gowon) announced Government's intention to introduce Universal Primary Education by 1976, it was clear that there was insufficient time to produce the estimated number of teachers to cope with demands of the programme. (FME 2000). Distance education was considered the best means of supplying the required number of teachers, since then, it has been produced

teachers for education system. Distance education is a term which has been defined in various ways depending on the perception or geographic location or objectives set out to be achieved by the author. Creed (2001) defined distance education as "an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone far removed in space and/or time from the learners". This implies that education is provided to people who are separated from their teachers by location, workplace, and space/time. Mudasiru (2006) definition of distance education "as a term to describe the student centeredness of distance education and it deals with the uses of print and electric technologies to present individual lessons to learners at a distance" focuses on the student itself, reaching at his/her pace, with the success of the programme. Suen and Parkes (2003) indicate that distance is the most unique feature of distance education - i.e. the educator and the learner are physically separated from each other by time and place. This has a number of implications for learning and assessment processes. The learner is isolated from resources, support and peers. This lack of contact requires motivation, the retention of motivation was supported by the Working Group on Distance Education and Open Learning (2002) when they argued "that distance students, who study without the provision of quality support from the institutions are unlikely to be successful. Butcher and Hope (2001) recommended utilization of a mentor either formal or informal.

Distance education has been variously known as 'correspondence study', 'home study', 'off-camps study', 'distance study', telematic teaching', 'extra-mural study system'. Distance education is the provision of education by a mode other than the conventional face-to-face method but whose goals are similar to, and just as noble and practical as those of on-campus full-time, face-to-face education. Distance education may be full-time, part time, graduate and undergraduate certifications and continuing education. It accommodates diverse learning styles, provides access to remote and normally inaccessible under-represented groups such as women, as well as persons in rural and remote locations (Federal Ministry of Education 2000).

**The objectives of distance education in Nigeria are to:**

(a) Provide access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied;

(b) Meet special needs of employers by mounting special certificate courses for their employees at their work place.

 (c) Encourage internationalization especially of tertiary education curricula.

(d) Ameliorate the effect of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing Nigerian experts as teachers regardless of their locations of places of work. (NPE 2004)

The characteristic of distance education include: learner taking greater control over what to learn and when to learn it. Even though the teachers are responsible for packaging and facilitating students' learning, teacher-student face-to-face contact constitutes a minor part of the learning process. The multi-mode approach, using several media for facilitating teaching and learning is a trademark of effective distance education. *The only current example of a dedicated distance* education institution in Nigeria is the national Teachers' Institute (NTI), which falls outside of the University System. However, the establishment of an Open University is a key component of a renewed government commitment to developing distance education programmes at the tertiary level of education (UNESCO 2001) States that the world needs better teacher and more teachers. The Dakar conference revealed that there were still more than 100million children out of school; they need teachers as the world moves towards the 2015 target of Education for All. And we need to raise the skills of the existing 60million teachers; too many are untrained and unqualified. Based on this demand for teachers, Distance education became actively involved. The National Teachers Institute in Nigeria have long experience of this approach and have become a recognized and part of the education system in the country (UNESCO2000).The objective of this paper is to critically look at the problems of distance education and the implications for Teacher Education in Nigeria.

**Problems of Distance Education**

There are many problems that impede the success and quality of distance education. These include the following:

 **1) Problem of electricity:** This is the pivot on which the success of distance education rotates, it is meant to supplies power to its consumers, but this is not the case in Nigeria as the reliability and adequacy is being hindered by various factors. Most of the generating stations are over twenty years and are now obsolete; they no longer operate at their

maximum installed capacity. The spare parts for these machines/generators are now difficult to get. This results to low generation which now gives rise to massive loader shedding which in effect leads to outage. The end result is socioeconomic life of the citizens are affected. Moreover, Nigeria has Poor Maintenance culture, neglect of these generators over the years due to poor financing limits carrying out necessary routine/preventive maintenance on regular basis. The gas pipes supplying gas to the generating station are constantly vandalized by the Niger-delta militants. This gives rise to shutting down of some stations. The inability of N.E.P.A. /P.H.C.N. to grow with time by making adequate provisions for expansion in area of installations and investing in solar energy has also contributed to the problems. The power supply, transmission and distribution line in Nigeria are run over-head and are therefore subject to various situation, for instance, lightening, high winds, vegetation and bush burning. This cause the line to trip, moving vehicle may hit and break an electricity pole or run into a roadside distribution transformer and feeder pillar, this leads to power interruption.

Many rural areas do not have electricity and the areas that do have, the supply is epileptic. The problems need government urgent intervention for electricity is very important to the success of distance education, because of massive use of resource materials like internet, radio, television, print media, fax, e.t.c. The television and radio stations both private and Nigeria television Authority (NTA) can reach millions of people irrespective of their geographic location but disruptive problems of incessant power outages in the country will pose a limiting factor (Osuji1981, Akinyemi 1986). Radio being the cheapest, the endemic power outages in the country poses a limiting factor to the extent to which the radio can be used effectively to broadcast educational programme… The problems of electricity in most cases is presented as if it is a minor issues, it is really not as easy as they paint it to be, to effect these repairs and changes, absolute political will must be involved.

**2). Lack of libraries:** These are made up of educational resources which include "those materials made up of books, audio visual software, audio visual hardware and other pedagogical materials used in teaching and learning processes (Ogunsola, 2004). These resources are also in forms of publications, periodicals, manuscripts, newspaper, diaries and other forms of works in print. Research finding of Ali (2008), reported that for some

strange and unexplained reasons, none of the 2distant learning centers had a library or negotiated with the owners of the centre for beefing up some sections of the existing secondary school libraries at these two locations, to enable their students use the sections. Indeed, the 2 libraries at these centres are out of bounds for the distance learning students. In addition to the lack of Library facilities, instructional materials such as pictograms, instructional/teaching modules, Maps, Video tapes, reference books, course outlines, computers, etc, were not provided for lecturers to use. This is a pitiable situation for an educational system that produces 21st century teachers. Libraries constitute store house of knowledge therefore students should  be availed the opportunity to attain more knowledge…(Osuji, 2005).Etuk in (1993) recommended, the federal and state governments should encourages the creation of the position of literacy librarians in our public libraries and saddle them with the responsibility of initiating meaningful programme for those who, as a result of poverty, learning deficiency or physical or mental disability continue to live under the handicap of functional literacy. Libraries can enhance the quality of students produce by distance education, through provision of information which increases knowledge.

3). **Problem of inequality in the society:** The social impact of technology change is difficult to predict or foresee. Often, far from improving the quality of life or expectations of the powerless and the poor, the application of technology functions in strange and unexpected ways to reinforce the worst problems of inequality. The digital divide that polarizes the technological "haves" and "have-nots" separates the "wired world" from that without access to this technology and within developing countries, those who have the requisite levels of literacy and computer skills to make use of the internet and other communications technologies from those who do not have income, education, age, ethnicity, language and gender separate people who have a reasonable hope of making use of electronic communications from those who have little or no hope whatsoever**:** (Hellman 2000-2005). The poor state of the nation's economy has pauperized most Nigerians. Even an average middle income earner cannot afford basic technological and communication gadgets. Thus, computer related telecommunication facilities might not be useful for most Nigerians as computer skill is a luxury in institutions, offices and homes. This may make the integration of necessary on-line resources (e-mail, newsgroups, world-wide-web, etc) into

distance education in Nigeria difficult (Yusuf 2006). The key challenge is to ensure that the broad vision of Education for All as an inclusive concept reflected in national government and funding agency policies which posits that Education for All... must take account of the need of the poor and the most disadvantaged, including working children, remote rural dwellers and nomads, and ethnic and linguistic authorities, children, young people and adults affected by conflict, HIV/AIDS, hunger and those with special learning. (Dakar World Educational Forum in April 2000), is neglected.

**4). Cost of Distance education:** Financial involvement in accessing distance education technology is enormous. The cost of a personal computer (PC) and laptop are still very high in Nigeria considering the income level of an average worker in the country. Few students that are privileged to have a PC/Laptop are not connected to the internet as this do attract extra cost of accessing internet is still very high in west Africa. It is as high as $8/kbps, while it costs a ridiculous amount of $0.52/kbps in North Africa and even lesser in Europe. Students make use of cyber café who charges between #100.00 and#150.00 per hour despite, their poor service and slow rate of their server, (Ajadi, Salawu and Adeoye, 2008).

**5). Dropout rate:** Distance education programme has shown high rate of drop-out. This is very alarming as it shows a "sign of stop over course" The figures from Col International (2001) have been presented in table 1, below to enable easy comparison.

Table1: Comparative Analysis of Enrolment and drop-out rate of Distance Education Students

| Years | Enrolment rate | Drop-out rate | % |
|-------|---------------|---------------|---|
| 1994-97 | 7,324 | 1977.48 | 27 |
| 1995-98 | 7,581 | 2274.3 | 30 |
| 1996-99 | 8,398 | 2939.3 | 35 |
| I997-2000 | 8,521 | 3323.19 | 39 |

Source: Igbafe, E.C. (2009) Figures adapted from Col International (2001).

From the table 1 above, the pattern of enrolment and drop-out rate is shown. Distance education programme has steadily rising enrolment; however, these are matched

by significant drop-out rates. **Reasons given for high drop-out rate include**: inability of trainees to afford course materials; time needed for other income-generating activities; disruption to the studies of female trainees as they follow a re-located husband; demands of busy farming periods at examination time (especially in the Northern states like Sokoto and Kano):inappropriate workload; late delivery of materials because of poor postal services; Long distance travel to study centres; failure to participate in the practical teaching element (a compulsory part of the course);low pass rates in assignments and tests; poor quality of learner support.(C.O.L International 2001).

6). **Poor societal perception**: The society has poor perception of distance education. Distance learning is regarded by students and ministries of education as a second rate system used to offer a shadow of education while withholding its substance. It is an inefficient but cheap way of containing educational demand without meeting it. It helps insulate the elite system from pressures that might otherwise threaten its status or ways of working. (Perraton 2000)This has great negative effect on the students' self-esteem.

7). **Counselling services**: Students tend to engage in distance education without the skills needed for independent learning. Therefore they need an adequate support system which will provide them with the relevant environment to develop the required skills...students in remote areas, have little or no access to communication devices and technology, irrespective of location, learner have different needs. Moreover, as the programme progress many students face challenges that requires the services of a competent qualified counsellor. Distance education needs strong support service for their students.

8). **Lack of qualified teachers**: Education of teachers requires well trained and efficient teachers to teach its specialized subjects. To have been trained to teach does not imply that you can teach in e-learning. Just because teachers have teacher qualifications does not necessarily prepare them to be e-teachers...(Campbell 1997 cited in Adejimi 2008) .Few expects available require constant retraining to keep abreast of the fast rate of technologies changes (Ogili 2008).Distance education lack qualified teachers to teacher such courses.

9). **Problem of Postal services:** The problem confronting distance education is mainly street delivery of course materials by postmen on house to house basis, the effectiveness of the services depends on the road network, weather,the name and number of the street. Postal services are unreliable and irregular in some areas of Nigeria which is a major

drawback in the network system. This makes learners travel long distance to centres of distribution with economic implication etc. (Holmberg, 1989).

10). **Problem of infrastructure:** Some of the centres are not equipped while some are poorly equipped, In a research carried out by Ali (2008)  none has large classes of  the centres   has large halls that could properly accommodate large classes of about two hundred students or more.. Small rooms were partitioned to allow for 2classes holding simultaneously, this resulted in over-crowding and some students standing outside the classes for lectures. Lecture periods have to stagger because of the pressure on the use of studios, workshops and laboratories. The operators as Okebukola (2001) pointed out were more interested in the economic gains which they hoped to derive rather the provision of qualitative education. Ipaye(2005)  reported the satellite outreach campuses was grossly abused, university education became instantly bastardized, standards were low, there were no discernible admission qualifications, there seems to be no regard for quality in terms of staffing, facilities, carrying capacities, entry requirements, curriculum and the minimum standard.

**Implication for Teacher Education in Nigeria**

The problems of Distance Education have a number of implications to Teacher Education.

- The Federal, State and Local government should liaise with N.E.P.A. /P.H.C.N. to achieve the objectives stated in the National policy on education. Distance education method depends extensively on electricity supply from writing to printing. Moreover, they can make arrangement to manufacture special batteries with longer lifespan or solar energy radios for distance education students to use for aired programmes.

- Distance education administrators should create libraries for its students, as a self-study form of learning, libraries provides conducive reading environment, acts as motivator, increase attention, improve study habits and desire for research.

- Distance education students should be provided scholarships or subsidized course material, especially the disadvantaged.

- The quality of teachers teaching distance education students should be academically and professionally qualified persons. The administrators should

bear in mind that the quality of teaching staff, determines the quality of teachers produced and quality of education that exists in the country. Teachers should be provided grants to attend conferences, seminars, workshops to update their knowledge and skills.

- The quality of course materials should be well prepared, constantly updated to meet the need of self-learning. This implies course materials must be clear, interactive, relevant and unambiguous assessment materials. (Carrol, 2004).

- Awareness and advocacy can be raised to change the poor societal perception of distance education. This will reduce dropout rates and increase the self-esteem of its students.

- Telephone counselling service department should be opened at strategic areas to reduce the problem created by isolation, alienation, unpleasant experiences and other personal-social problems.

**Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to look at the problems of Distance Education in Nigeria, knowing that understanding of the problems leads to successful implementation of Teacher Education through Distance Education. Teacher education administrators, the ministries of education should pay attention to the details of each of these problems so as to produce quality teachers who can stand the test of time. The future of teacher education lies in how well distance education problems are reflected upon. The successful implementation lies on how well the federal, state and local government liaises with the National Electricity Power Authority and other relevant bodies.

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