

OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL) AS A MECHANISM FOR SUSTAINABLE FEMALE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Since the 1960s there has been rising commitment to strengthen the delivery of education in Nigeria. This interest was borne out of the desire to stress the nation's commitment to the right of every citizen to education by the year 2015. One worrying aspect of educational development in Africa including Nigeria is the disparity with regard to equal educational opportunity for girls, though it is recognized that women constitute important target groups in development programmes of the nation. The purpose of this study is to introduce readers to the subject of ODL as a mechanism for sustaining women education and therefore development. The population of the study comprises 80 female children of school age and 10 adults. They were selected at random from the streets, homes and market places in two rural communities in Edo State. These females did not have access to education and or prolonged schooling. They were gathered together three days in a week in one convenient study center where basic education course content including English language proficiency is delivered by teachers with the aid of television for a total duration of 28 weeks. The result of the study strongly recommends ODL as a strategy for sustainable female education in Nigeria.

Introduction

Since the 1960s there has been a rising commitment on the part of Government to strengthen the delivery of education in Nigeria. This interest grew out of the desire to emphasize the nation's commitment to the right of every citizen to education by the year 2015 which was stressed by the World Conference on Education for All, (Jomtien, 1990), the World Education Forum (Dakar, 2000) and the E-9 Education Ministerial Review Meeting (Beijing, 2001), buttressed by Health and the Millennium Development Goals (HMDG, 2007).

Also, getting the formal education system right is a crucial sub-goal of the Dakar agenda for ensuring access to education for all by 2015.

The Dakar EFA goals include:

- Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care
- Ensuring that possibly all children particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and ethnic minorities have access to and complete free and compulsory education by 2015.
- Meeting the learning needs of young people and adults through skills and appropriate learning programmes.
- Achieving a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy especially for women.
- Eliminating gender disparities and achieving gender equality in education.
- Improving all aspects of the quality of education so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills. (Dakar Framework for Education, 2000, Subrahmanian, R, Sayed, Y, Balagopalan, S and Soudien, C, 2003).

It is a well recognized and acclaimed statement that education is the most potent instrument for development and for mental and social emancipation (Ojo, Ogidan and Olakulehin, 2001). Education must be at the core of Nigeria's and Africa's development and poverty alleviation strategy. But the challenges of achieving education for all remain beyond the grasp of many countries including Nigeria. It is particularly so among the poorest countries located in the sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (UNESCO, 2003).

It has been observed that the majority of women and a large number of girls in Africa are still grappling with the problem of basic reading and writing skills. (UNICEF, 2003) stated that the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER, 2001) indicate that 71% of out of school children are girls, while Mahammed (2006) revealed that the literacy rate for males was 58% as against 41% for females. Nevertheless, as seemingly insignificant as the difference may appear it is not acceptable if the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) must be achieved. Indeed, of the nearly 7.3 million primary school children of school age who are not in school about 62% were girls. This is a serious indictment on the formal school system which is serviced through the conventional classroom setting which has been in existence in Nigeria since 1842.

Consequently failure of the formal conventional school system appears to have led to the need to explore the possibility of establishing an alternative and innovative approach to the

education process in order to expand quality and effective educational opportunities to individual and groups that had hitherto not been reached by the conventional system of education. Such individual and groups include women involved in the Islamic practice of *pardah*, which precludes many women from benefiting from education or from participating in economic activities. Also at a disadvantage are the migrant cattle rearers and fishermen, offshore oil workers, prisoners, and full time housewives, working women, housemaids and baby minders. ODL has the exceptional ability of meeting a number of challenges that keep girls away from school. It is against this backdrop that Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has been identified as the panacea to the perennial educational challenges of equitable access to learning, equality of educational opportunities as well as providing a second chance for those who had never been or had once been in the system but had to dropout for one reason or another.

The current trend in education reveals that within Africa, Asia, America and European countries Open Distance Learning is a strategy for the attainment of quality Education for All goals (Olayemi, 1991). It is a universal call to literacy (Okoli, 2006). The problem that faces the average woman particularly rural women in Nigeria is illiteracy. Tejuosho (2008) posited that most women were very intelligent but lacked education.

Thus the Nigerian ODL objectives include:

- Widening of access to education in order to ensure equity and equality of opportunities with emphasis on female education.
- Developing education as an instrument for poverty alleviation especially in the rural areas.
- Providing for all categories of learners avenues for the acquisition of flexible and qualitative education which will be accessible anywhere, anytime and through appropriate and cost effective medium. (FGN, 2004).

These objectives have consequently increased the pressure for a reappraisal and change in Nigeria's educational structure in order to achieve the goals of education as stipulated in the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004) and consequently to reduce the gender gap in

education, thereby ensuring access to education for all by the year 2015. The essence of focusing on access through ODL is to remind policy makers and educational managers that for many countries that have disadvantaged children and females schooling remains physically and financially out of reach.

The importance of the need for teaching and learning within and outside the school environment and the sudden rise in technological creativity in several developed and developing societies has brought Open Distance Education into limelight (Egwuasi, 2005). These technological learning facilities imply that less effort is needed to ensure education for all especially for girls whose socialization hitherto was to make them more domesticated and docile while boys, on the other hand, were encouraged to learn. Such attitudes which devote more attention to boys thereby giving them undue advantages over the girls are reproduced rather than challenged by teachers in the classroom.

Literature Review

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is relatively not a new concept. In Nigeria the history of ODL dates back to the late 1940s and 1950s, the era when education by correspondence was a means of preparing candidates for the General Certificate of Education (GCE), which was a pre-requisite for the London Matriculation Examination (Jegede, 2006; **Tait, 2003; Bell and Tigt, 1999**). Aderinoje and Ojokheta (2004) reported that Nigeria's original core of administrators and educators were products of the University of London distance learning without any formal ties to that university. Therefore Nigeria was not left out of the opportunities of ODL. But the present delivery of course content through a dynamic and

interactive communication process seemed to have introduced it (ODL) as a fairly recent innovation in education (**Edmonds, 2006**).

The concept of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) meets the Capability Approach Theory which stresses any form of learning in which the provider enables the recipient to exercise choice of what they learn, how and where they learn, how quickly they learn and when to have their learning assessed. It emphasizes freedom to carry on working and schooling as long as one is capable.

The concept of ODL is a term with no universally accepted definition. **Peratton, Robinson and Greed (2001)** define distance education as an educational process in which a significant proportion of teaching is conducted by someone far removed in space and, or in time from the learners. It (open learning) is viewed as an organized educational activity based on the use of teaching materials in which the constraints on study are minimized in terms of access, entry or time and place, pace, method of study or a combination of any of these. UNESCO (2003) stated that ODL represents approaches that focus on opening access to education and training, freeing learners from constraints of time and place and offering learning opportunities to individuals and group of learners.

Keegan (1982) defines ODL to include:

- i) The separation of teacher and student which distinguishes it from the conventional "face to face" learning.
- ii) The use of technical media usually prints for writing by both the teacher and learner and so conveys the educational content.
- iii) The provision of two-way communication so that the student may benefit from or even initiate dialogues.
- iv) The possibility of occasional meetings for didactic and socialization purposes.

It is a systematically organized form of self-study in which student counseling, the presentation of learning materials and the securing and supervision of students are carried out by a team of teachers by means of media which may cover long distances (Dohmen, 1967).

A considerable number of studies including Maki, Maki, Patterson and Whittaker (2000), Poirier and Feldman (2004) reported advantageous examination outcome for ODL students. Waschull (2000) and Kinney (2001) stated that there was no difference in performance between ODL and formal classroom based students. Hence Calvert (1986) asserted that ODL helps to extend the market for education to clients who have not been previously served with special attention. On the other hand Wang and Newlin (2000) held that students in the conventional classroom setting performed better and had higher course grades than their ODL counterparts. These studies have been carried out on ODL particularly in developed countries with their concern for ensuring and meeting the needs and rights of quality education for all.

It is regarded as schooling in the classroom without walls, extra mural studies, experimental learning, off-campus education, and open learning (Egwuasi, Etim and Obott, 2006). It creates opportunity for Life Long Learning, Life Wide Education, Adult Education, Mass and Media Education, Self Learning, Personalized Learning and Part-Time Studies.

It prepares individuals for personal development and enhancement as they manage the challenges of living and working in a diverse, global society. **Aderimoye (2001)** and Jegede (2003) asserted that open distance education removed all barriers to educational access including age, limited space structures and other restrictive laws guiding the formal education system. Indeed ODL offers millions of uncatered learning opportunities.

Aderinoye and Ojokheta (2004) posited that there are positive links between demand of education and the urge to be educated. Ofoegbu (2007) suggested that one of the ways to ensure that demand for education corresponds with growth in educational facilities is to ensure a well organized Open and Distance Learning system.

Open Distance Learning is thus a system of education that uses modern communication facilities including high speed internet connection, computers, and CD-Rom, radios and television

systems to facilitate learning process. Hence the concept of ODL suggests an educational approach designed to reach learners in their homes, offices, shops, and study centers and thus provide learning resources to enable them attain the desired goal without attending formal classes.

UNESCO (1997) stated that though most ODL programmes were targeted at the adult population they could be used for school age children and youths who were unable to attend the formal school system. **UNESCO (2002)** posited that ODL was not necessarily the most cost effective approach to education but it might be the only way to reach some target audience. In this case the reduction in the cost of education may not be an objective of ODL. Thus, the objective of ODL is to enhance the opportunities that support education for all and life-long learning and at the same time provide avenues for the acquisition of qualitative education for all categories of learners especially women. Quality education for women and girls has proven to result in better health, including reduction in infant mortality as well as lower fertility rates **(UNICEF, 1998)**.

Statement of Problem

One apparent aspect of education development in Africa including Nigeria is the discrepancy as regards equal educational opportunity for girls, though it is recognized that women are important target groups in development programmes of the nation.

Education is the primary agent for transformation and empowerment towards sustainable development, and for increasing peoples' awareness and capabilities to transform their visions of the society into reality. It is an instrument that is meant not just for some or a few but for all. Female children like male children need quality education. But unlike male children several challenges including socio-economic, socio-cultural and religious factors hinder the regular participation of women in education. Historically women have been denied access to schooling,

literacy and other educational opportunities by the use of a host of social, cultural, economic, religious and biological reasons. Hence women who constitute over 50% of the nation's population have been exploited and discriminated against and at the same time effectively denied education which is one of the fundamental human rights.

Women and girls are subjected to the indignity of child labour, early marriage, sexual harassment and life in *purdah*. When work relates to domestic and economic activities for a regular cash income girls are more likely to be involved than boys. In such cases parents are most likely to keep the girls out of school. They are invariably streamed out of school for development into "schooling for subordination and marginalization". This has led to discriminatory positions against girls and has become a major challenge to sustaining female access to educational opportunities. In response to such bias in female education there is need to find out if Open Distance Learning (ODL) will foster the education of women in Nigeria particularly now that women education is receiving world wide attention. Therefore the research question for the study is "will ODL be a mechanism for sustainable female education?" The purpose of the study is to contribute to knowledge and provide evidence supporting the assumption that Open Distance Learning could be a mechanism for sustainable female education in Nigeria. To guide the thrust of the study the following questions and hypothesis were raised and formulated and tested at five percent (5%) level of significance.

Research Questions

1. Will ODL correlate significantly with the academic performance of school age female students and adults in Nigeria?
2. Will ODL sustain the education of female children of school age and adults?
3. Will ODL influence learning behaviour on issues related to health, culture, community and acquisition of skills?

Hypothesis: The following hypothesis is raised and tested at 5% level of significance.

- Ho1 ODL will not significantly correlate with the academic performance of female students of school age and adults in Nigeria.
- Ho2 ODL will not significantly sustain the education of girls and adults
- Ho3 ODL will not significantly influence the learning behaviour of pupils in health related, culture, vocational and community issues.

The study has significant implications for the nation's commitment to the right of every citizen to education by the year 2015. It has important implications to meeting the needs and demands of education. The results of the study will enable education planners and managers ensure access to quality education for all.

Methodology

The sample population for the study comprises 80 females of school age and 10 adults who did not enjoy the right to schooling. They were randomly selected from the streets (hawkers), homes (house maids) and from the market places (petty traders) in one rural community in Benin City, Edo State. The selected number was distributed to two Study centers established and located in St Joseph's Catholic Church premises, Benin City which respectively accommodated the children of school age and adults. The teaching and learning activities were carried out from 3pm to 6pm three times a week for approximately two terms of fourteen weeks each (28 weeks). Students were tested at the end of the first term (14 weeks) and again at the end of the second term (twenty-eight weeks).

Instrumentation

Interview was the instrument used to ascertain the educational background information on sample. Five televisions were purchased by the researchers for the purpose of teaching pupils at the study center purposely selected for the study. Pupils were taught by means of television since according to Ogunmilade (1981) it (television) is one of the best ways of reaching thousands of student's studying at home and study centers. The specific number of courses to be taught with the aid of television was selected from the primary one (basic education) curriculum which was obtained from the Ministry of

Education and adapted to the teaching and learning activities that ran for 28 weeks at the study center. Test modules on the specific subject areas were developed by the two researchers and validated by conventional public primary school teachers. The courses included English Language, Arithmetic, General Knowledge and courses based on Health Related Issues, Skill Acquisition or Vocational Studies and Community/Cultural issues. The data were analyzed by means of Correlation, percentages and means.

Results

The results of the study are shown in the tables below

Ho1 ODL will correlate significantly with the academic performance of school age female students and adults in Nigeria?

Table 1

Correlation between Open Distance Learning and Pupils' Performance

Variable	N	Course	'r'	Remark
Female Children of School age	80	English Language	.86*	S
		Arithmetic	.88*	
		Hygiene	.77*	
		General knowledge	.76*	
		Soap making	.81*	
Adult	10	English Language	.66*	S
		Arithmetic	.68*	
		Hygiene	.81*	
		General knowledge	.76*	
		Soap, candle making etc.	.88*	

P < .05

Source: investigators field work.

Table 1 shows that the calculated r value exceeded the table value at 5 percent level of significance. Therefore the null hypothesis which states that ODL method of teaching will not significantly correlate with the academic performance of female students of school age and adults in Nigeria is rejected.

Ho2 ODL will not significantly sustain the education of girls and adults

Table 11
Mean and ANOVA test of significant difference of Pupils level of performance

Course	Length of teaching	Girls of School age (N=79)	Adult Women (N=10)	ANOVA Calculated (Girls)	ANOVA Calculated (Women)
		Mean	Mean	F	F
English vocabulary	Twenty eight week	56.00	45	6.85*	4.18*
	Fourteenth Week	27.50	15		
	Zero week	00	1.50		
Reading comprehension	Twenty eight week	48.50	40.50	4.77*	4.33*
	Fourteenth Week	19.70	15.55		
	Zero week	2.50	2.10		
Writing	Twenty eight week	47.82	48.50	4.75*	4.56*
	Fourteenth Week	10.50	9.54		
	Zero week	5.50	2.55		
General knowledge	Twenty eight week	49.25	45.75	5.45*	4.20*
	Fourteenth Week	7.25	25.50		
	Zero week	.50	10.00		
Social studies	Twenty eight week	38.45	38.55	4.63*	4.69*
	Fourteenth Week	19.90	15.57		
	Zero week	2.0	3.50		
Arithmetic	Twenty eight week	48.75	35.00	5.57*	6.52*
	Fourteenth Week	12.25	15.75		
	Zero week	0.50	5.55		

P < .05

Source: Researchers Field Work

On the whole the result of the analysis for all the courses among children of school age and the adults used in the study follow the same trend of rejection of the null hypothesis and indicate that ODL as a significant mechanism in fostering female education. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. The level of sustaining female education through Open Distance Learning is significant. The position here is that ODL is a justifiable mechanism for a sustainable female education in Nigeria.

ODL will not significantly influence the behaviour pattern of pupils with regard to health related issues, culture, skill acquisition, community issues

Table 3

Chi-square Analysis of Significant Difference of Percentage scores

Variable	14 th week	28 th week	Chi-square	Remark
Health Related	35%	87%	5.07*	S
Skill Acquisition (cooking, candle making etc)	45%	78%	6.96*	S
Cultural Awareness	47%	79%	4.02*	S
Community Issues	42%	77%	4.58*	S
Average percent	42%	80%		

P < .05

It could be observed from table 3 that the average percentage achievement score for the 14th week was 42% while that of the 28th week was 80%. The Chi-values 5.07*, 6.96*, 4.02* and 4.58* respectively show high significant difference at P < .05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

Discussion

The purpose of the study is to find out if Open Distance Learning could be a used as a mechanism for sustainable female education. Eighty children of school age and ten Illiterate women were randomly selected from the streets, homes and market places in two rural communities in Edo State and taught in two study centers organized by a Catholic religious body. Study classes were held three times a week from 3 to 6pm. The results of the analysis of data indicated substantial correlation between open distance learning and students academic performance. The results of the study supports the study of Poirier and Feldman (2004), **Patterson and Whittaker (2000)** and Ogunmilade (1984).

The study showed that the level of female education can be improved and sustained by ODL. The result of the analysis of data in table 2 showed that ODL did not only improve the participants' level of literacy it also sustained their education. It established that ODL is positive in meeting the need and demand for education (Ofoegbu, 2006). Comparing the Means of the participants' performance at zero weeks, the fourteenth and twenty eight week respectively, that is, achieving approximately a 50% improvement

implies that the learning needs of children and adults can be met through equitable access to ODL. In fact ODL programmes can raise the literacy level of females incrementally and systematically so that the goals of Education for All shall be met in 2015.

The result of the study reveals that ODL creates opportunity for women and girls to learn about their life, health, acquire economic skill and be in tune with the community and culture. An educated woman is a better wife, mother, social mobilizer and community member regardless of location; urban, rural and remote areas of the country.

Conclusion

The study identifies Open Distance Learning as a mechanism for sustainable female education in Nigeria. The major obstacle for women and girls empowerment is lack of education and as long as they remain illiterate economic changes would not be reasonably attained. With ODL women will be better equipped to contribute meaningfully and effectively to their development and to the development of the nation (Emunemu and Ayeni, 2003). It is concluded that ODL will reach the unreached. It may eliminate gender disparities in Primary and Secondary education and ensure that girls have equal access to basic education. ODL will raise the literacy level of females regardless of age. Once the various shortcomings and deficiencies in terms of requisite facilities and infrastructure are in place, the prospects of Open Distance Learning for women will become more noteworthy.

Recommendations:

1. Government should develop a framework to facilitate national awareness orientation and therefore creating a reliable avenue for the delivery of education to women.
2. Formulating national policy guidelines for Open Distance Learning is necessary but the problem of providing basic facilities and amenities including electricity which constitute adverse effects on the programme should be addressed with vigour. Several communities in Nigeria and some Sub Saharan countries are yet to have electricity in their rural communities. Meanwhile the

urban areas suffer epileptic power supply. It is therefore recommended that for ODL to make meaningful impact on access to education Government should make adequate provision for power.

3. Communities should be encouraged to own and participate in the management of community resources and study centers for the benefit of the women and girls.
4. Qualified and experienced Educational managers should be appointed and employed to manage Open and Distance Learning programmes.
5. Workshops, seminars and conferences should be organized on regular basis to exchange and share ideas on how to improve the management of ODL.

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