Adequate Library Facilities in Nigeria: A Key Contributor to Sustainable Distance Education System

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ABSTRACT The paper identifies the problems associated with the establishment of Satellite Campus by majority of Nigerian Universities. The nation is aware of the decay inflicted on university education by some of the ubiquitous study centers. The paper, therefore, discusses the possibility of achieving higher functional literacy through distance education system and stresses the importance of functional library facilities in the programme. The paper finally suggests ways and means which the government can use to make the distance education system a success.

INTRODUCTION

Along with an increase in the number of institutions, the federal universities experienced tremendous growth in enrollment during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Indeed, during that time, enrollment doubled every four to five years. Student enrollment during the decade of the 1990s increased more gradually (Table 1), and approximately doubled over the ten-year period. System-wide, the number of students increased at an average annual rate of about 12 percent. The government-approved annual enrollment growth rates for the federal universities used by the NUC as part of the budgeting parameters are 2.5 percent for the 1st generation universities, 10 percent for the 2nd generation universities and 15 percent for the 3rd generation universities (Hartnett, 2000). But it must be realized that both the Federal government and the Universities could not satisfy the aspiration of Nigerians to acquire university education. The Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) could not admit a reasonable percentage of Nigerian qualified prospective candidates to the universities due to the limited space and academic facilities. In other to satisfy the aspiration of these students among other reasons, majority of Nigerian universities decided to establish Satellite Campuses in various parts of the country. Okebukola (2001) noted that the desire of Nigerians to acquire higher education informed the establishment of such centers, but pointed out that the operators were more interested in the economic gains which they hoped to derive rather than the provision of qualitative educations.

People are worried that the future of the nation is sacrificed on the altar of economic gains being made in these centers rather than the provision of good qualitative education. Akinpelu (1992) observed that in Nigeria, 50%-70% of the people are illiterates, in a nation whose population is estimated at 100 million. This means, in effect, that not less than 60 million of the citizens cannot read or write. Oni (1992) was of the opinion that children are like seeds in the hands of adults, and that it is the kind of fruits they are cultured to bear that they would germinate to bear at adulthood.

Table 1: Average annual enrollment growoth 1989/ 90 - 1998/99

Ibadan	-	9%
Lagos	-	7%
Nsukka	-	6%
Zaria	-	11%
Ile-Ife	-	6%
Benin	-	14%
Jos	-	7%
Calabar	-	24%
Kano	-	12%
Maiduguri	-	10%
Sokoto	-	13%
Ilorin	-	14%
Port Harcourt	-	12%
Uyo	-	15%
Awka	-	1%
Abuja 1990/91-1998/99	-	125%
Owerri	-	22%
Akure	-	31%
Minna	-	32%
Bauchi	-	17%
Yola	-	43%
Makurdi (1992/93-1998/99)	-	3%
Abeokuta (1992/93-1998/99)	-	6%
Umudike (1993/94-1998/99)	-	223%

Source: 1987/88 – Nigerian University System: Past, Present and Future, NUC.

In recognition of the educational needs of Nigerians, government was institutionalizing a virile distance education programme to be implemented through the Open University of Nigeria, expected to take off in 2002 (Punch, 2001). It was pointed out that the action becomes necessary because of the bastardization of university eduction in the country by the Satellite Campuses. To meet up with the increasing demands for the acquisition of university education by Nigerians which prompted them to be patronizing such illegal outlets, the Federal Government would ensure the take-off of the National Open University in the country before the end of the year. The Federal Government on Wednesday August 30, 2001 finally wielded the big stick against universities operating Satellite Campuses as it directed them to immediately close shop (Punch, August 30, 2001). And to serve as a deterrent to further patronage of the Satellite Campuses, government, through the National University Commission (NUC) vowed not to recognize Certificates awarded by such institutions.

It is the objective of this paper to point out the problems associated with the operation of Satellite Campuses, the need for distance education system through the establishment of National Open University and the need for adequate library facilities in the proposed Open University System and in other parts of the country. The roles which adequate and functioning library facilities are expected to play in the Distance Education System would be emphasized.

DISTANCE EDUCATION SYSTEM – WHAT IS IT?

It is common knowledge that our educational systems cannot cater for all who are desirous of education at all levels. For one reason or the other not all can afford to do face-to-face learning even of the short-time duration. To fill the gap, distance education can be regarded as the answer. Distance education is a generic term that includes a range of teaching/learning strategies variously referred to as correspondence education or study the world over, as home study or independent study in the United States of America; external studies in Australia, etc. The exact meaning of each of these terms has been a subject of some debate but in line with Rhumble and Harry (1982),

distance teaching will refer to the institutional role of providing education at a distance and distance learning to the role of the learner while teaching and learning will constitute the Distance Education System. However, the main aim of all these is that of providing or communicating and acquiring some specific ideas, knowledge, skills, attitude and practice in response to some predetermined needs. All these are done in organized manners outside the formal face-to-face school framework. Distance Education thus caters for those who for one reason or the other cannot attend face-to-face learning.

The aims and objectives of Distance Education will be:
(a)   to brush up and strengthen what is already known;
(b)   introducing students to the basic concepts and techniques of their chosen fields of study and preparing them to launch into the next stage of education. Both short and long term objectives will include the following:- Distance Learners should be able to:
(a)   speak and be understood;
(b)   listen to and understand conversation;
(c)   read and follow directions; and write his own cheque, keep an account, write a bill or an invoice and so on (Olayemi, 1993).

COMPONENTS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION SYSTEM

The following are some of the identified components of Distance Education System:
(1)   Correspondence texts or lectures: These could be in Units, modules or cycles; each of which will teach a part of or a whole topic.
(2)   Set books for readers: These are to be seen in our context as supplementary to the correspondence texts which must have been fully illustrated and written in simple language.
(3)   Audio and Video Cassettes: In context, the audio will be more easily accessible if mass produced specifically for literacy for all. Nigeria is yet to be able to take the full benefit of the video cassettes but they should form a part of the course-ware for the 21st century.
(4)   Television: This too needs to be explored for the 21st century. For now however, a 30 minutes slot on National Network at the national level and an hour or more on the State or local stations in the evening hours

will go along way in raising the standard of literacy in the country.

(5) Radio: It is not an over-statement that many more listen to the radio. Some hours tagged Literacy Hour should be aired by different stations daily. Each community will air lessons/lectures relevant to it (Olayemi, 1993).

From the above listed components of distance education system, the roles which functional library system can play in its execution can never be over-emphasized. At all levels, as Kaegbein (1982) has rightly observed, the communications of knowledge play an important role not only via the examples given by other persons, but also through the individual's own reading. A student exposed to these relevant materials will therefore be in a better position to raise relevant and intelligent questions, and also form his own opinion about what he is taught in the class (Ogunsola, 1996). He may even become an 'expert' on a particular topic, perhaps discovering aspects unknown to the teacher.

LIBRARIES AND DISTANCE EDUCATION SYSTEM

The purpose of education is to pass on society's cultural values and accumulated body of knowledge to the next generation (children) and to prepare them for meaningful adult life. In particular, the new Nigerian Education System has emphasized creativity, scientific and reflective thinking, inter-ethnic understanding among others and a holistic approach to teaching and learning especially at the tertiary level. If we are to produce children who are self-reliant, and better able to fit into their immediate environment and interact successfully with the world at large we need well developed Distance Education System which is well supported by adequate library facilities like learning resources centers, Media Resource Centres, Instructional Materials Centres and so on. One of the reasons why illiteracy rate is high in Nigeria is because many people relapse into secondary illiteracy for want of adequate and relevant reading materials to sustain and consolidate the reading skills acquired in the classroom or Distance Education System. Without any shadow of doubt, the extent to which children and young people of today will be creative, informed and knowledgeable will be shaped by the boundaries of the contents of the library resources available within their environment.

Library resources are those materials made up of books, audio visual softwares, realia, audio visual hardwares and other pedagogical materials used in the teaching and learning processes. Library materials here are synonymous with educational resources, learning resources or media resources. New trends all over the world, Nigeria included, are advocating a multimedia approach to education. A wide variety and plentiful supply of resources are required to encourage independent study so that young people from an early age can learn how to think so that their convictions and views are formed as a result of active mental efforts. A basic book collection whether for the primary, secondary or tertiary level should be rich and varied. It should cover all the subject areas of the school's curriculum as well as cater for individual interests and extra-curricula pursuits. For Distance Education System to be viable and well executed, the books and related resources should include a wide variety of content for different levels of reading ability, styles and types. All these must be made available in our various public libraries and the Open University Library. The Open University Library should contain books for the fast or slow readers, for the gifted and the retarded.

Audio visual or non book materials are becoming increasingly very important in school or public libraries. Their importance as far as Distance Education System is concerned can never be over emphasized. It is the availability of these in large numbers in any library which has given such library its new name of Media Resource Centre. Audio visual resources are not aids as many teachers would have us believe. They are learning media in their rights. Television and Video-Tape Recordings are extremely important in the proper execution of Distance Education System in Nigeria. These are high demand gadgets and may not be within the reach of many prospective students of Distance Education System. But they have become common house-hold appliances especially in urban areas of Nigeria. In fact many homes are mini-resource centers. The television and video can provide a team production approach to learning problems. They can magnify or reduce demonstration or illustrative materials. They can capitalize on immediacy at the same time reach audiences of any size. Television and video accelerate the teaching-learning processes as well

as provide for special instruction. They permit the viewing of widely different subjects at any given time. The only limitation in their usage is the irregular power supply in Nigeria. If Distance Education system is to be successful, this problem of erratic electricity supply should be addressed.

Audio Recordings are many and varied. They include phonograph records, recorded tapes, cassettes and the like. These resources appeal to the aura senses of both teachers and the students especially in non-face-to-face educational system. They are useful in developing or improving children's listening skills – an invaluable aspect of teaching – learning process. Audio recordings are cheap and easy to produce. They are easy to use because they can be played and replayed at will. It is also possible to combine audio recordings with slides or filmstrips thus catching the ear and eye at the same time. It must be pointed out that if Distance Education System is to be successfully implemented, the teachers and demonstrators or instructors of this laudable programme must see library staff and library resources as partners in the teaching learning processes. Both teachers and students must make use of library facilities available in their areas.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It is a known fact that over one million pupils sit for the School Certificate/G.C.E. Ordinary level examinations every year, and that the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) can only offer admission to less than 15 percent of candidates seeking university admission. Besides, an estimated 50,000 working adults who were unable to obtain higher education will now utilize the opportunity offered by distance learning programmes to develop themselves on a part-time basis. It must be realized that the desire for more learning is healthy. Modern societies are knowledge-driven. Illiteracy and ignorance have long been identified as enemies of development and global efforts are being directed towards meeting the people's educational needs so that the benefits of globalization can spread faster. The challenge is, therefore, to maintain set standards without limiting access to learning. The government has repeatedly expressed concern about the poor quality of learning in many university outreach centers. The nation is aware of the decay inflicted on university education by some of the ubiquitous study centers. It is also

realized that the Satellite campus system has long been hijacked by charlatans whose motives are mainly pecuniary. What the nation has had on its hand is a situation where many of the satellite campuses dish out sub-standard education to their students. Therefore, the need to enforce quality is not in doubt. While confronting the short-comings of the satellite campuses, the huge demand for university education by Nigerian must not be over-looked. The mushrooming of outreach centers was the logical response of a society whose strong thirst for higher learning has remained unsatisfied for many years. It can then be concluded that the Federal Government's plan to establish an open university is a positive step.

Various modes of instruction which are available to choose from have been suggested in this paper. In a developing country like Nigeria, it may be unrealistic to choose the video cassette and the television for the execution of distant learning programme. The most easily accessible to a wider population is the print called correspondence texts, then the audio cassettes and the radio. The video cassette and the television are yet to become commodities of the common man and are not even easy to carry around like the radio, the printed text and the audio cassettes. Lessons on identified relevant topics are to be written in simple easy to understand sentences using personal pronouns and discussant modes. Each of these lessons is to be clearly and fully illustrated; contain learning cues and built-in feedback system to keep the learner on the study. At the initial stage and without audio cassette accompaniment what we will have may look like picture reading but for the higher illiterate it is functional literacy. The lessons/lectures need not be too long: if they are too long, the learner becomes discouraged; if too short not much may be gained. The radio as has been pointed out reaches a wider audience. There may be an urgent need for communication experts to develop or adapt for the use of literacy for all means of communicating through cellular radio. This uses low-power radio transmitters that are placed at mapped out strategic locations in form of resource center within the community. Such will enable more air hours for transmitting to prospective learners and teach and train using the correspondence materials/texts.

Audio cassettes like tapes (cassettes) and players can effectively be used in literacy for all

through Distance Education System. The government will however have to design and specially produce such tapes and players thus making them available cheaply to the populace. They then constitute a part of the course ware for literacy for all through Distance Education System. The audio cassettes will teach what the correspondence texts contain. If painstakingly and rightly cued and used many learners will become literate through them.

Vocation Schools, tutorials, weekend classes or contact sessions are also important as they not only provide psychological satisfaction to the learner that he too attends formal classes but make room for clarifying problems arising from self-study. At each of these contact sessions, a thorough review of the previously studied lessons, practicals would be done. It is certain that if the written lectures, the audio cassettes, the radio programme(s) and the subsequent contact session are useful to the learner, the distance learner will be motivated to stay on the programme and even clamour for more advanced courses. The self-help group, if well organized, may take over the duties of the contact sessions under the guidance of the teacher.

By adopting some or all the techniques and technologies just enumerated above, access to education and literacy will be increased and the quality of education will also be improved. However, if care is not taken, fragmentation and lack of coherence may result for courses being taught. It is therefore necessary to ensure that course materials have explicit statements of objectives, are well structured and laid out; illustrated; written in a personalized language i.e. talk to the learner, are error-free and contain not only learning cues but built-in feed-back systems to help the learner check his progress. Also if success is to be achieved, writers of scripts, an efficient monitoring team, immediate feed-back system, ensure that lessons/lectures are motivating to keep the learners on the course, are also points to consider. In essence Distance Education System aimed at literacy for all should ensure the appropriateness of programmes and of distance education techniques and technology to the particular requirements of the community. The programme should be in consonance with identified priorities while helping individuals and groups generally acquire more awareness of and sensitivity to the environment and its problems and begin to think of what they can do to address the problem. The designed programme should be functional. Time is a factor that is very important in Distance Education System. Schedules of writing, editing production and distribution have to be kept. Adequate, detailed and careful planning is critical to the whole teaching/learning arrangement of the Distance Education System if success in literacy is to be substantial.

The government must make it mandatory for the organizers and the executors of Distance Education System to deposit copies of correspondence texts, audio cassettes and other teaching and learning materials produced by them to the various libraries available in their environment. This will be useful for Distance Education Students to make reference to any of these materials when there is the need for it. As emphasized by Etuk, (1993) librarians are servants and the major gateways to knowledge. As such, it is recommended that the federal and state governments should encourage the creation of the position of literacy librarians in our public libraries and saddle them with the responsibility of initiating meaningful programmes for those who, as a result of poverty, learning deficiency or physical or mental disability continue to live under the handicap of functional illiteracy.

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