# Distance Education Network for Strengthening the Education Movement in Nigeria

Ezeja Ogili

Department of Staff Development and Distance Education
School of Distance Learning and Continuing Education
Institute of Management and Technology, Enugu – Nigeria
e-mail: ezejaogili@yahoo.com

**Abstract.** Nigeria is the largest race in African continent with a population of 140,000,000 people. It also contributes to the high rate of illiterates among the nine populous countries of the world. Existence has always meant for man, a succession of challenges. Moreover, the preservation and utilization of natural resources can only be assured through heavy investments in knowledge and ability aimed at all inhabitants of our country Nigeria. Education represents the conscious, deliberate and well equipped aspect of that steady progression which is the law of all human beings. Challenges are still with us and have not loss nothing in each particular life or given community they arise in different combination and obey a different order of priorities.

## 1. Overview

The advent of this era requires a higher-order thinking skills to effectively utilize the technological tools of the emerging century. Distance Education has emerged as an intrinsic part of many national education system with the power conferred on it as a genuine effort of the society to exploit all this abilities of the time, all the contributions of the past, and all the hopes of the future. The rational for Distance Education (DE) practice in Nigeria include its cost effectives, time effectives, individualization of the instructional attractiveness and compressing of the world into a global village. Distance Education network is the response to a growing needs of the society that need to expand education rapidly and cheaply, it is an academic discipline in its own right with a liberal practice of taking care of the socially, and geographically isolated of the society. Therefore, it is necessary to take education seriously and actively to its promotion development which calls for serious attention.

## 2 Introduction and Background:

Today according to Green Street (1989), it is unrealistic to face future with relatively rigid and less adoptive set of educational programme and structures. We are faced with a situation in which education have become increasingly significant and crucial

(Omolewa, 1980). On a worldwide scale, attitudes and polices on education in general are fast changing, while there has been particular interest in Distance Education. It is therefore necessary to take education seriously and actively to its promotion development (Ogili, 1998[a & b]). We should not only look at our strategies as practitioners but also redefine our concepts that would create genuine functional education especially in Nigeria. Wangoola (1989) reiterates that a network can be describes as reiterates a process by which individual, groups and institutions are put in contact in a manner which enable them to learn from each other, strength their own work, supplement each other, take joint action and mobilize and deploy latent resources and energize for social advancement. Thus a network is defined as the totality of all the units connected by a certain type of relationship which enhance the sharing of experiences, knowledge, and skills in a particular field of activity designed to raise this quality of life (Ogili, 2004).

It is clear that no group or profession can survive at whatever level, unless there is ample opportunities for individual initiatives and the entire such conduct that civilized moves it forward and develops it in a wholesome way.

Today the world is undergoing tremendous changes in arts, science and technology. There are also dramatic, social, economic, political and ecological changes across the globe. The extent to which people perceive and actually are sensitized to these change depends on a number of variables which include exposure, experience and direct interaction with one's environment (Ogili 1995&1996). The term Distance Education (DE) grew out of a need for a concept broader than correspondence study that could encompass new communications technology for the delivery of Education at a distance. It is an over-arching concept that appears not to have serious rivals for international usage. Ogili (2006) defines distance education as the various forms of study at all levels which are not under the continuous levels which are not under the continuous immediate supervision of facilitators present with their learners in lectures rooms or on the same premises, but which, nevertheless, benefit from planning, guidance, and tuition of a tutorial organization." This definition has remained unchanged for a period of nearly ten years (Holmberg 1986). It is interesting to note that planning, guidance and tuition are a function of an organization as compared to a teacher.

In another context, Moore (1973) states that DE may be defined as the family of instructional methods in which the teaching behaviours are executed apart from the learning behaivours including those that are n a continuous situation would be performed in the learner's presence, so that communication between the facilitator and the leaner must be facilitated by print, electronic, mechanical or other devices. In contrast to Holmberg's definition that focused on the "tutorial organization" Moore has emphasized the importance of communication between a facilitator and learner and the family of instructional methods appropriate to Distance Education.

A may be seen, several characteristics of DE have emerged, as have a number of issues. Keegan (1986) analysed a number of definitions and produced a descriptive definition consisting of seven elements of DE as follows:

1. The quasi-permanent separation of teacher and learner throughout the length of the learning process; this distinguishes it from conventional face-to-face education.

2. The influence of an educational organization both in the planning and preparation of learning materials and in the provision of it from private study and teach – yourself programmes.
3. The use of technical media; print, audio, or computer, to unite facilitator and learner and carry the content of the course.
4. The provision of two-way communication so that the learner may benefit from or even initiate dialogue; this distinguishes it from other uses of technology in education.
5. The quasi-permanent absence of the learning group throughout the length of the learning process so that people are usually taught as individuals and not in groups, with the possibility of occasional meetings for both didactic and socialization purpose.
6. The presence of more industrialized features than in conventional oral education.
7. The privatization of institutional learning.

In order to reduce internal inconsistencies in the preceding classification, Ogili (2007) provided three criteria on which to judge the process of DE.
1. DE implies that the majority of educational communication between (among) facilitator and learner(s) occurs noncontiguous.
2. DE must involve two-way communication between (among) facilitator and learners(s) for: the purpose of facilitating and supporting the educational process.
3. DE uses technology to mediate the necessary two-way communication.

Ogili (2004) believes that perceived control occupies a central position in communication theory which may be especially relevant in educational settings. This is because our society has, for good reason, been referred to as the information age. Today, over half of the labour force in the world work in the information sector. However, he further said that the information age emerged as a result of a crisis of control in the last century but the advances in the way information is created, processed, and communicated has spawned a control revolution and the information age.

Ogili (2006) agreed that the developments in educational technology have seen a gradual shift from an all-encompassing reliance on mass media…as alternative systems for the delivery of instructions to a concern for the individual, personal media…for instance in the home, at work, and in that classroom. It is further believed that the information revolution based upon microelectronics is a revolution of greater significance; it is nothing than an "intelligence revolution" making possible the intelligent application of information to perform tasks of ever increasing complexity.

Garrison (1989) and Ogili (1996:b) summed up the importance of information technology with the following assumptions.
a.) That the human species and the things that its members undertake generate vast quantities of data and information that is of interest or value to someone somewhere.
b.) That in order to exist and survive in a complex competitive world members of the human species need to have access to and capable of processing significant quantities of information (Barker, 1985). As a result of existing and emerging communication technology, distance education is experiencing a shift of emphasis from packaging content economically to facilitating dialogue and support for the educational transaction (Ogili, 2004).

## 3    The Relevance Of Network In Distance Education

According to Tandon (1989), the relevance of Network includes that newer idea; visions and perspectives can be elaborated and sharpened. Hence, a Network is the most efficient and flexible mode of sharing information, experiences and ideas across like-minded persons, groups and organizations spread geographically and working on diverse issues. In conditions of grassroots efforts towards education, the organization of the poor and social change inevitably invite retaliation from those with vested interest in status quo. This retaliation takes three forms over repression, negation and cooption. This has proved more relevant and effective as the principles and ideas of participatory research seem to be congruent with the practice of Networking. Participatory researchers share common visions, dreams and struggles. Even though they operate from different  geographical locations, entry points, focus etc, they have essentially a common approach to different geographical, social, economic and political context in their work.


### Characteristic of a Network

1. It is an informal and flexible mechanism based on the initiative and interest of individuals and groups. No centralized planning and implementation is done in a Network.
2. It recognizes the value of experiences of its ordinary members and eschews the concept of expertise.
3. Members are encouraged and supported to take over the activities, direction and resources of a Network.
4. It entails shared responsibility among the members for sustaining, strengthening and managing the Network. New members are invited and existing member are encouraged by all the existing active members.
5. It has the capacity to mobilize its membership and their resources for collaboration around common issues at a rapid space.
6. It requires some animators, convenors, or co-ordinators to act as modes for energizing and sustaining information, ideas, and resources among members of the Network.

In a network, interaction is encouraged. As intelligence and ability give us power in the first place, knowledge which is scattered among members is tapped for the benefit of the group. In a network therefore, there is shared knowledge, shared experience, and collaboration of the greater benefit of  all expressed by the term synergy or synchronized energy (Ingalis 1973). Synergy is manifested in shared values and expectations in a network which brings likeminded people together to achieve common objectives.

# 4    Operational Justification of Distance Education Network

Ogili (1995) pointed out that the operational justification of DE network is because the society is changing very fast in the present age. Hence, education is actually faced with the challenge of fulfilling the needs of a changing society which include, knowledge explosion, expansion of educational institutions, increase in learners enrolment, shortage of professional facilitators, non-committed political will, poverty of many families etc has therefore arisen. Also Ogili (2004) stressed that the justification for using DE network in Nigeria is the power conferred on the programme as the genuine effort of man take up into himself all the abilities of the time, all the conditions and contributions of the past, and all the hopes of the future. Hence, DE network creates viable chances to those who could not go to the formal school because of financial, social, geographical and medical reason. It is more succinctly clear that the attributes of network include: to save costs, save time in bringing education to the individual and to the door step of all. Secondly, is an investment in human resources development as it seeks to equip at least an individual in his own way with skills, and a capability of import and share their skills. This is because we in Nigeria, have lived with the belief and practice of being our brothers keepers, which we now extend to DE delivery. Ensuring that at the end, we shall not just be improving on the well-being of our families, but shall be building self-reliance nation (Ahmed, 1992).

Ogili and Eluka (1997) affirms that with the emergency of DE network in Nigeria, the desire of removing culture of silence, ignorance assistentialism, dehumanization, disparity and disabilities also emerged. The operational justification of DE network is the capacity to create the required change in skills, values, attitude, knowledge, etc that are relevant to the development of people and the nation. Thus, Ogili (1997) describes DE as a part of our struggle for securing a national goal of securing social justice, equity, liberty and removal of illiteracy and poverty in Nigeria in this millennium.

Ogili (1995) and (1996 [a&b]) asserts that DE network is best in meeting the vision and growing needs of the society which is impossible to meet by conventional schools. These include:

−  Ensuring that learners learn in scattered communities covering sparsely populated, large geographical areas such as found in Nigeria.  Hence making it possible for a few facilitator to reach large number of learners.
−  Creating possible opportunities for learners to learn while they continue to earn. Learners do to need to be removed from their productive activity while they earn.
−  DE does not require new schools to be built; it can only rely on the spare-time use of existing buildings and equipment. While all ranks can receive learning concurrently without apathy.
−  Liberation of both the socially and geographically isolated learners from the culture of illiteracy and relapsing into illiteracy. Also, there is no age limit to learn thereby promoting lifelong education.
−  It is cost effective. Teaching is economical, once the facilitating materials have been produced and the system is established, additional learners can be enrolled with only marginal costs. The more learners they are, the less the cost per learner.

- DE brings into learning circle expert knowledge, rare experiences and stimulating personalities. Hence professionalism is respected.
- It is most effective in national campaigns. Today health, child development, nutrition and political issues are initiated through DE network. Hence, the cost effectiveness of DE in absorbing very large numbers of learners with many following each course has made it attractive for a country with vision that need to expand education rapidly and cheaply.

## 5 Some Major Problems of Distance Education network in Nigeria

Most African countries especially Nigeria are facing many obstacles in the running of the DE system. Some of these problems include:
- Inadequate trained distance educators: even the few experts available require constant retraining to keep abreast of the fast rate of technological changes;
- Dependence on consultants outside Nigeria as a result of shortage of experts needed;
- Lack of finance and culture of preventive maintenance in our societies;
- Lack of effective cooperation among the DE institutions because of non-formation of a clearing house for cross fertilization of ideas and information at a given time for exchange of experts;
- Geographical remoteness which result to learners lack of access to institutions and other resources when needed most.
- Scarcity of light for reading after day light hours,
- Radio receivers and cassette players are often expensive in Nigeria in relation to not only average wage and salaries earners (Ogili, 2006).
- Postal services are unreliable and irregular in some area in Nigeria which is a major drawbacks in DE network system. This make learners travel long distance to centres of distribution with economic implications etc (Holmberg, 1989).
- Non availability of educational media where needed;
- Lack of information about what DE is;
- Long periods of training which are necessary before entering any profession do not seem to have take off seriously in DE,
- Lack of intellectual techniques in the field of DE, the current practitioners from making popular acclaimed achievement in the solution of Nigeria's educational problems.
- Existence of personal jealousness, and rivalness, conflict of personality, favoritism, cliques, and faction, prejudices. And idiosyncrasies resulting from the political relations between persons; difficulties in communications, and imperfections in organizational structure (Ogili, 1996 and 1997).
- Gender disparity in developing nations on education issues,
- Bad leadership, corruption, political instability and poor economic management of our nation,

− The economic crisis which has led to mass unemployment thereby creating fear of future and helplessness among the nations (Okeem, 1990).

## 7    Recommendations

Distance education has drawn widespread and growing interest in this decade as a result of the emergence of sophisticated communication technology (Ogili and Nzeneri, 2004).

They further affirmed that formal and institutionally based conventional educational programme are often luxuries we cannot afford. As such DE Network has become the new imperative of our time and therefore, in other to bring about effective telmatic learner, there is need for the followings:

− Setting up a very strong professional association of distance educations with vigour;
− Engaging in regular publications of its activities and achievements through the Nigeria Distance Education Journals and other academic/professional journals;
− Organizing regular conference, seminars, workshops; courses for its members and other interested or reference group.
− Recruitment and retention of professionally trained distance education personnel (academic/technical) to man the study centres and other areas.
− Seek support service of the related agencies in terms of human and material resources;
− Provision of logistics for developing distance education programme practice;
− Regular evaluation of practices to allow for extensive and intensive understanding of negative or positive achievements for adjustment and/or modification.
− Organization of support services such as broadcast, learner fora, study groups, study centres, equipment, course, set kits on a serious basis so that each learner undertake to one suitable to him based on his circumstance (Ogili 1995[d]).
− Provision of grants-financial to distance educators in Nigeria to enable them attend both long-term and short term course;
− The Nigeria Association of Distance Educator (NADE) should be formed and strive to come of age by establishing a permanent secretariat with a paid secretary to co-ordinate the activities on a day-to-day basis.
− Federal, state and local governments should set aside at least 10 percent of their budget for the provision of electronic, mechanic and other materials. This will be supported with adequate security and maintenance culture.
− Establishment of National satellite Education programmes.
− To establish a network of co-operation between different systems of DE institutions;
− Creation of data base concerning the different types of DE  materials, video equipment, audio equipment, printed materials and computer facilities.

# 8 Conclusion

The prosperity of a country depends not on the abundance of its revenue or on the strength of its fortifications and beauty of public building, but on the number of cultivated citizens, its men of character and enlightenment. The justification of Distance Education Network for strengthening education movement in Nigeria is the development of DE into an acceptable academic discipline with some underline criteria: in the growth in theoretical and conceptual depth, the growth in the degree of relevance to real and important problems: interrelationship between its fundamental ideas and professionalisation of distance educators beyond training programmes. Hence the rationale of Distance Education Network to Nigeria. Network is for strengthening education movement in its capabilities of bringing reasonable expectations, experience, and insights into useful order.

Finally, education movement that is actual and functional needs certain conditions such as open-door policy, foresight, accessibility and information while all these factors must operate in optional combination synergically in order to achieve the desired educational objectives.

## References:

1. Afigbo, A.E. (1983) Nigeria and Open University. Owerri: New Africa.
2. Ahmed, A.I. (1992) Mass Literacy Policy and Delivery in Nigeria, Abuja: NMEC
3. Barker, P. (1985). Information Technology, Education and Training. British Journal of Education Technology, 16 (2) 102-115.
4. Bates, A.W. (1984). The Role of Technology, Distance Education, London: croom helm.
5. Garrson, D.R. (1989). Understanding Distance Education: a framework for future. London: Routlage.
6. Greenstreet, M. (1989) The Concept of Network in Adult Education: Journal of AALAE, 5 (4): 22-26.
7. Holmberg, B, (1989). Theory and practice of Distance Education New York: Routlage.
8. Ingles, H.T. (1984). Cutting-edge developments in educational technology: prospects for the immediate future. In J.W. Brown and S.N. Brown (eds). Educational media yearbook Colorado: Libraies Unlimited.
9. Keegan, D. (1986). The Foundations of Distance Education, London: Croom Helm.
10. Moore, M.G. (1973). Towards a theory of Independent earning and teaching. Journal of Higher Education. 44, 666-679.
11. Ogili, E.E. (1995a) Distance Education: A liberal vision in Nigeria: Journal of Education and Psychology in Developing Africa. 2 (1) Sept. 38-40.
12. Ogili, E.E. (1995b). Teacher Education and Distance Education in Nigeria: An imperative for national development. A paper presented in Conference organized by NCCE. Kaduna: 25th – 29th September.
13. Ogili E.E. (1996a) Evaluation of distance Education programmes in Nigeria. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis Seminar presented to department of Adult Education, University of Nigeria Nsukka March.
14. Ogili E.E. (1996b) Factors Militating Against the Development of Distance Education in Nigeria. Journal of Nigeria Research in Social Sciences and Education. 1 (1) 4 – 10.

15. Ogili, E.E. (1996c) Distance education VISION AND Gerontology for a better tomorrow. <u>Journal of Research in science and Technology Education (JORSTED) (2)</u> PP. 204 – 212.

16. Ogili, E.E. (1977a) Information Technology Application in Distance Education and Training: A Strategy for professionalism in Adult Education <u>Journal of CITADEL</u> 1 (3): 451: - 460.

17. Ogili, E.E. (1977b). Stress and Crisis in distance Education in Nigeria. Stress Crisis in science and Technology Education in Nigeria. (ed) (A publication of Dept. science and Technical Education, ESUT, Enugu, pp. 47-57.

18. Ogili E.E. (2004) Challenges of Open and Distance Education in Achieving Education for All in Nigeria Malaysian Journal of Distance Education, 6 (2): 67-74.

19. Ogili E.E. (2005) Strategies for Effective Communication in Educational Instructions in Nigeria madysiaan on line Journal of Instructional Technology (MOJIT) 2 (1): 7th paper, htt:/ppp jj.usm. my/mojit.

20. Ogili, E.E. (2006) Distance Education Approaches, Enugu: ADELS foundation Publishers.

21. Ogili E.E. (2007). Introduction to Distance Education Technology, Enugu: ADELS foundation Publishers.

22. Ogili, E.E. and Eluka, M.A. (1997) Distance Education programmes and Operational justification in Nigeria Towards vision 2010, A Paper presented to IMO STATE University, Owerri. Educational Technology Conference, 22-25 July.

23. Ogili, E.E. and Nzeneri, S.I. (2004) quintessential crises in Distance Education practices on Achieving Education for all in Nigeria, 21st ICDE World Conference on Open learning and Distance Education, 18-21 February, Hong Kong: 336

24. Okeem, E.O. (1990). <u>Education in Africa; Search for Realistic Alternative,</u> United Kingdom: IFFA

25. Race, Philip (1988). <u>How to win An open Learner.</u> London CET.