
Role of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) In Technical Vocational Education and Training
in Nigeria

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Abstract

Open and Distant mode of learning can contribute to improving the skills of personnel and the overall industrial workforce of any organization. Open and Distance learning (ODL) has the potential for providing cost effective training to a large number of workforce while satisfying the need of continuing education at different levels. This paper discussed the open and distant mode of learning. The paper examines the role of ODL in the provision of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in a growing economy. The paper further highlighted the challenges of ODL in the area TVET delivery. Some of which include stakeholders' resistance, digital divide and inadequate infrastructure, lack of requisite skills and knowledge among others. The paper submits that, ODL mode of learning has great importance and relevance especially in Nigeria where there is an urgent need for improving the overall skills of personnel so as to enable them become part of a productive force in a post-oil boom economy. Recommendations made include design and review of TVET programmes and curriculum to be responsive to the needs of the students, community, industries and the economy; emphasis to be placed on training and re-training of stakeholders for effectiveness and efficiency among others.

Keywords: Open and Distance Learning, Technical Vocational Education and Training, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Open and Distance learning (ODL) is a system and a process that connects learners with distributed learning resources. It is characterized by Separation of place and or time between instructor and learner, among learners, and or between learners and learning resources conducted through one or more media. Adebayo (2007) view open and distance learning as the type of education that takes place outside the conventional school systems; it is imparted without necessarily having personal interaction with students or learners. It is also a teaching and

learning process in which students are separated from teachers by a physical distance which is often bridged by communication technologies (Dhanarajan, 2008). From foregoing definitions, it is seen that ODL is not necessarily predicated upon the presence or participation of an instructor who imparts the content of a curriculum at a distance.

According to Fozdar (2009), the definitions also reflects the inherent structure and organization of the learning activity by regarding it as both a "system" and a "process" organized by a provider who is involved in the assessment and

monitoring of the learning activity. Thus, it is different from a non-formal and experiential learning that can occur when an individual simply access information or interacts with media. Open and distance learning gives opportunity to individual(s) who may be disadvantaged by limited time, distance or physical disability to acquire education. In open and distance mode of education, students may not be required to be present in a classroom but to engage in the use of innovative approach like e-module to learn and acquire knowledge.

Open and distance learning is increasingly becoming popular because of its flexibility and learner friendly approach particularly to those who could not get access to the formal education as provided by regular conventional universities. ODL is more cost effective and can take place while continuing full-time employment (Moran and Rumble, 2004). People living in remote areas are able to enroll in programmes which otherwise would not be available to them. For instance, in India about 15 percent of the total population joining higher education is trained by Indira Gandhi National Open University which is one of the 150 distance mode institutions under the conventional learning system (Fozdar, 2009).

According to Mishra, (2004), the path to industrialization and economic development of any nation is through skills acquisition and training. ODL is seen as a viable mode for the provision of technical vocational education and training. This is because it allows vast number of people hitherto unreached to take advantage of education and training opportunities. The changing skills demand due to competition and the rapid market changes especially in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) calls for exigency in the provision of continuous learning and training

opportunities. Consequently there is a need for a paradigm shift in the training approaches in the formal and informal sectors for training and developing skills in line with the needs of the society.

In Nigeria today, it is estimated that more than 70 percent of employment is in the 'informal' sector where employees are engaged in relatively low productivity jobs (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Provision of appropriate skills and training may thus be an important intervention to increasing the productivity of this workforce. ODL institutions can play important role by providing flexible and cost effective technical vocational education and training thereby achieving the much needed target on skills acquisition, training, capacity building, employability, life-long education and continuing education. ODL is now recognized and accepted as an important mode for achieving many targets including the delivery of TVET. Hence in addition to contributing to social and economic development of a country, ODL also enable the creation of a knowledge-based society (Fozdar & Kumar 2008).

Similarly, Fozdar (2009) opined that, open and distance learning is rapidly transforming the delivery of education at all levels within developed and developing countries. The application of ODL mode especially in advanced economies has led to its rapid growth and adoption as such most developed countries now use ODL as a primary strategy in delivering technical vocational education and training reform. This initiative is being driven by a recognized need for more efficient and effective human resource development strategies in response to the forces of international competition and globalization (Fozdar, 2009).

Concept of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

The development of any country depends on the level of industrialization, per capita income of its citizens, gross domestic product, educated and skilled manpower among others. Most developing countries have not achieved a significant level of industrialization relative to their population and citizens' living standard (Sarkar, 2015). Technical vocational education and training (TVET) enable the preparation of individual as a skilled manpower and have a direct impact on the development of a country (Okoye & Arimonu, 2016).

According to Arfo (2015) the concept, terminologies and acronyms of TVET vary from country to country. These include among others: Occupational Education (OE), Vocational Education (VE), Professional Education (PE), Career and Technical Education (CTE), Further Education and Training (FET), Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Vocational and Technical Education and Training (VTET), Vocational and Technical Education (VTE), Training and Further Education (TAFE) and Vocational Education and Training (VET).

However, United Nations Education and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) (2004) had recommended what it considered an appropriate and more comprehensive term of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET). According to UNESCO, since education and training were complementary parts of preparing an individual for the world of work, it should not be perceived as distinct processes hence the terminology should reflect this reality. UNESCO (2010) referred to TVET as those aspects of the educational process

involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitude, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of the economic and social life. This concept is recognized and used internationally. TVET is also seen as a system for developing skills and competencies necessary for socio-economic development, national development, employment and job creation (Ansah & Ernest, 2013). It is a mechanism for poverty reduction, self-employment and wealth creation. For instance, Republic of South Africa (RSA) (2013) viewed TVET as education for acquisition of practical and employable skills and competencies needed for developing good working culture among employees in different occupational trades. Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (2004) on its part enumerated the goals of TVET to include provision of trained manpower in applied sciences, technology and business; provision of the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development and give training and impart the necessary skills to individual who shall be self-reliant economically.

ROLE OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING IN TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Open and Distance Learning is increasingly becoming popular because of its flexibility and learners' friendly approach particularly to those who could not get access to the regular conventional systems. ODL has the potential to produce skilled workforce and reach the un-reached and even the marginalized and excluded group of individuals in the society.

According to Fozdar (2009), ODL institutions have diverted attention towards improving skills of teachers and industrial workforce through in-service training and skills development programmes. Fozdar further submitted that, ODL institutions do not only impart knowledge in alternative to conventional educational system but also in the area of technical vocational education and Training.

In Nigeria, ODL has made tremendous contribution to teacher education. It is also used extensively to provide pre-service teacher education, qualification upgrading and continuing professional development in subject areas and instructional methods. However, the rapid advancement in technology has further encouraged the adoption of ODL mode in the delivery of technical vocational education and training. Institutions with ODL capacity can offer programmes for improving skills needed for the workforce working in industries and workshops/laboratories which contribute to the growing economy of the country. Formal educational system alone cannot meet the need for continuous learning and training opportunities especially with the inability of candidates to get admitted into regular convention universities in Nigeria. This call for strengthening of ODL programmes to accommodate more candidates. Thus, skill based programmes can be implemented through ODL mode as it is an effective way of providing education for the development of skills required for an untrained workforce (Sarkar, 2015).

Challenges of TVET delivery through ODL Mode

The rapid growth of open and distance learning has resulted in the

emergence of many challenges. Some of these challenges include the following:

- i. *Inadequate Curriculum and Instructional Content:* TVET curriculum has not been fully responsive to the needs of commerce and industry (Arfo, 2015). There is also the shortage of well-designed instructional content that is well formatted for more advanced delivery systems such as the internet especially in the area of TVET. This is mostly due to the high costs for converting traditional content into a distance learning format (Sarkar, 2015).
- ii. *Stakeholder Resistance:* Instructors and lecturers especially those involved in regular mode delivery often view ODL as a threat. The fear of technological change and job loss hence present significant barriers to implementation. Even when it often entail a shift in job function and professional development of faculty, instructors, and support staff to enable them to support new models of delivery (Fozdar & Kumar, 2008).
- iii. *Quality and Standard:* There are concerns among many potential participants and students that ODL is a “second best” option. There are also concerns relating to the quality of offerings and qualifications obtained especially with the proliferation of on-line education platforms. However, it is interesting to note that ODL programmes are mostly run by accredited institutions which offer recognized certificates approved by the senate/board of such institutions.
- iv. *Appropriateness and Efficacy:* There is a misconception that ODL is an inappropriate mode for imparting technical and vocational skills. Conversely though, Fozdar and Kumar (2008) view ODL most appropriate for

post-secondary technical and vocational level studies. According to them, this is because technical and vocational studies often comprise of much greater cognitive and theoretical components that better lend themselves to distance learning methodology.

- v. *Digital Divide and inadequate infrastructure:* There is an inequitable access to information and telecommunications technology (ICT) between the developed and developing countries. The potential of ODL to expand access to TVET will be increasingly predicated upon finding ways to improve access to technology. The current levels of ICT infrastructure and access in most part of the country is poor. This lack of basic infrastructure limits the options for ODL delivery models.
- vi. *Lack of Requisite Skills and Knowledge:* The Development and sustainability of ODL mode of learning requires investment in new skills and knowledge for distance instructors, learners, technical support staff, administrators and policy and decision makers. This will ensure that stakeholders are on board with regards to providing affordable education for all.

CONCLUSION

The inability of many candidates to get admitted into conventional universities in Nigeria calls for strengthening of open and distance learning. ODL has the capacity to satisfy the urgent need of providing cost effective technical vocational education and training to a large number of individuals and the need for continuing education at different levels. It provides access to education and TVET

in particular in a more flexible and learner friendly mode while supporting in-service training and skills development. These enable citizens become part of a productive force in a growing economy.

Technical vocational education and training plays a vital role in a country's economic growth and development. It enable individual to gain employment and or launch a business and work productively. ODL is consequently a pivot in the quest for delivering an affordable, flexible and learner friendly TVET.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TVET curriculum across the levels of study should be periodically reviewed. This will ensure that skills and training responsive to the needs of the students, community, economy and the nation at large would be identified and reflected.
2. The design of TVET programmes in ODL mode should be responsive to the needs of industries and the economy. It should reflect the demands of a global competitive labour market.
3. Emphasis should be placed on the training and re-training of ODL stakeholders. This will enable a shift towards accepting the dynamism of their job functions for effectiveness and efficiency in the delivering process.
4. Government at national and sub-national levels should provide a suitable framework for the participation of private sector through the Public-Private Partnerships. This will help in reducing the infrastructural deficit and inadequate technologies and ultimately widen the scope of access to TVET and education in general.

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