

Organisation of Dual Mode Distance Education institutions in Nigeria: present and future

by
Professor Babatunde Ipaye
National Open University of Nigeria
bipaye@gmail.com

Introduction:

The challenges of mass access to university education in Nigeria are escalating by the day. It is becoming clearer everyday that going strictly by the use of brick and mortar institutions and limiting learning to the four walls of the lecture room, not much may be done within the coming decades to provide sufficient classroom space, accommodation and facilities for all those intending to acquire university education in the country. For example, the Population Reference Bureau, 2007 showed that 34% of Nigeria's population put at about 140million are aged 10 to 24. This is about 47million. The total number of secondary school students preparing for university admission between now and the next four to five years will come from this figure. Yet for a period of one decade now, Nigerian universities had been able to take among themselves, only between 24% (in 1998) falling to 5% in 2002 and rising to 8% in 2004 of all applicants for placement in Nigerian universities. The high and discriminatory fees charged by overseas universities had hit Nigeria most hard thus reducing the number of Nigerian students who could go out as private students. Nigeria believes that her "development will not be saved by oil & gas or solid minerals but rather the application of the benefit stream arising from resource exploitation in the development of human capital" (FGN, 2006). Education, particularly at the tertiary level, is central to the accomplishment of this belief. Nigerian youth want to go to the university but there is just no space in the existing universities to take those who are qualified for admission. It is projected that by 2009, just a year from today, about 10,535,618 qualified candidates will be rejected or denied admission into any of the 91 conventional universities in Nigeria because of lack of space rather than lack of ability of the candidates. Table 1 below tells part of the story.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE PLEASE

One of the ways in which some Nigerian universities responded to this high demand for university education was to introduce satellite, outreach campuses where thousands of students were admitted and provided off-campus university education. However, this became grossly abused, university education became instantly bastardized, standards were low, there were no discernible admission qualifications, there seemed to be no regard for quality in terms of staffing, facilities, carrying capacities, entry requirements, curriculum and the minimum standard. Though fees were high, yet tuition fell to almost the lowest ebb ever. The Federal Government became extremely worried and immediately and urgently decided to close all satellite outreach campuses run by any university. So far, Government had succeeded in crippling but not in totally uprooting the satellite campus syndrome.

The closure of such outreach campuses and classes probably intensified the decision of a number of Nigerian universities to sanitise the process of mass access to university education. They turned to what they call “ Distance Education”, but which in actual fact in many cases is part-time studies. It must however be noted that a few universities had established distance education along with conventional university education long before the mad rush for outreach campuses. Even these now decided to upgrade the practice and become dual mode institutions.

Dual modes in Nigeria

There are currently four well known and recognized universities running the dual mode system in Nigeria. These are :

1. **University of Lagos** – through the Distance Learning Institute (DLI) – formerly known as Correspondence and Open Studies Institute (COSIT), established 1974.
2. **University of Abuja** – through the Centre for Distance Learning and Continuing Education (CDLCE), established 1992, essentially to offer degree courses using the distance learning approach, and as a silent substitute for the defunct National Open University.
3. **University of Ibadan** – through the Centre for Distance Learning, which commenced in 1988 as Centre for External Studies, a sub-unit of the Department of Adult Education and Extra-mural studies. It started by offering degree programme through the correspondence mode before evolving into a full fledged distance learning programme in 2002.
4. **Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife** – through its Centre for Distance Learning established to provide through DE, courses like professional Master of Business Administration, Master in Information Technology. The centre also coordinates the university’s pre-degree programmes. It was formally established in 2002.

Interestingly, all are Federal universities. None of the 33 State universities and the 34 private universities had ventured into dual mode though one is not sure how many of them are planning to go into distance education and how soon. For example, Abia State University – through its Institute of Distance Education (IDEA) runs a distance teaching unit under the university’s consultancy outfit which is expected to generate revenue and thus it is for profit. According to Ipaye, (chapter 14 , in press) only the University of Abuja had the mandate by government from inception to run distance education. This mandate arose from the closure of the Open University in 1984 and was a way of Government compensating for a perceived loss arising from such a closure because six years later, as a way of saving face, the closed open university was, as noted by Hamza (2000), “ silently merged with the university of Abuja to form the nucleus of the Centre for Distance Learning and Continuing Education”. In fact, Decree 110 of 1992 which set up the university of Abuja “mandated the university to operate like a dual mode university offering both the conventional and distance learning programmes” and her academic brief was very clear on this. (see Ipaye, in Press).

The organisational pattern and operating practices of ODL institutions depend on a number of factors. These include the philosophy underlying the establishment of the institution, economic restrictions, societal demand, political dictates and institutional control. With the benefit of hindsight, most operators of the dual mode in Nigeria would prefer a more student-centered model and an open approach with a larger number of students by making access open to all. However, institutional controls and the demands of the National Universities Commission, NUC, actually dictated a more institution-centered, partially open and partially closed approach with greater control and well defined selection criteria.

It must be noted however that Nigeria would have started the dual mode in one of her universities since the early 1960s. On the eve of independence in 1959, Nigeria set up the Ashby Commission to look into and project on higher education in Nigeria. The Commission recommended three additional universities to the existing university college at Ibadan.. Specifically, the Commission recommended “a new university at or near Lagos, with special emphasis on evening students, and correspondence courses for degree programmes”. In

addition, Ashby also recommended that the university in or near Lagos should have a school of commerce and business administration which offers both day and evening classes; the day courses if necessary as sandwich courses for office based students. It emphasized evening courses leading to degrees in Law. Further, the Commission recommended a Department for Correspondence courses which will admit properly qualified students for courses leading to degrees in selected areas which can be taught well by correspondence, believing that such institutions in Nigeria will be very popular and will encourage large numbers of employed men and women to improve their education thus improving their chances for upward mobility in their chosen professions. They supported this recommendation by saying that "University institutions with Departments for correspondence courses have played a very successful part in helping to solve Russia's education problems and they are still an integral part of higher education in the United States" (Ashby, 1960; see also Adesina, 2005). For some unexplainable reasons, but best known to the university, the university of Lagos established in 1962 did not immediately implement the recommendations pertaining to correspondence courses and in fact, according to Adesina(2005) "only a small proportion of its students benefited from the evening courses administered by four of its twelve units". He observed further that "the idea of correspondence courses leading to degree, which could have placed Lagos University in a unique position among Nigerian universities was not given any serious consideration until 1974" (see Ipaye, in press). The history of distance education had been well documented. (see Fagbamiye, 2000; FME,2000; Ipaye, in press)

Organising the dual mode programme: Current practice:

There is no common discernible organizational practice across the dual mode institutions in Nigeria. The following however are observed trends. In each university, the decision to go dual and introduce distance education unit was taken by Senate.

A unit was designated to house the DE programme. Such unit was empowered to liaise with interested Faculties and Departments. The programmes of such faculties and departments are then carefully studied to see if they are amenable to distance learning. The DE unit is empowered to bring on board any department that opts to join DE programmes. For example at the university of Ibadan, while virtually all the departments in the Faculty of Agriculture had made their programmes available for DE, only the department of Statistics had opted for DE in the Faculty of Science, only four departments in the Faculty of Arts and only three departments in the Faculty of Social Sciences. Usually, the DE unit appoints a coordinator from the participating Faculty to coordinate programmes from that Faculty in the DE offerings. Such coordinators become automatic members of the Board of the DE. The DE unit itself is organized into "departments" and sub-units to oversee different functions and activities. There is a Director appointed by the Vice-Chancellor, a senior administrative official is also deployed by the Registry to the Unit to oversee administrative functions and a senior Bursary staff is deployed to head the finance section of the DE unit. The Director reports directly to the Vice-Chancellor and to Senate of the university. Since none of the universities had gone completely on-line, most of the course delivery methods are either embedded or based on "residential school" pattern. This means that study materials are provided to students where available, and some six to ten weeks block period is devoted to residential tutoring during the long vacation by the regular conventional students. For some of the universities, the DE programmes are scheduled into contact sessions, with specific recommended load and courses designed for each contact session. There is thus little or no flexibility the type most often experienced in distance learning. Thus what most of them practice classify variously as , part-time studies, pseudo-distance teaching or distributed learning since the work of the four years for conventional students is merely distributed into five or six years for the DE student. For each, restrictions still apply as to entry qualifications, same-time registration, same-time examinations, same-time graduation. Also, many of them have no customized prepared study materials for the DE programmes, rather depend on same prescribed text-books as for conventional, on-campus students. One of the implications of allowing departments to opt for DE is that such departments were expected to ensure that same lecturers teach both on-campus and off-campus students. Experience showed that in most cases this assumption is not met and Senate would not know, though many of them provided lecturers of equivalent qualifications but not necessarily similar experiences to teach some of the courses.

Suggested approaches and future trends:

Within the overall vision and mission of the university, the off-campus students' programme (i.e. Distance Education) must have its own vision and mission clearly stated. This must not contradict the overall vision and mission of the university but enhance it to the extent that the qualitative dimensions and the comparative nature of the DE will show. The programme must have its own strategic plan albeit, as an offshoot of the main strategic plan of the university. The DE programme of the university should be a Senate affair and thus all Faculties and Academic units should cooperate in running it. True enough the university may start with just a few courses based in a given Faculty or Department, but as time goes on and the needs for other services arise, there will be need for other Faculties and Departments to join in. The University Library play a major role in helping off-campus students. We shall discuss this later. The Library is the archive of and repository for knowledge. Learning is about acquiring knowledge, skills and competencies with which the learner is empowered to contribute to the development and betterment of the human race in diverse ways. This is why some say that "Learning is an empowering activity where students acquire and productively apply new knowledge and skills. It is a sustainable, lifelong, renewable process for people and for institutions that serve people". (USQ; <http://www.usq.edu.au/learnteach/default.htm>) Viewed from this perspective, the role of the library in a DE programme cannot be over-emphasized.

Quality Assurance in Dual Mode institutions:

The issue of quality was one of the main things which the Federal Government frowned upon in the era of outreach campuses and which led to their closure. In operating the dual mode system therefore, we need to pay particular attention to the issue of quality. We try to proffer some suggestions here.

Conceptualising the programme:

Quality assurance in dual modes begins from the very time the programme is conceptualized; at the planning stage and the mode of implementation. There is thus the need for thorough planning as to duration, quality of staff, quality and type of students, courses, study materials (print, audio, CD/DVD,etc.) instructional delivery mode (whether f2f, virtual or mixed, broadcast, telecast, higher-order e-learning etc i.e. webbology), mode and frequency of contact, provision of support services, use of available and adaptable technology, and a well laid down roadmap for the success of the programme. Often it pays to start small and gradually build up, but if the capacity is there, the university can start big but ensure that there is always room for improvement and development.

Orientation:

The next consideration after admission (admission is based on quality of students mentioned above) is orientation. No matter how crowded your programme is, make room for orientation. Orientation is a time to tell students what to expect, what the university is, what to do and how to succeed. It is a time you help them to form the mental picture of achieving their goals in the university and how to actualize taking the very first steps to achieving their goals. This is when the foundation of the quality of their work and the extent of their success is laid. The extent and rate of their adjustment to university work, to the concept and practice of studying at a distance and at understanding what is expected of them depends on the quality of the orientation you provide for the students. Various activities during orientation had been discussed elsewhere; see (Ipaye, 2007)

Parity in curriculum content and subject matter delivery

First, the quality of your DE must be at par as much as possible with that of the full time conventional students. A course that carries 2 credits which requires two hours of lectures per week and thus 30 hours of total lectures for the 15 week -Semester must similarly be given in not less than 30 hours of contact in a residential school period; or contact period in which it is offered in a face to face manner. If it is a purely an on-line course then we should try to double or

increase the time allotted by at least 25% to 50% to ensure that sufficient reading and study of the subject is provided. Ipaye,(2007) suggested how to do this.

Provide student support services.

One of the areas in which dual modes systems are deficient especially in Nigeria is the provision of learner support services. These services are scarcely available in most conventional universities hence when they go dual, they do not see the need for it in the distance education format they introduce. To help distance education students maximize their academic gains and access success without tears, there is need for dual mode providers to provide learner support services to the students. What are these services?

Study Centres:

None of the universities currently offering the dual mode has study centres. This is because such a practice is not allowed by government. This is one of the reasons all of them still run residential schools as described above. However if DE students are widely distributed, there is need to create information centres where students can access information about the university, the courses, time tables, take delivery of study materials, etc.

Student Counsellors:

There is need for the establishment of counseling services. Student Counsellors perform very important roles in distance education, all geared towards helping the student maximize the benefits of university education and enhancing the quality of education delivery..

Tutorial services:

Tutorials are fast becoming a rarity in conventional universities these days. In dual-mode DE, it is necessary. Though, most course delivery in our dual mode institutions is by face to face, this often than not is in large groups/classes. For distance learners not to be lost in the academic crowd, there is need for meeting them in smaller groups for tutorials where they have the opportunity to ask questions and indicate areas of problems and difficulties in their studies. The provision of tutorial opportunities enhances the quality of teaching and learning and thus is a quality assurance device. In many dual mode programme, tutorial facilitators are also serve as academic counsellors. We need to mention provision of library services and use of mobile technology to enhance quality. (see Ipaye,2007 for details)

Conclusion:

Nigeria is anxious to provide university education to majority of her citizens who qualify for university admission. However, the four walls of the university in the conventional sense cannot take all hence the need to resort to DE in HE. ODL to a large extent is helping Nigeria focus and refocus on areas of training and capacity development which conventional provisions had not ventured into. For example new courses available through ODL include Peace and conflict resolution which help in developing capacities in handling sensitive socio-political issues in a country facing electoral, political and social conflicts; courses like criminology and security studies as well as Police Science help develop capacity and competencies in combating crime and increasing security at macro- and micro-levels. Further, through ODL a number of politicians, political leaders and service professionals have registered for courses which hopefully will help to enhance their appreciation of good governance and qualitative leadership; all in a country yearning for good governance, electoral reforms and quality leadership. The provision of special study centres by NOUN, is a major way of reaching the unreached and bringing the hither-to marginalized into the fold. In her three years or so of existence, NOUN had registered more than 10,000 female students including women in seclusion and a number of female prison in-mates have been counselled to register. With conventional universities going dual and providing DE Nigerian universities will begin to take a more central place and play a more central role in dealing with issues of conflict, social justice and governance in their curriculum.

References

Fagbamiye, E.O. (2000): An overview of the practice of distance education in Nigeria. In *Education Today Vol.8, No. 2, pp 30 - 34*

Hamza, Yahaya (2000) Challenges and prospects of re-establishing the Open University in Nigeria. In *Education Today Vol.8, No. 2, pp 41-43*

Ipaye (in Press) Learner Support Services in ODL in developing economies

Ipaye, Babatunde (2007) Organisation of Dual Mode Distance Education institutions in Nigeria: suggested models and contextual issues. Unpublished Workshop paper.

Federal Government of Nigeria, FGN (2006) Reforms in HE in Nigeria

(USQ; <http://www.usq.edu.au/learnteach/default.htm>)