

## **Role of Open / Distance Learning in the Attainment of United Nations Millennium Development Goals in Cross River State, Nigeria**

**By**

Dr. Roseline E. Tawo, Department of Adult and Continuing Education, University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria: [ekasih@yahoo.com](mailto:ekasih@yahoo.com)

Has a Ph.D in Guidance and Counselling. Taught for 12 years in secondary schools (Cross River State) and now in the University. Coordinator, B.Ed Adult Education programme (University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria, 2002-2006). Academic Adviser. Examination Officer (1999-2002). A member of Professional Associations. Has attended and presented papers in Local and International Conferences.

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Dr. Arikpo B. Arikpo, Department of Adult and Continuing Education, University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria: [drarikpo@yahoo.com](mailto:drarikpo@yahoo.com)

Holds a Ph.D in Education, was Head of Department, Director of State Agency for Non-Formal Education (Cross River State), Coordinator of Distance Learning (Cross River State). Has published extensively.

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Dr. Marcellus U. Ojuah, Department of Adult and Continuing Education, University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria: [muojuah@yahoo.com](mailto:muojuah@yahoo.com)

Holds a Ph.D in Adult Education from University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria. Currently a senior lecturer at University of Calabar. Belong to three learned Societies (NNCAE, CAETA, MNAEP). Involve in CBO/NGO activities.

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Mr Chris C. Chukurah, Department of Vocational and Special Education, University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria: [churac2006@yahoo.com](mailto:churac2006@yahoo.com)

Examination officer in the Department, once a Coordinator of Students Industrial works Experience (SIWES) Students Academic Adviser.

**Registration Number: ACDE2888/0053**

**Sub-theme:** Meeting the Challenges of the Millennium Development Goals: Role, Potential and Impact of ODL

**Abstract:** This study reports the view Cross River State distance education learners hold about the relevance of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in the process of attaining the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (UN MDGs). A brief review of the concept and methods ODL use in making information and knowledge available to people was made. Also, the United Nations MDGs were identified and problems encountered in meeting the goals' targets briefly outlined. It is postulated that, greater awareness of the concept and methods of open and distance learning in meeting targets of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was not being created sufficiently to meet the felt needs of targeted populations. The sample for the study is made up of 88 students purposively selected from the open and distance learning study centres in Calabar Metropolis. The study design is survey research. The instrument is a 26 item Likert-type scale questionnaire designed by the researchers. Statistics of percentages were adopted. Based on the analysis, it was found out, among others that 70% (seventy percent) of the respondents agreed that ODL methods provided wider access, and the acquisition of functional literacy skills for all learners, which are relevant in the attainment of UN MDGs. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that; programmes for attainment of UN MDGs incorporate the views of the targeted population in a practical attempt to attain the MDGs in the Cross River State and elsewhere. Secondly, the ODL methods of CEP, ETRP and IBEP should be relied upon for widest reach to the targeted individuals and groups for the MDGs benefits.

**Key words:** Role, Open/Distance Learning (ODL), Assessment, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Attainment, Cross River State

## **INTRODUCTION**

The success of every nation's effort in economic, social, political and technological development depends largely on her ability to make education accessible to her citizens. This has inspired and posed challenges on the Nigeria government to provide education for all her citizenry. The government saw open and distance learning system as a big relief to its objective of, making education available to all its citizens. (Ihieonyemolor and Obioma. 2007, 201) reported that, the efforts of the government in the development of open and distance learning dates back to Ashby Report on higher education in 1960, when it recommended the establishment of the University of Lagos, considering the concentration of people and the higher demand of university education. Open and distance learning is no longer new in Nigeria. (Ipaye 2006, 35) explained that, Open and distance learning began in the 1940s as correspondence studies, when many Nigerians enrolled in colleges in Great Britain and studied for many examinations. This, according to him continued until some Nigerian Universities, through their Institutes of Education, started distance learning programmes. Contributing similarly, (Adekanmbi 1993, 95) narrated that:

The emergence of the correspondence system of instruction in the early part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century marked a turning point in the provision of educational opportunities for millions of people all over the world. It signified a major departure from the traditional face-to-face approach to teaching and learning by making it possible for teachers and learners to be separated in time and space.

(NPE 2004, 34) made it clear, where it said "Correspondence education would be encouraged, being a low cost method "mass education". Mass education, according to (Omolewa 1985, 5) involves;

Adult education, to the school of Thomas Hodgkin and Rowland Chadwick, known as "fundamental education", the acquisition of reading and writing skills which are to be applied for the development of the Community. Thus adult education is concerned with agricultural extension, community development and social welfare. It involves the building of latrines; the construction of Maternity Homes to facilitate health delivery and the establishment of village industries to stimulates economic growth and generate a spirit of self-reliance.

Apart from the Correspondence method of mass education, (Tawo, Arikpo and Ojuah 2008, 2) listed the multimedia approach, tutorial approach, small group problem solving approach, individualized instruction approach, use of information technology approach and support services of counseling, to form part of open and distance learning methods of instructional delivery. (Tawo

et al 2008, 2) explained that distance learning is a planned form of education that uses technology to bridge the distance gap. (Adekanmbi 1993, 97) categorized distance learning approaches into four (4) models, namely; the correspondence school model, the consultation model, the integrated model and the distance teaching or Open University model. The objectives of Open and distance learning according to (NOUN 2006, 18) consist of programmes;

essentially designed to widen the access to education and to ensure equity and equality of opportunities for all and sundry. Open and Distance Learning Education is to be used as an instrument for poverty alleviation, especially in rural communities, by providing opportunities that support Education For All (EFA) and life long learning. Open and distance is to equip the Nigerian populace for the emerging global culture of technological literacy via its programmes and use of information and communication technology.

The objectives of instructional methods of Open and Distance Learning are quite consistent with the attainment of goals of the Millennium Declaration, by evidence of (Fasokun 2006, 21-43) about which he disclosed that, in September, 2000, 189 nations met and committed themselves to combat poverty and make development a reality for everyone in the United Nations Millennium Declaration "... specifically, they called for halving, by the year 2015, the number of people who live on less than one dollar a day... they emphasized the need for promoting gender equality and empowerment of women, guaranteeing a basic education for everyone and supporting principles of sustainable development. Continuing, (Fasokun 2006, 22-24) listed Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as follows

Goal 1: Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger.

Goal 2: Achieve Universal primary education.

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women.

Goal 4: Reduce Child Mortality.

Goal 5: Improve maternal health

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development

Concluding, (Fasokun 2006, 29-41) said the achievement of MDGs will be largely determined by the extent to which rural poverty reduction is achieved.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The standard of education in Nigeria has been observed to ill-equip the learners with career related functional literacy (Arikpo, Tawo and Ojuah 2008, 16; Ngwu 2003, Viii; Dike 2002, 2). (Ben 2006, 263-288. vol. 12) observed that, "sole focus on access to education may not deliver education for all. Education for all should be accompanied with acquisition of functional literacy in order to accommodate quality and quantity. Functional literacy according to (Kolawole and Adepoiyi 2006, 019) refers to literacy which goes beyond ability to read and write; it is an emancipatory practice that requires people to be able to read, speak and understand what is read, and able to use the knowledge to solve their socio-cultural and economic problems. Continuing (Okedera 1981. in Kolawole et al 2006, 019) remarked that, for literacy to have impacts on the recipients, it must be functional and permanent. Unfortunately, the views of learners in Open/Distance learning in the Cross River State have never been assessed, in terms of how this form of learning methods are relevant in meeting the Millennium Development Goals' eight-point criteria, as far as their personal and community development are concerned. Observably however, (Tawo, Arikpo and Ojuah 2008, 3) stressed that distance learning uses methods which focus on learners needs. Contributing, (Perreton 1993 in Tawo et al 2008, 3) disclosed that distance learning involves situations in which learners' physical separation from the educational principles is bridged by postal mail, e-mail, fax, computer conferences, telephone or periodic tutorial sessions etc. This means ODL provides both education for all and the kind of quality needed for learners' permanent functional literacy.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Consequently, the main focus of this study is to describe the views of open and distance learning students on the role of open and distance learning in the attainment of United Nations Millennium Development Goals in the Cross River State of Nigeria.

Specifically, the objectives of this study are to;

1. Access the overall views of Open/Distance Learning students (ODL) on the adequacy of Correspondence Education Programme (CEP); Radio and Television Education Programme (RTEP); and Internet-Based Education Programme (IBEP), methods in the provision of education for all.
2. Relate the influence of sex on views about the relevance of open and distance learning in the attainment of UN MDGs.
3. Compare differences in views on the role of ODL in the attainment of UN MDGs based on education and occupational status.

### **RESEARCH QUESTION**

What is the overall view of students of ODL on adequacy of; Correspondence Education Programme; Radio and Television Education Programmes and Inter-based Education Programmes methods in the provision of education for all in the Cross River State of Nigeria?

### **SIGNIFICANCE**

Generally, the merit of this study is that, results from the assessment of learners views provide critically needed data for planning programmes on attainment of MDGs targets, without which the beneficiaries are either victimized or ignorant of what may be happening in their lives and environment.

### **ASSUMPTION**

It is assumed that all the respondents are adults who know the value of education in personal and community capacity building. Most of them may have suffered one form of deprivation or the other and so are competent and reliable as respondents of this kind of study.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The sample is made up of 88 students of open and distance learning study centres in Calabar South and Calabar Municipality Local Government Council Areas purposively selected for this study. The research design is survey research. The instrument is a 26 item Likert-type scale questionnaire designed by the researchers. The questionnaire has sections A and B. Section A contains the personal data of the respondents and served as the independent variables for the study. Section B has four sub-headings which briefly describe some instructional methods used in ODL instructional delivery, and also stated how the ODL methods enhance the attainment of each of the eight MDGs. Information in sections B served as the dependent variables for the study. In order to analyze the views of the respondents on the relevance of ODL in attainment of UN MDGs, statistics of percentages were adopted.

## FINDINGS AND RESULTS

**Table 1: Percentage analysis of students view on the adequacy of; correspondence education programme; radio and television education programmes and internet-based education programmes methods in the provision of education for all (N=88).**

S/N	ITEM	STRONGLY AGREE - 4		AGREE - 3		DISAGREE 2		STRONGLY DISAGREE-1	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
	<b>Correspondence Education System as part of ODL Strategies (CEP).</b>								
1	ODL increases access to learning and training through correspondence education system.	31	35.2	48	34.5	7	8.0	2	2.3
2	ODL encourages continuous learning and retraining through correspondence education system made available directly to the learners.	37	42.0	47	53.4	3	3.4	1	1.1
3	ODL augments the work of conventional institutions where they are unable to admit all candidates at a particular time through CES	25	28.4	38	43.2	21	23.9	4	4.5
4	Through correspondence education system, ODL encourages the working class and family members to study at their convenience using study materials posted to them.	30	34.1	45	51.1	6	6.8	7	8.0
	<b>Educational TV and Radio Programmes as part of ODL Strategies (RTEP).</b>								
5	ODL provides life and recorded lectures to people in their homes through satellite, cable television and radio.	30	34.1	35	39.8	16	18.2	7	8.0
6	ODL provides speedy and efficient training for key target groups through TV and radio educational programmes.	25	28.4	42	47.7	17	19.3	4	4.5
7	ODL provides life long and inclusive learning through TV and radio system irrespective of the age, sex and location of the learners.	25	28.4	45	51.1	12	13.6	6	6.8
8	ODL mounts educational/literacy campaigns to a larger audience through educational TV, radio jingles and programmes.	23	26.1	53	60.2	10	11.4	2	2.3
	<b>Internet-based Education Programmes as part of ODL Strategies (IBEP).</b>								
9	ODL provides entrepreneurial training for learners by delivering study materials in electronic format through computers.	22	25.0	45	51.1	16	18.2	5	5.7
10	ODL facilitates teacher-student interactions through e-mail	17	19.3	45	51.1	14	15.9	12	13.6
11	ODL promotes student-student and, one to one interactions for effective studies through computers.	19	21.6	44	50.0	15	17.0	10	11.4
12	ODL provides opportunities for one-to-many and many-to-many interactions through conferences assisted by computers and bulletin boards.	24	27.3	45	51.1	15	17.0	4	4.5
	<b>ODL Relevance in Attainment of UN MDGs.</b>								
13	ODL is more suitable for giving lessons on functional and vocational literacy to all manner of learners, thereby reducing unemployment and extreme poverty.	30	34.1	41	46.6	9	10.2	8	9.1
14	ODL is a more convenient tool for achieving universal literacy, by its strategies of providing access to all learners continuously.	33	37.5	42	47.7	10	11.4	3	3.4
15	ODL methods provide learning opportunities and materials without bias to gender, thereby empowering women and also eliminating gender disparity.	26	29.5	48	54.5	10	11.4	4	4.5
16	ODL strategies provide information on child nutrition/care readily by health care bodies, thereby reducing ignorance and infant mortality.	27	30.7	51	58.0	6	6.8	4	4.5
17	ODL methods of seminars and workshops on improved maternal care are more effective and affordable to women and concerned public, on improved maternal care.	29	33.0	43	48.9	9	10.2	7	8.0
18	ODL methods are better avenues for planning and educating all targeted groups/individuals on HIV/AIDS, using radio, TV, posters, jingles and town criers.	29	33.0	45	51.1	9	10.2	5	5.7
19	ODL correspondence, seminar/workshop and jingles methods are more effective in educating members of the community on sustainability of their environment.	21	23.9	57	64.8	8	9.1	2	2.3
20	ODL correspondence and electronic based educational programmes are more reliable for providing current information and awareness for global partnership on human and related development.	30	34.1	46	52.3	9	10.2	3	3.4

Based on the result in Table one, it was found out that;

- I. Correspondence Education System (CES) as part of ODL;
  - (1) On the issue of ODL increasing access to learning and training through correspondence education system, respondents strongly agreed / agreed by 69.70% on one hand, and disagreed / strongly disagreed by 30.30% on the other hand.

- (2) On the issue of ODL encouraging continuous learning and retraining through CES, respondents strongly agreed / agreed by 95.4%, on one hand, and disagreed / strongly disagreed by 4.6% on the other hand.
  - (3) On the issue of ODL augmenting the work of conventional institutions, where they are unable to admit all candidates at a particular time through CES, respondents strongly agreed / agreed by 71.6% on one hand and disagreed / strongly disagreed by 28.4% on the other hand.
  - (4) On the issue of ODL encourages the working class and family members to study at their convenience using study materials provided through CES, respondents strongly agreed / agreed by 85.2% on one hand, and disagreed / strongly disagreed by 14.8 on the other hand.
2. Educational TV and Radio Programme as part of ODL;
- (5) On the issue of ODL providing life and recorded lectures to people in their homes through satellite, cable television and radio, respondents strongly agreed/agreed by 70.9% on one hand; and disagreed/strongly disagreed by 26.1% on the other hand.
  - (6) On the issue of ODL providing speedy and efficient training for key target groups through ETRP, respondents strongly agreed / agreed by 76.1% on one hand, and disagreed / strongly disagreed by 23.8 % on the other hand.
  - (7) On the issue of ODL providing life-long and inclusive learning through ETRP irrespective of age, sex and location, respondents strongly agreed / agreed by 79.5% on one hand, and disagreed / strongly disagreed by 20.5% on the other hand.
  - (8) On the issue of ODL monitoring educational / literacy campaigns to larger audience through educational TV, Radio jingles and programmes, respondents strongly agreed /agreed by 86.3% on one hand and disagreed / strongly disagreed by 13.7% on the other hand.
3. Internet-based Education Programme (IBEP) as part of ODL;
- (9) On the issue of ODL providing entrepreneurial training for learners by delivering study materials in electronic format through computers, respondents strongly agreed/agreed by 76.1% on one hand and disagreed/strongly disagreed by 23.9% on the other hand.
  - (10) On the issue of ODL facilitating teacher-student interactions through the e-mail, respondents strongly agreed / agreed by 70.4% on one hand, and disagreed / strongly disagreed by 29.6% on the other hand.
  - (11) On the issue of ODL promoting student-student or one-to-one interactions for effective studies through computers, respondents strongly agreed / agreed by 71.6% on one hand, and disagreed / strongly disagreed by 28.4% on the other hand.
  - (12) On the issue of ODL providing opportunities for one-to-many and many-to-many interactions through conferences assisted by computers and bulletin boards, respondents strongly agreed / agreed by 78.8% on one hand and disagreed / strongly disagreed by 21.2% on the other hand.
4. ODL Relevance in Attainment of UN MDGs;
- (13) On the issue of ODL being more suitable for giving lessons of functional and vocational literacy to all manner of learners, thereby reducing unemployment and extreme poverty, 80.7% strongly agreed/agreed on one hand, and on the other hand 19.3% disagreed/strongly disagreed.
  - (14) On the issue of ODL being suitable for promoting functional literacy and access to all learners continuously, respondents strongly agreed / agreed by 85% on one hand and 15% on the other hand.
  - (15) On the issue of ODL methods providing learning opportunities and materials without bias to gender, and thereby empowering women and also eliminating gender disparity, respondents strongly agreed / agreed by 84% on one hand and disagreed / strongly disagreed by 16% on the other hand.

- (16) On the issue of ODL strategies providing information on child nutrition/care readily by health care bodies, thereby reducing ignorance and infant mortality, respondents strongly agreed / agreed by 88% on one hand and disagreed / strongly disagreed by 12% on the other hand.
- (17) On the issue of ODL methods of seminar and workshops on improved maternal care being more effective and affordable to women and concerned public for improved maternal care, respondents strongly agreed / agreed by 81.9% on one hand, and disagreed /strongly disagreed 18.1% on the other hand.
- (18) On the issue of ODL correspondence, seminar workshops and jingles methods being more effective for educating members of the community on sustainability of their environment, respondents strongly agreed / agreed by 88.7% on one hand and disagreed / strongly disagreed by 11.3% on the other hand.
- (19) On the issue of ODL methods being better avenues for planning and educating all targeted groups/individuals on HIV/AIDS, using radio, TV, posters, jingles and town criers, respondents strongly agreed / agreed by 84.1% on one hand and strongly disagreed by 15.9% on the other hand.
- (20) On the issue of ODL correspondence and electronic based educational programmes being more reliable for providing current information and awareness for global partnership on human and related development, respondents strongly agreed / agreed by 86.4% on one hand and disagreed / strongly disagreed by 13.6% on the other hand.

## **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS**

Based on the assessment of views or perceptions of ODL learners in the Cross River State, a higher percentage of them feel ODL methodologies create maximum access to learning for all and as well provide functional literacy skills, relevant in the attainment of the eight point UN MDGs. Assessment of people, especially adults has to rely on their individual perceptions for the needed information. Assessment according to (Denga 2006; 4) is seen to involve the evaluation of the cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills... It includes qualitative statements or value judgements. Similarly, perceptions, according to (Oyedemi 1988, 110) may be defined as the process of identifying, discriminating, recognizing and judging objects and qualities or relation in our environment by means of sensory information...an individual learns to understand his physical and social world through sense organs. Any situation in which the views of people, especially adults, were not assessed and taken into consideration over an issue or programme that affects such people, the result may be oppression, victimization or outright failure in the attainment of objectives of such a programme. (Bodley 1982, 110) warned that, any programme of directed culture change imposed upon a “target” population against their will would almost unavoidably violate the rights and in principle at least such programmes are usually rejected by social engineers.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The views of the benefiting individuals, groups and nations shall have to be taken into account while designing and implementing programmes for the attainment of the UN Millennium Development Goals in the Cross River State and elsewhere.
2. Secondly, in an attempt to consider the views of beneficiaries, emphasis on resource allocation should be placed on adult teaching and learning methodologies adopted by open and distance learning.
3. Thirdly, in line with the 2000 UN Millennium Declaration, education for all should be matched with individual functional literacy skills acquisition for all as provided by the ODL methods. This way, individuals would be better equipped for effective performance even when faced with changing circumstances both in their persons and their environments.
4. Fourthly, given the trend towards global partnership and the exclusive nature of programmes of traditional institutions, ODL methods guarantee better alternatives among individuals and nations for access to information and remedies for solving educational, social, health, political, economic and environmental issues.

5. Finally, a more comprehensive study should be carried out on a wider sample, using more advanced statistics beyond percentages, although the theme and methodology of this study would still be followed

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