

**The 2<sup>nd</sup> African Council for Distance Education (ACDE) Conference and General Assembly, Lagos Nigeria 8-11 July, 2008**

**Theme:** Open and Distance Learning for Sustainable Development in Africa

**Sub-Theme 5: ii** Collaboration and Partnerships in Open and Distance Learning: Models, Challenges and Responses: Possible collaborations in the different modes of ODL.

**Title:** **Collaboration between Open and Distance Learning Institutions and Conventional Institutions: Needs, Challenges and Benefits.**

By

**Ikpe, Adakole**

School of Science and Technology, National Open University of Nigeria  
14/16 Ahmadu Bello Way, Victoria Island, Lagos.

[carterikpe@yahoo.com](mailto:carterikpe@yahoo.com) : [aikpe@nou.edu.ng](mailto:aikpe@nou.edu.ng)

and

**Okonkwo, Charity Akuadi (Mrs) PhD**

School of Education, National Open University of Nigeria  
14/16 Ahmadu Bello Way, Victoria Island, Lagos.

[caeokonkwo@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:caeokonkwo@yahoo.co.uk) : [cokonkwo@nou.edu.com](mailto:cokonkwo@nou.edu.com)

A paper presented at the **2<sup>nd</sup> African Council for Distance Education (ACDE) Conference and General Assembly, Lagos Nigeria**  
8<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> July, 2008.

# **Collaboration between Open and Distance Learning Institutions and Conventional Institutions: Needs, Challenges and Benefits.**

## **Abstract**

Research has shown that for Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions to succeed generally, collaboration and ethos of partnership has emerged as important strategies. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions help provide mass access, as well as affordable university education, whilst providing succor for those yearning for placement in conventional face to face (F2F) universities, but are unduly disenfranchised. Collaboration is needed in various facets of the ODL processes: such as course material development, admissions, examinations, information and communication technologies applications in ODL and in aspects of course delivery such as tutorial sessions, and provisions of facilities for laboratory activities. The extent to which all these can be effectively actualized depends on effective collaboration and partnership between ODL institutions and F2F institutions aided by technologies. Thus, by working collaboratively, ODL institutions can provide more effective services to their students and thereby satisfy the education needs of the society. Despite the benefits and success it can provide for ODL, effective collaborative practices are not without challenges. It is therefore worthwhile to explore the areas of needs, challenges therein and benefits derivable from collaboration between these types of institutions.

This study attempts to establish the need for collaboration between ODL institutions and conventional universities e.t.c. It focuses on areas of needs, challenges and benefits, therein, with the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) in focus. Data was collected from survey of a cross-section of the academic and administrative staff of NOUN and from staff of some conventional universities and other establishments involved in the provision of education and services at NOUN with particular reference to the processes of: course material development, examination, course delivery - tutorial sessions, provisions of facilities for laboratory activities, information and communication technologies applications in ODL. Based on the results, suggestions are advanced for ensuring best collaborative practices for open and distance learning.

## **Synopsis:**

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is in vogue all over the world, and there is a growing realisation that to succeed, there should be effective collaboration between ODL institutions and their conventional face to face (F2F) counterpart's, e.t.c. This assist towards achieving the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) and providing Education For All (EFA) initiatives.

## **Introduction**

### **Open and Distance Learning in Nigeria**

Open and distance learning in Nigeria dates back to the 1940's, with the commencement of correspondence studies with various distance learning institutions in the United Kingdom.

As far back as the early 1960s, there was the realisation of the important role of education as a tool for speeding up socio-economic development in Nigeria. This, according to Adeoye and Ikpe (2006), "spurred the government to search for alternative models of providing education for the

populace other than the traditional conventional system which was rather restricted and limited in scope". This was also necessary for those who had experienced some form of formal education in the past and needed to update their knowledge and ultimately improve their productive capacity, more so since the nation was grossly lacking in appropriate skills and knowledge amongst the ever growing workforce, hence the advent of the NOUN as a remedial measure.

The idea of an Open University system for Nigeria as a separate and distinct institution with a national spread was subsequently reflected in the National Policy on Education by 1977. The document stated emphatically and without ambiguity that "maximum efforts will be made to enable those who can benefit from higher education to be given access to it. Such access may be through universities or correspondence courses, or open universities, or part-time and work-study programme".

The system which encompasses education for all, education for life, self learning etc forms the bedrock of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN).

### **Present Higher Education in Nigeria**

Nigeria has one of the largest university system in sub Saharan Africa, with over ninety (90), state, private and federal institutions. The growth rate witnessed in this sector has been remarkable but as observed by Hartneth and Strasser (2004), it is not yet 'uhuru', since they reported that "long term brain drain, combined with insufficient output" has not left the university system any healthier. The need to seek alternative palliatives for the current demand for placement in tertiary institutions was further stressed by Ojerinde (2008), who had shown that in the year 2008, over one million candidates participated in the University Matriculation Examination, but only two hundred thousand candidates could get placement into the universities in view of the restrictions imposed by their limited carrying capacities.

In response to strong social demand, the federal government had always taken steps to expand access to tertiary education in Nigeria. Some of such policy actions include:

- an increment in the number of federal/state/private universities
- introduction of quota system in admission, to address regional/class imbalance, and
- the re-establishment of the National Open University.

### **Establishment of the National Open University of Nigeria**

The National Open University was formally established on the 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 1983 with the view of becoming the fountain head and spring board of modern open and distance education in Nigeria.

The institution was however suspended by General M Buhari on April 25<sup>th</sup>1984, though the act establishing the institution was not abrogated.

A workshop on evolving a national policy on distance education in Nigeria held from the 27<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> September, 2000 in Abuja and was a major turning point for ODL in Nigeria. At the end of the workshop participants evolved a ten year plan for rejuvenating distance education in the country. Since then a number of things have happened which include;

- The enactment of a National Policy on Open and Distance Education
- The establishment of the National Virtual Library and the
- Re-establishment of the National Open University of Nigeria, amongst other activities.

The National Open University of Nigeria was thus re-born on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of October, 2002 by President Olusegun Obasanjo.

## **Target Clients**

The National Open University of Nigeria is designed to provide access to all Nigerian who yearn for education in a manner convenient to their circumstances. It will cater for the continuous educational development of professionals such as teachers, accountants, bankers, lawyers, doctors, engineers, politicians, self employed businessmen and women.. The clientele range is elastic and dynamic, so its constantly reviewed to meet ever changing needs.

## **Method of Delivery**

The best way to reach a learner is to use the technology the learner already has or that which can be made readily available to him/her. In view of this, NOUN has adopted the following methods which are considered suitable for our circumstances;

- The most basic method of delivery employed by NOUN is the use of printed materials. These are specifically and carefully developed course materials by tested experts in the various fields of study. Unlike the conventional textbook, these materials are specially designed to suit the peculiar circumstances of the distant learner and invariably replace the lecturer in a face to face system. Other methods of delivery adopted include
- The use of audiotapes, videotapes and CD-ROMS which are to compliment the print materials, and in the not too distant future,
- Special and well scheduled radio and television programmes are expected to play a major role in the delivery of programmes and to this end, NOUN had recently taken delivery of an FM radio transmitter which has been doing some test runs on 105.9 MHZ, in the Lagos area. There are plans to acquire short-wave (SW) transmitters for national coverage. The government had also ceded the educational TV at Tejuosho-Yaba, Lagos to the university.
- NOUN will as such take full advantage of ICTs to provide learners with access to internet via the use of VSATs, and microwave radio at each study centre. Currently over sixteen study centres have been linked with facilities for video conferencing, it will be extended to all the study centres spread all over the country eventually.

It is thus obvious that for the NOUN to achieve its goal, it must partner with a number of institutions, bodies and organisations. This symbiotic relationship is expected to be the tonic for successful implementation of its programmes.

## **Collaboration**

The importance attached to collaborative and partnership practices need not be over flogged. According to Gupta (2006), “the open system practices ethos of sharing and collaboration by pooling intellectual and physical resources”. This, he reiterated, helps to “avoid reinventing the wheel, keep cost low, enhance reach, impart high quality education with global needs-driven curriculum, replicate best practices and facilitate learner mobility”.

## **The Study**

This study focuses on the need for collaboration, the challenges and benefits, therein, in this practice, with the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) in focus. Data was collected by using structured and semi structured questionnaires designed and validated by the researchers. The population from which the sample was drawn consists of academic staff of the National

Open University of Nigeria and some Tutorial Facilitators. A total of twenty five academic staff consisting of Course Coordinators and Programme Leaders and some Tutorial Facilitators who are usually engaged from conventional universities were randomly selected and administered with the test instrument. The choice of these category of staff was advised by the fact that they were directly involved with collaborative practices in NOUN. Twenty two of the questionnaires were successfully completed and returned and were used for analyses.

The samples were both male and female, with a minimum qualification of a master's degree in their respective fields. They also had varied experiences, ranging from two (2) to over twenty (20) years of teaching at the tertiary level, both in the conventional and the open and distance learning institutions. Duties performed by these staff include:

- course coordination
- tutorial facilitation
- admission exercise
- examination duties (collation of questions, setting/marking of examinations, e.t.c.)
- course material development/writing
- monitoring of course material development
- performance of clerical/administrative duties.

### **Result of the Study:**

#### **The general challenges encountered in the course of discharge of Duty in ODL Institutions**

For this item, the respondents were of the view that, the challenges encountered included:

- adequately satisfying the learning need of the learners
- lack of sponsorship towards participating in conferences
- delays with production of necessary course materials/lack of same
- inadequate funds/facilities, lack of research grants
- issues of motivation
- inadequate manpower
- poor remunerations
- erratic power situation
- uncondusive environment for real academic work, thereby hindering research work
- regimental work period
- delays with payments to course writers/facilitators/examination script markers
- lack of understanding of ODL by a majority of the public

#### **Areas of Need**

The respondents identified the following areas of needs for collaboration between ODL and conventional institutions. They include:

- content experts, to assist with course material development/authorship/editing and updating of course materials
- examiners /supervisors
- script markers/moderators
- unlimited access to online course materials from other institutions
- sourcing for relevant materials and published course materials from sister institutions for adoption

- organization of regular workshops/induction courses for course material developers and facilitators
- prompt remuneration and motivation of course material developers
- regular updating of staff through participation in international workshops, conferences and seminars
- sourcing of adequate facilities for practical sessions
- collaboration in curriculum development

### **Benefits**

The respondents recognize the followings as benefits derivable from collaborative practices between the two classes of institutions. They are:

- reaching the unreached
- manpower development through usage of staff as course developers/writers and tutorial facilitators
- enhances standardization of educational system and maintenance of academic quality
- promoting the adoption of true life long learning
- production of learning materials of high quality
- encourages interaction between students/staff of the two divides
- useful in research situations, since one could serve as a control during comparative analysis of either systems
- facilitates exchange of current academic ideas, materials and personnel's as may occur during sabbaticals
- use of laboratories, lecture theatres and offices of the conventional institution
- increase access to qualitative higher education
- reduction in cost of production and ODL delivery

### **Challenges with Course Material Development**

The common challenges in the development of course materials as posted by the respondents are:

- time constraint
- dearth of senior academics that could assist with course material development
- identifying potential writers
- follow up/monitoring of course writers to ensure timely delivery
- issues bothering on copyright and royalties to writers
- delayed remuneration to course developers, lack of motivation and incentives
- unwillingness by many to participate
- lack of current literatures for use
- erratic power supplies
- unavailability of regular/easy access to the internet
- issues of intellectual property rights
- slow pace of writing by many developers/delay in publishing
- substandard products from some authors (quality assurance)

### **Evaluation of Learning Outcomes**

The learning outcomes of students in the NOUN are evaluated through the following means:

- Self Assessment Exercises (SAE's)
- Tutor Marked Assignments (TMA's)
- End of Semester Examinations (ESE)

- Student Industrial Work Experience Schemes (SIWES)
- Practicals
- Projects

### **Challenges with Assessment**

The respondents were able to identify the followings, as challenges encountered with regards to assessment of students learning out come:

- undue delay with processing of results
- ambiguity with registration of courses for examination
- delivery of question papers to various centres
- leakage of examination questions
- examination malpractices/impersonation at venues
- failure on the part of some students, to properly write their matriculation/identification numbers on answer scripts
- disobedience of rules and regulations governing the conduct of examinations by some students
- missing examination results/TMA's
- incomplete results
- enormous cost of conducting examinations
- lack of proper/adequate supervision of facilitators in assessing students
- lack of feedback to students on the outcome of graded TMA's
- inadequate facilities for conduct of examinations
- use of ambiguous/substandard questions
- poor editing of some questions used for assessments
- organisational lapses- non inclusion of some question papers e.t.c.

### **Suggestions**

After a careful perusal of the inputs from the respondents, the following suggestions are advanced. The researchers are of the opinion that these may aid advance the frontier in open and distance learning.

- ICT's should not only be considered, but used as a vital tool for improved productivity and interactivity in open and distance learning, since with satellite technology and video conferencing, OFL institutions can collaborate in the dissemination of knowledge, e.t.c.
- As opined by Gupta (2006), other avenues of collaboration may also be exploited for enhanced productivity, such as with governmental departments, corporate bodies, banking/insurance institutions and Non Governmental Organisations.
- Aside from domestic conventional universities, collaborative activities should be encouraged with foreign universities which could in the final analysis lead to the sharing of infrastructures, ICT's, and intellectual resources.
- The enactment of a national policy on distance education should be on the front burner. This could facilitate the establishment of a 'National Distance Education Council' that would serve as a regulatory body for open and distance learning.
- ODL institutions should strive towards self reliance, by engaging in such practices that may generate funds through sponsored projects, consultancy and detour as much as possible from bogus projects.

### **Conclusion**

This study establishes the needs for collaboration, challenges and benefits, therein, with the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) in focus.

Open and distance learning is the vogue. Its benefits are obvious. Like an age old adage which states that, ‘two hands can wash each other better than one’, the role of collaborative practices, not just between ODL institutions and conventional institutions alone, but with various corporate bodies, governmental/non governmental agencies should be encouraged. This will undoubtedly assist the university in no small measure towards realising its mission and vision statement.

## References

- Adeoye, F. A and Ikpe, Adakole, (2005), **A Talk Shop on the National Open University of Nigeria**. Proceedings of the 46<sup>th</sup> Science Teachers Association of Nigeria Annual Conference, 14 – 20 August, 2005.
- Federal Ministry of Education (2002) **Blueprint and Implementation Plan for the National Open and Distance Learning programmes**. The Regent Press, Abuja
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (1998), **National Policy on Education**. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, NERDC press, Yaba-Lagos, Nigeria.
- Gupta Sanjay (2006), **Effective Institutional Partnership for Student Support in Open Education: Reflections on Indian Experience**. A paper Presented At a Workshop Organised by the Regional Institute for Research in Open and Distance Learning, Lagos, Nigeria.
- Hartnett, S.W and Strassner, E. (2004), Higher Education in Nigeria: A Status Report. World Education News and Reviews. *Higher Education Policy*. September 2003, Vol.16 No. 3.
- Jegede, Olugbemi (2003), **NOUN and Role of Support Staff**. An Induction Lecture for Academic Staff of the National Open University, Lagos 6<sup>th</sup> August, 2003.
- Jegede, Olugbemi (2003) **Taking the Distance out of Higher Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Nigeria**. An Invited Convocation Lecture presented at the Federal Polytechnic, Oko. Anambra State. 28<sup>th</sup> November, 2003.
- National Open University of Nigeria (2003), **Student Handbook**. The Regent Press, Abuja.
- National Open University of Nigeria (2004), **Getting to Know Your University**. An Orientation and Information Guide For Students of the National Open University of Nigeria. The Regent Press, Abuja.
- Ojerinde, D. (2008), Only 20% UME Candidates Will Gain Admission – JAMB, NUC. The Punch Newspaper, Wednesday, May 21, 2008, page 7. Punch Nigeria Limited, Ikeja, Lagos.