

HIGHER EDUCATION FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE ROLES OF DISTANCE LEARNING EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: *The desire to achieve a sustainable national development in a holistic context had necessitated the enactment of several legislations, sectoral policies and programmes implementation in Nigeria. However, national development is still very illusory, meaning that those policies and programmes have little effects, thus informed the adoption of a functional education as a strategy. Hence, education has been conceived as a tool to guarantee and fast track national development. A nation that neglects educating her citizenry is putting her national development into a great risk. It is in this contention this paper addresses higher education for national development: The Distance Learning Education (DLE) in Nigeria. Therefore, some concepts as encapsulated by the topic have been well explained to aid reader's understanding and knowledge of the focus of the paper. These included: higher education, national development, Distance learning education and the relationship between DLE and national development in Nigeria.*

Key Words: *Higher education, National development, Sustainability, Distance learning education.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

The quest for a sustainable national development is a tropical and perennial issue, which developing nations in Africa, Latin America and Asian continents are facing with today, Nigeria, inclusive. Several sectorial policies and programmes; economically, socially, educationally etc. have been adopted to address the situation. Also, several legislations have been enacted towards this end. Observable, lack of national development is still very illusory in the country, Nigeria. It is because of this reason this paper examined Higher education for national development: The roles of distance learning education in Nigeria. This is to establish the relationship between the former and latter. In line with the thought of Hubbard (2003), the attending key words of a discourse need to be well clarified so as to make the topic of the discourse very clear to readers. It will not be out of place therefore, to first make an attempt on a conceptual clarification of some keywords of the topic as discussed, subsequently.

1.1. Meaning of National Development:

Despite the fact that the term is a victim of definitional pluralism. However, scholars have defined it, premised on their different dispositions, orientations and perceptions which makes the term contentious, debatable and nebulous. It is a broad concept which involves an aggressive development of a nation, socially, economically, politically etc. National development also encompasses cultural values its preservation and enrichment According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, national development refers to a phenomenon that embraces a whole nation. Gboyega (2003), defined it as an idea that embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. Akintayo (2004) corroborated by Olagunju (2008), explained development as “a process by which something passed by degrees to different stages, especially, a more advanced or mature stage. Erinsakin (2007), opined that development simply means an enlargement or expansion of a structure of a thing. Akeen (1995), submitted that development involves movement from small size to large, more complex size, non-maturity to maturity, dependence on other for self-reliance in the major areas of life; social, political, economic and cultural spheres. Premised on the arrays of definition above, it implies therefore, that development encompasses newer attitudes, structures are new skills.

Tolu and Abe (2011), defined national development as the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political, as well as, religions advancement of a nation or country. Sarma (2018), explained it to include; all aspects of the development of a nation namely; political, social, economic etc. National development, therefore, is a dynamic and revolutionary development of the society, qualitatively and quantitatively. National development can also be explained as a nation capability to secure and guarantee her citizenry social welfare, wellness and well-being. From this very explanations, national development goes beyond economic concept. It also dove tail to communication and transport agriculture, commerce and Industry etc. Moreover, the psychological well ness of the

people is also inclusive .A national development of a nation is a function of people contribution s which can only be possible if people are in a good mental state .

1.2. Some Indices to Measure National Development:

- ✓ Poverty reduction
- ✓ Improve national income per capital income
- ✓ Quality education
- ✓ Improved transport and communication systems
- ✓ Standard medical facilities
- ✓ The use of science and technology
- ✓ Preservation and development of nature and environment
- ✓ A welfare scheme for the betterment and improved in living conditions of people
- ✓ Promotion of the concept of sustainable development
- ✓ Development of an impartial and a well-organized political system
- ✓ Development in the socio-economic conditions of the people, among others.

A cursory look at the state of national development in Nigeria, bearing the above indices in mind, Nigeria's experience, particularly at the threshold of a new century (21st) is of disappointment, annoying and disheartening. Development is very critical and vital to the sustenance and growth of any nation. However, Nigeria amidst of her large human, material and natural resources has been battling with the problem of development after many years of her independence. Security challenge is rampant and on a steady rise on a daily basis. Pandemic and endemic corruption permeate the political landscape of the nation. The nation is stagnant technologically and industrially. Nigerians are deeply enmeshed in an abject poverty, medical facilities are in a "sorry" state, while governance is deeply rooted on tribalism, sectionalism and ethnicity. There are lack of a well-coordinated social welfare programme for Nigerians, and military, alike. Some of these are on a long term, while some are on a short term. These include;

- ✓ Mapping out plans on national development from colonial era to the present time.
- ✓ Formulation of different economic policies.
- ✓ Implementation of poverty eradication programmes.
- ✓ Implementation of human capacity development programmes.
- ✓ Formulation of industrial policies.
- ✓ Implementation of corruption reduction strategies and policies.
- ✓ Bridging the infrastructure gap to stimulate economic growth and wealth creation.
- ✓ Building a productive competitive and functional human resource base for economic growth and social advancement.
- ✓ Networking with foreign partners and developed nations.
- ✓ Formulation of different educational policies, curricula restructuring and reorganization towards improving the state of education The above strategies adopted to guarantee national development have been a mixed grill, meaning that impressive results have not been fully achieved. According to Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011), "inspite of series of development strategies put in place by successive governments, and sometimes with some intentions all attempts to generate meaningful development proved, futile.

1.3. Constraints to National Development in Nigeria:

The following are some of the challenges to national development in Nigeria:

- ✓ Lack of executive capacity responsible for the formulation and implementation of national development plan.
- ✓ Lack or no consultation with the general public (Lawal and Oluwatoyin, 2011).
- ✓ Political instability and bad governance (Mimiko, 1998).
- ✓ Lack of synergy of efforts or cooperation between government and private sectors.
- ✓ Impositions of national development plans are policies on Nigerians and lack of capital to implement the plans and policies.
- ✓ Lack of credible governance.
- ✓ Poor leadership
- ✓ Poor implementation, coupled with lack of adequate human resources (Makinde, 2005).
- ✓ The unstable nature of the country's economic, social, and political environment, weak and uncoordinated information from professional bodies (Uhebu, 2004).
- ✓ High level of illiteracy
- ✓ Vicious circle of poverty and environmental challenges (Erinsakin, 2014).
- ✓ Poor infrastructures, among others

Based on the aforementioned constraints the search for an enduring and sustainable national development not in Nigeria also, globally, therefore is still an on-going exercise. In 1962, at the UNESCO's conference, it was firmly stressed that **Higher Education** must be expanded to include the training of a whole man for nation building. Higher education covers post-secondary education of the national education system which is given at Colleges of Education, Polytechnics, Monotechnics and Universities (Oyekan, 2000). Nigerians need higher education so that they can be equipped with requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable them to relate and adapt successful to the rapid socio-economic, cultural and political changes in the society.

According to the Federal Government of Nigeria (2004), education is an instrument per excellence for effective national development. This therefore justifies the provision of functional education at all levels by governments. It is a sound budgeting and investment that will help Nigeria to achieve national development. Egunyomi (2015), stated that adopting education is the most effective and significant pro-active strategy which a nation like Nigeria needs to tackle her socio-economic and political challenges. UNESCO (2002), stressed that education offers answers to many of the world's problems. Erinsakin (2018), stated that education is a mechanism to achieve a progressive society devoids of poverty, diseases, economic backwardness, injustice, industrial stagnation, religious crises, and security challenge and so on. Avalanche of literature have revealed stakeholders' opinions that the provision of education, specifically, higher education. Through the formal system of education is not sufficient to achieve the expected national development. This paves way for Non-Formal education which **Distance Learning (ODL)** is a component. Distance learning education was established in July 1983 by an Act of the National Assembly in Nigeria but, when it became crystal clear to the then Federal Government that the growing demand and yearning for education could not be met by the few available higher institutions of learning in the country the idea of DLE was conceived and introduced. DLE has many nomenclatures According to Javis (1983), reported by Sarumi (2001), distance learning is referred to as, Home Study, Independent Study, External Study, Off Campus and Open Learning and so on.

Distance learning education is not of recent origin. Hitherto, it was a Corresponding Education programme but, later metamorphosized to a Distance learning education. (Ajadi, Salawu and Adeoye (2008),

Nigeria is the most populous nation in Sub-Sahara Africa with about 140 million people occupying a landmass of about 923,768 square kilometers and with over 274 ethnic groups making up the federation. The social and economic dimensions of providing education for the population, within the context of prevailing national circumstances of dwindling financial and other resources in the face of development needs are heavy. The ever-continuing growth in Nigeria's population, the attendant escalating demand for education all levels, the difficulty of re-sourcing education through the traditional means of face-to-face classroom bound mode, and the compelling need to provide education for all (EFA) irrespective of environmental, social or cultural circumstances have meant that the country must of necessity find the appropriate and cost effective means to respond adequately to the huge amount demand for education. All these emerging situations have signal the need for a comprehensive search for a more viable, robust, reliable, efficient, effective, and cost-beneficial educational solutions, which according to Jegede (2003) and Sadeq (2003) the most logical strategy to achieve these is by embracing Open Distance education method.

The above extract encompasses comprehensively, the rationale for the programme in Nigeria.

Distance learning is a system of education characterized by physical separation between the teacher and the learners in which instruction is delivered through a variety of media, including, print and other ICTs to learner who may have missed the opportunity earlier in life or have been denied the face-to-face formal educations due to socio-economic, career, family and other circumstances. Jegede (2003), defined Distance education as education provided by a mode other than the conventional face-to-face method whose goals are similar to and just as noble and practical as those of campus full time face-to-face education. A panoramic survey of definitions cited above on DLE, the following emanated as some of the major attributes of the programme;

- A quazi or permanent separation between facilitators and learners.
- The use of both print and electronic media
 - DLE encourages self or teach yourself programme
- Learning is privatized, and so on

1.4. Open Distance Learning and National Development: The Connectivity:

Ubah (2015), stressed that education is very important to human development, progress and growth of any nation. Distance learning programme has been able to solve this problem to a large extent thus, corroborated the assertion of Erinsakin (2018), that development is a by-product of quality education. Through ODL, Nigerians have been able to acquire functional education for self and national development, ordinarily which they would not have

been able to acquire through the traditional system of education. In addition, ODL has also contributed in providing opportunity to the people to receive education that enable to make them meaningful contributions towards national development. ODL has also narrowed the hitherto existing gap to accessibility to higher education. It needs to be recalled also that inequality in Nigeria is one of the banes or challenges to national development. Numerous scholars have attested to the relevance of education as a strategy for achieving equity and equality for sustainable national development (Akinpelu, 1990, Ki-Berbo 1998, Ozigi, 1996, Babafafunwa, 2005), Omolewa 2003 and Oduaran, 2001

It has also been established in diversified literature that DLE could propel meaningful and sustainable national development. Babawale (2008), submitted that sustainable national development entails an enduring, remarkable, non-terminal improvement in the quality of life, standard of living and life chances of the people, favours a progressive curve in human development, encompassing enhanced creativity for an increased and improved productivity which can only be secured through inclusive education. It is a strong opinion of Sarumi (2007) and Wagner (1994), further accentuated and supported by Erinsakin (2018) that national development in Nigeria is strictly anchored on the level of educational attainment of the nation which Distance learning education offers. Akinpelumi (1990), contended also that DLE offers education on Political Education; such as, democracy and good governance, thus help to reduce political manipulation, political violence, and electoral malpractice, promote good governance and enhance democracy in the nation. The Community development education of ODL helps to develop the leadership traits/styles for an enhanced community and national development (Sarumi, 2000). Also, DLE further helps to address problems of injustice and non-democratization of education in Nigeria. The Entrepreneurship and Vocational Education of ODL help to equip people with the appropriate business values, entrepreneurial knowledge, engender the spirit of business; thus, reduce the twin's problems (poverty and unemployment) in Nigeria. Erinsakin (2014), strongly asserted that the socio-peace stability could partly be guaranteed, if poverty level and unemployment status of the people, changed. This will make them to eschew behaviour that are minimal to national development.

In the area of moral development, behaviour, attitudes, changed values are promoted through the Civic education, offers by ODL programme for an enhanced patriotism and actualization of the norms and values of the society. Other areas include; access to technology and scientific culture, acceptance of global information and knowledge, good health especially preventive measures, effective family planning to discourage and reduce over population and its attendant consequences, empowerment programmes to combat poverty, disease and injustice, widening access to education as social justice for sustainable national development.

2. CONCLUSION:

Premised on the contributions of Distance learning education as discussed above it is very glaring and crystal clear that the programme is a catalyst to achieve sustainable development in all aspects of a nation and individuals' development in Nigeria

3. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Government at various levels should ensure that the programme is well sustained through adequate funding and provision of all logistics.
- The stakeholders in the provision of Distance of distance learning should also mount enlightenment programme to sensitize the public on the need to avail themselves with the programme
- More centres of the programme should be created to make its accessible easy and convenient for people in Nigeria.
- The providers of the programme in Nigeria should synergize efforts with international Organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations alike to guarantee affective implementation of the programme
- The facilitators of the programme should be assisted and encouraged to embark on training and retraining programme for maximal service delivery and productivity.
- They should be effective mercenary and strategic approach for effective supervision and monitoring of the programme.
- There should be a stable government policies on the programme etc.

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