



(REVIEW ARTICLE)



## The changing pattern of University Education in West Africa (A case study of the National Open University of Nigeria)

Oshionebo Emem \*

*College of Media and Entertainment, School of Journalism and Strategic Media, Middle Tennessee State University Murfreesboro, Tennessee.*

International Journal of Science and Research Archive, 2023, 10(01), 703–707

Publication history: Received on 30 August 2023; revised on 08 October 2023; accepted on 11 October 2023

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/ijrsra.2023.10.1.0812>

### Abstract

The utilization of technology in education has become a global trend, with West African countries actively exploring its integration into their educational systems. The internet is often perceived as a tool devoid of inherent values, offering the potential to democratize access to learning and overcome traditional barriers. It is widely acknowledged that online technologies hold the promise of addressing educational disparities and social exclusion while creating inclusive and accessible educational opportunities. The Nigerian government, recognizing the limitations of conventional educational methods, has advocated for the adoption of new technologies to reduce the cost of educating a large population of adults who have been excluded from traditional learning channels. This paper provides an overview of the advancements in open, distance, and technology-driven learning, with a focus on The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) as a case study. It employs the social cognitive theory to examine how universities in West Africa are embracing online learning practices, drawing insights from experiences in Western Countries.

**Keywords:** Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL); Open Distance Learning (ODL); Blended Learning; E- Learning; Higher Education

### 1. Introduction

The changing pattern of Higher Education in Africa started from pre-colonial and colonial rule in Africa, which changed the dominant cultural setting of not having a formally established institution that deals with the production and dissemination of knowledge (Adesina 2013). In pursuing knowledge in higher education in the precolonial era, an indigenous form of learning bore fruits in various levels of african civilization and forms of learning in higher education institutions. After independence, West African countries inherited fragile institutions which have set the standard of the educational standard today in West Africa. (Teferra, and Altbach, 2003)

The structure of the educational system began to take shape via the developed educational policies, and gradually the system has been improving through the influence of other western universities from developed countries and nations' socio-political and economic contexts. (Teferra, and Altbach, 2003)

Higher Education in West Africa has continued to evolve from traditional to Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) systems.

This article will focus on the learning pattern of West African higher education systems, showing how education has evolved to the era of technology in distance learning education using The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) as a case study, with a focus on distance learning education. The concept of distance education emerged to provide relief

\* Corresponding author: Oshionebo Emem

to busy learners who do not fit into the traditional university system, which has taken over the educational systems of West African countries.

### **1.1. History of National Open University of Nigeria**

The quest for digital education in Nigeria's higher institutions led to the re-establishment of The National Open University of Nigeria by the Government under the regime of the then president (Olusegun Obasanjo) on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2001. However, the university was established in 1983. The establishment of NOUN was a timely and phenomenal evolution in the history of Nigerian higher education. The program provides access to young, elderly, and disadvantaged groups who are interested in the acquisition of a university education anytime and anywhere (Jegede 2003).

The National Open University of Nigeria was established to provide technology-enhanced learning opportunities that is characterized by the separation of teacher and learner in time or place, or both time and place (Jegede 2003). It can also be regarded as a transition from the formal classroom to a system where the learners pursue their studies independently from their homes. (NOUN, Hand book) Open University education embraces openness in education as a core value and provides flexible learning opportunities through distance education or Open and Distance Learning (ODL) with minimal requirements. The university commenced operation with the admission of 10,026 students into different programs and has been expanding in size to date. (NOUN, Hand book)

---

## **2. Literature review**

The ODL mode of education in Noun has been greatly influenced by how the university's management observes and learns from other universities in the western world. (Adesina 2013) The gradual transition in West African education system from a "traditional" model (in class face -to face lectures) to a technology-enhanced learning model where the learner is the main actor of his learning process. In this perspective, the use of ICT, including the Internet, is used to facilitate learning. The ODL mode of learning is conceptualized in the education literature as a flexible learning method aimed at delivering teaching, on both an individual and group basis, to students who are not physically present in a specific geographical location and who could not fit into the traditional educational setting involving attending classroom sessions. (Adesina 2013)

ODL became expedient in Nigeria because of the inadequacy of vacancies in the traditional universities for the teeming youth population thirsty for tertiary education. (Adesina 2013). Many scholars have shown diverse perspectives on the traditional and distance learning methods of teaching. The presence of ODL, which entails computer-mediated learning, two-way interactive video, and other technologies, has increased the coverage of teaching and learning in universities (Phipps, Ronald; Merisotis and Jamie 2000); also, the benefits of using multimedia technologies and the internet to improve the quality of learning and facilitation. (Georges, Beat, Antoine, Axel, and Astrid 2013).

(Ragad, Ghaliya, and Nasse, Tawafak and Al-Nuaimi 2012). (Kirkwood and Price 2013) argues the importance, benefits, and coverage of e-learning / distant learning over the traditional learning approach. (MacKeogh and Fox, 2009) and (Elfaki, Abdulraheem & Abdulrahim (2019) emphasize the Strategies and the impact of embedding e-learning in traditional universities. Despite the importance and advantages of ODL, few studies have focused on the factors limiting the ODL instructional mode of learning in higher education institutions (Ananga and Kofi 2017). They are of the opinion that there is a huge number of prospective students seeking higher education in West Africa amid inadequate infrastructures for distance learning; on this note (Ananga and Kofi 2017) suggest that it becomes necessary to focus on the traditional mode of learning rather than ODL. In particular. Laurillard (2002) notes that despite the availability of information technology, teaching methods have not evolved to the extent that they can keep pace with what is needed in ODL mode. He emphasized that lecturers can still use the marker and whiteboard method depending on the context and dynamics of the courses, for example, solving mathematical problems.

---

## **3. Social cognitive theory**

Social cognitive theory has played a major role in the learning pattern of higher institutions in West Africa, specifically the National Open University of Nigeria. This theory suggests that learning occurs via direct experience and indirectly through observation and imitating others, Bandura (2009). Within the context of higher education, the changing patterns of learning in NOUN and other West African universities have been based on imitating what universities in Western countries do to improve learning.

Scholars have also used social cognitive theory to examine a range of domains, including the learning pattern of students in higher education (Harrison 2019), and explore the connection between learning and the theory (Richard Erlich, Darlene, and Russ-Eft 2011). Social cognitive theory suggests that four human capacities allow for learning to occur through imitating others: symbolization, self-regulation, self-reflection, and vicarious capability. These four capacities have an underlying meaning that allows for learning to occur in any context where it is applied Bandura (2009). I will be demonstrating how these elements have facilitated the concept of ODL in NOUN and how other institutions are influenced by their mode of teaching. The first capacity, symbolization, explains that learning takes place via direct experience and also indirectly through observation. NOUN, since its existence, has been collaborating with Indira Gandhi Open University of India, one of the largest Open and distance learning institution in existence, Wawasan Open University Malaysia, and other institutions. Through these collaborations, NOUN has sent several academic professionals for benchmarking events to these universities and others for a direct learning process.

Secondly, the self-regulation effect emphasizes that by observing the positive and negative consequences of people's actions, we are able to regulate and modify our behavior to maximize rewards and minimize negative outcomes (Bandura 2009). This explains how the university builds their strength from the mistakes of other developed distance learning universities thus their continuous development in the field. Third, with the self-reflective capability, people reflect on their actions, on the extent to which those actions are in line for instance, with social morality or personally held values and goals (Bandura 2009). This explicates how the governing council of NOUN reflects on decisions taken by the senate committee to ascertain if they are in line with the core values of the institution. The fourth capacity emphasizes that humans have vicarious capabilities, which are ultimately crucial in terms of learning from media, it explains that vicarious learning is the ability of people to harness their symbolizing, self-regulatory and self-reflective capabilities to learn from watching others (Bandura 2009). Combining all these social cognitive capacities has provided different learning sources for NOUN and other west African higher institutions since the inception of education in the countries.

---

#### 4. Blended learning pattern

This pattern is the combination of the two modes of learning (face-to-face and e-learning) to ascertain the strengths, weaknesses, and how the two can complement each other for effective delivery of instruction. (Gulati, 2008). Overall, blended learning seeks to leverage the advantages of both traditional and online learning to create a more flexible, engaging, and effective educational experience. In a blended learning environment, students typically have access to a virtual learning platform or course management system where they can find resources such as readings, videos, quizzes, and assignments. (Gulati, 2008) It combines various instructional modalities, such as in-person lectures, group discussions, and online materials. It allows for flexibility in how content is delivered and accessed.

Blended learning has become an increasingly popular form of learning Based on the dominant perception of scholars about traditional and e-learning/distant learning modes of education. (Ananga and Kofi 2017). in supporting the evolution from traditional teaching to an effective learning system, this study proposes that NOUN and other West African Universities should introduce the blended teaching and learning method considering the developing state of the countries. Based on the analysis of scholars, the two modes have their strengths and weaknesses but can complement each other for the effective delivery of instruction in institutions (Ananga and Kofi 2017). Blended learning is defined as a hybrid between e-Learning functions (synchronous and asynchronous) and face-to-face teaching in such a way that real value is added to the learning environment. (Knowles et al. 1988). Knowing that the need to adapt teaching in the digital age is necessary, the question is which of these modes of teaching and learning in universities is flexible enough for students, e-learning/distance learning or the traditional (face-to-face). The blended mode offers an alternative to traditional teacher-led education in the classroom and to solely computer-led education (Knowles et al. 1988). It is normally not teacher-centered but learner-centered.

The instructional method of NOUN has always been an e-learning system, specifically open and distant learning; however, there is room for a blended method to be introduced to accommodate students that prefer one-on-one tutoring and those unable to afford the high cost of internet subscriptions.

---

#### 5. Methodology

The paper adopts a theoretical literature review approach, thus, library research that involves studies on the various themes identified. These include theories in distance learning and teaching, ICT use in distance education, technology use in distance education delivery, and students' access to the traditional and blended learning pattern. The paper used a critical literature review approach through a comprehensive search of publicly available literature on the identified

themes. Searches were also performed with Google scholar, Middle Tennessee State Library, the NOUN handbook, and a few others. Searches were conducted from several distance education journals both locally and internationally. The key issues relevant to this study were appropriately captured and referenced.

---

## 6. Conclusion

Learning using technology has become a global phenomenon. The Internet is often seen as a value-neutral tool that potentially allows individuals to overcome the constraints of traditional elitist spaces and gain unhindered access to learning. This paper provides an insight to how the national government of Nigeria and other West African countries are advocating and introducing e-learning in higher education. However, it is still a work in progress, considering the developing state of the countries.

The paper has proposed a blended system of learning that will accommodate different learners based on their availability of resources, to make learning more accessible to the massive population in West Africa.

---

## References

- [1] Ananga, P., Kofi, I.(2017). Comparing face to face and online teaching and learning in higher education. MIER Journal of Educational Studies, Vol. 7, No. 2 pp. 165 - 179
- [2] Bediang, G., Stoll, B., Geissbuhler, A., Axel, M., Stuckelberger, A., Nko, S., Chastonay Philippe (2013) Computer literacy and E-learning perception in Cameroon: the case of Yaounde Faculty of Medicine, BMC Medical Education
- [3] Elfaki, N., Abdulraheem, I., & Abdulrahim, R. (2019). Impact of e-learning vs traditional learning on students' performance. Najiran University, Nursing College Journal.
- [4] Finley, L., & Hartman, D. (2004). Institutional Change and Resistance: Teacher preparatory faculty and technology integration. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, 12(3), 319-337.
- [5] Gulati, S. (2008). Technology-enhanced learning in developing nations: A review. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 9(1).
- [6] Karsenti, T., Collin, S., (2013) Using IT for Distance Learning: Benefits and Challenges for African Learners, University of Quebec in Montreal (Canada).
- [7] MacKeogh, K., & Fox, S. (2009). Strategies for embedding e-learning in traditional universities: Drivers and barriers. *Electronic Journal of e-Learning*.
- [8] Mathew, I., Ebele, J., (2016). Open and distance learning: benefits and challenges of technology usage for online teaching and learning in Africa, Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and Open University Malaysia (OUM)
- [9] Mtebe, J., & Raphael, C. (2017). A decade of technology enhanced learning at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: Challenges, achievements, and opportunities. *International Journal of Education and Development using ICT*, 13(2).
- [10] National Open University of Nigeria condition of service handbook (2016) NOUN press.
- [11] Ogunbase, A. (2014, October). Acceptance and Use of Web-based Learning Environments/E-learning Environments in Higher Education: West African learners experience. In *E-Learn: World Conference on E-Learning in Corporate, Government, Healthcare, and Higher Education* (pp. 1467-1475). Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE).
- [12] Redmond, P. (2011). From face-to-face teaching to online teaching: Pedagogical transitions. In G. Williams, P. Statham, N. Brown & B. Cleland (Eds.), *Changing Demands, Changing Directions*. Proceedings ascilite Hobart 2011. (pp.1050-1060).
- [13] Richard, L., Russ, E., (2011) Applying social cognitive theory to academic advising to assess student learning outcomes. *NACADA Journal*, Vol. 31 Issue 2, p5-15. 11p
- [14] Ronald, p., Merisotis, J. (199) A review of contemporary research on the effectiveness of distance learning in higher education. Institute of Higher Education Policy, 49p
- [15] Schweighofer, P., & Ebner, M. (2015). Aspects to be considered when implementing technology-enhanced learning approaches: A literature review. *Future Internet*, 7(1), 26-49.

- [16] Teferra, D. and Altbach, P., (eds.) (2003). African Higher Education: An International Reference Handbook. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- [17] Thierry Karsenti, University of Montreal (Canada) Simon Collin, University of Quebec in Montreal (Canada) Using IT for Distance Learning: Benefits and Challenges for African Learners
- [18] Woldegiorgis, E., Doevenspeck, M. (2013) The changing role of higher education in Africa, Canadian center of science and education.