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# **Open and Distance Learning: Achievements and Challenges in a Developing Sub-Educational Sector in Africa**

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Additional information is available at the end of the chapter

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## **1. Introduction**

Africa became independent during the first decade of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as most countries making it up established their own governments and opened diplomatic missions in foreign lands for the first time, in the 1960s. With independence arose fundamental preoccupations and primary concerns; these preoccupations and concerns were those addressing issues of the development of the newly independent nations and the search for appropriate instruments that were to be used in bringing about this development.

Aside the UNESCO generated series of workshops of the early 1960s, encouraging investment in education (Thompson, 1981), a number of pertinent literatures made public in the 1960s did much to reinforce the belief in the reliability and efficiency of education as potential instrument for the quick development of Africa; these literatures include the writings of Blaug (1966) and Anderson (1966) which threw up the acquisition of literacy as a process to be embarked on, by all that seek development and literacy skill as a veritable tool for social development and societal advancement; specifically, these literatures submitted that any human society that may attain at least 40% literacy rate, would have succeeded in raising the productivity of new literates living within the society; they also posited that, in addition to raising the productivity of new literates, this feat would have equally raised the productivity of those working in association with the new literates as a consequence of the spillover benefits of literacy; additionally, the acquisition of 40% literacy rate by a society has been said to be capable of bringing about the expediting of the flow of general knowledge (relating to best practices in health, nutrition and information seeking) among members of society.

As a result of these factors, the new nations of Africa opted to expand both the educational structures and personnel inherited from colonisation with the view to ushering in, development similar to that enjoyed by their respective metropolises. Consequently, between 1960 and 1983, the number of primary schools quadrupled and the number of primary school pupils quintupled; the number of secondary schools tripled and the number of secondary school teachers rose two folds; teacher training schools multiplied four folds and the number of teachers teaching in them rose three folds; the number of universities doubled itself and the number of lecturers equally rose significantly in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 1988:12).

In addition to these major and ground breaking preparations for development, additional initiatives aimed at increasing literacy, numeracy and livelihood activities in Africa were initiated throughout the continent during the 1960s through to the 1980s; for example, Tanzania embraced the concept of “Ujamaa” in 1961, the details of which were contained in a document released in 1967 that has come to be known as the “Arusha Declaration”; among other policies, the Ujamaa advanced the implementation of free and compulsory education, one objective of which was the raising of the national average of literacy rate; consequently, primary school enrolment was raised from 25% (with 16% females) in 1960 to 72% (with 85% females) in 1985; additionally, the adult literacy rose from 17% in 1960 to 63% by 1975 (Wikipedia, 2011).

In 1972, Benin introduced the concept of “Ecole Nouvelle” (New School) and in 1974, it established the “Direction de l’Alphabetisation du Benin” (Directorate of Literacy Education of Benin); one of the many objectives of these two institutions was the raising of literacy rate in both national and French languages; as a result of this policy, literacy rate in the country rose from about 50 per cent in 1960 to about 85 per cent in 2008 (Nardulli, Peyton and Bajjalieh, 2010; Biao, 1995; Direction Nationale de Statistique, 1992); all these efforts came to add to the fact that Benin has since 1960, been posting the highest yearly school enrolment in Francophone Africa (Hough, 1989) and to the fact that Benin has traditionally supplied Francophone Africa with not only teachers and lecturers, but also high caliber international functionaries (Biao, 1995).

Senegal also introduced in 1980 its own concept of “Ecole Nouvelle” whereby primary school education is linked to the needs of the community while at the same time, serving as instrument for the amelioration of literacy rate across the community (Adick, 1998) .

In 1974, the Government of Lesotho established the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre (LDTC) with the view to equipping adults and youths with literacy, numeracy and income generation skills; by 2007, more than 200,000 learners have benefitted from the programmes offered by the centre (Garg and Lepphoto, 2009). In addition, a free education scheme was introduced in the country by 2000 ( Avenstrup, 2004); this scheme has now produced about a quarter of a million primary school graduates.

Kenya, Uganda and Malawi equally launched their Free Primary Education projects in 2003, 1997 and 1994 respectively with resounding success and with the view to increasing national literacy rate averages and reducing poverty (Avenstrup, 2004).

In addition to increasing the national literacy rate, Nigeria's Universal Primary Education that was launched in 1975 did much to reconcile two perceptions concerning literacy and development that prevailed prior to this period in the country; for many years, the view was held in Northern Nigeria that the promotion of adult education programmes with minimal promotion of formal youth schooling was adequate for any social development. On the other hand, much of Southern Nigeria expended much effort in advancing youth formal schooling to the detriment of adult education for a long time.

While the Federal Government of Nigeria deployed enormous human, material and financial resources towards the establishment of thousands of formal primary schools, recruitment of teachers and distribution of learning resources, it also encouraged its constituent parts (the States) to advance the cause of adult education within their areas of jurisdiction. This strategy culminated into the establishment of the first Agency for Mass Education in Kano State in 1985 and in the establishment of the National Commission for Literacy, Adult and Mass Education in 1991 (NMEC, 2004; FGN, 1974). The pursuit of literacy education having been prosecuted from many fronts, impressive results were yielded as illiteracy was seriously dented after a while.

As it is to be expected, all these initiatives have produced over time, huge populations of literate and schooled persons; in the words of World Bank,

*Primary school enrollments increased the most in absolute terms, growing from approximately 11.9 million pupils in 1960 to 51.3 million pupils in 1983. The gross primary school enrollment ratio rose from 36 per cent to 75 per cent over this period (World Bank, 1988:12).*

As mentioned earlier, teacher education enrolment equally grew exponentially and so did enrolment in secondary and tertiary levels of education (World Bank, 1988). However, an analysis of the rates of expansion across levels of education, suggests that the higher the level of education, the lower was the rate of expansion recorded during this period.

This chapter discusses the impact of a pattern of educational expansion such as this, on the development of open and distance learning in Sub-Saharan Africa. Additionally, the chapter discusses the findings relating to the performance of a novel and high profile open and distance learning programme currently running in Africa with the view to drawing valuable lessons for the future of ODL on the continent.

## **2. Review of the literature**

In addition to the historical performance of formal education, a number of other social and economic factors account for the growth of open and distance learning in Africa. A clarification of the concept "Open and Distance Learning" shall here precede the discussion of those numerous factors that fuel the growth of this budding sub-educational system.

## **3. Conceptual issues in open and distance learning**

Open and distance learning was first known as "Distance Learning" before it became "Open and Distance Learning"; indeed, the concept "Distance Learning" emerged from the idea of

“Distance Education” which came from “Correspondence Education” which itself arose from “Non-formal Education”.

Tracing our steps back to the basics therefore, we recollect that the emergence of open and distance learning was motivated by inability of numerous qualified candidates to access tertiary education in regular or formal tertiary education institutions; the search for educational opportunities by those candidates locked out of formal education institutions was eventually met with a positive response within the non-formal education environment.

### **3.1. Non-formal education**

Non-formal education is a planned educational activity that takes place outside the formal school system; while its outcome may lead to results and products similar to those produced by the formal school system, the environment within which it takes place and its processes are different from those obtained within the formal school system. It is a system of education within which the rigid safeguards (teacher or institution-controlled time-tabling, student discipline, teacher-controlled curriculum, etc.) of formal education are either made flexible or eliminated.

For example, learning meeting periods are jointly arrived at through discussions involving learners and facilitators; also the motivation techniques (giving of gifts, promises of future rewards, etc.) that would usually work among formal education students would not ordinarily be effective within non-formal education environment as each non-formal education learner is driven by his own peculiar intrinsic motivation.

Having reviewed the submissions of a number of authors, including Merriam and Caffarella (1999), Merriam and Brockett (1997), Watkins and Wright (1991) and Combs (1972), Gibson (2008) concludes that non-formal education is planned education that takes place outside the formal school and which may or may not lead to credit earning.

Although, not all non-formal education programmes, do qualify as distance learning programme, yet, it was within an environment such as the one afore described, that the first distance education programme was conceived; that first distance education programme was known as “Correspondence Education”.

### **3.2. Correspondence education**

The humble beginning of correspondence education must be traced back to 1840 when Isaac Pitman began to teach shorthand by post (Morris, 2011; Rowntree, 1992). This was the first ever recorded successful national attempt at providing education at a distance anywhere in the world; for many years, Pitman used the post to reach his many learners who equally got back to him through the same medium.

After this initial experience the practice of correspondence education spread like wild fire throughout the world and very soon, all kinds of subjects and topics were taught through correspondence education.

Correspondence education is a paper and written document based process of passing information between a facilitator and a learner or group of learners with the view to facilitating learning.

*whereas correspondence education relies on paper and the written or print materials and it employs the post or surface transportation as its means of communication, distance education, its successor, employs in addition to print and surface transportation, many more diverse and modern means of communication (Morris 2011; Jeffries 2011).*

### 3.3. Distance education

Distance education is a process whereby an individual or institution packages information in a learnable way with the view to helping another individual or group of individuals to learn at a distance. In line with the general aim of education, distance education employs all available media, methods and techniques to enable learners access needed information at a distance; distance education equally assists the learner to apply whatever may have been learnt.

One major characteristic of distance education is that it employs a variety of media (print, electronic and virtual) in its quest to help the learner learn as much as possible.

Distance Education is “a process to create and provide access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both” (Honeyman and Miller, 1993:68)

### 3.4. Distance learning

Distance learning on the other hand, is a process of education which emphasises learning; it is an educational enterprise during which, a facilitator of learning who is usually separated from the learner by spatial or mental distance, gathers, collates and presents information in a learnable form to one or a group of learners who have accepted the responsibility to learn.

While in distance education, the facilitator does the most that it could to help learners learn, distance learning assumes that the responsibility to learn is the learner's; and this responsibility includes the choice and decision to enroll on a programme, the choice of media through which to learn and most importantly what to learn and how to learn it.

While most psychologists would submit that learning means acquisition of information and knowledge that lead to change in behaviour (and this is the aim of education and the objective of distance education), distance learning leaves room for the learner to impute to the information and material presented, his own understanding that may be different from the understanding the facilitator had intended; additionally, the learner is at liberty to use his understanding and the information presented in any constructive way which suits his own will, circumstances and environment without recourse to the facilitator or institution that originated the learning material.



In this regard, distance learning operates within the strictest principles of distance education but with the largest tolerance for interpretations and application of learning outcomes; this is transformative learning; distance learning therefore more than distance education promotes transformative learning.

Arseneault in her 1998 study cited in Cranton (2000:190) suggests that an individual may embark on transformative learning through a process of “disorientation, self-examination, critical assessment, exploration of options, engaging in discourse and planning a course of action”. In her own postulation, Gibson (2008:270) proposes “problem-posing education, critical reflection, dialogue, contextualisation and politicising of experiences and the taking of action” as the path to transformative learning. She then concludes that transformative learning may be stimulated at a distance through,

*educational materials regardless of medium of delivery, be it print, radio, audiocassettes, videotapes or television, [that] embrace Holmberg’s guided didactic conversation and through this “conversation” pose questions, guide critical reflection, in the true sense of the word. Furthermore, the learner can be also guided toward reflections on and in the context in which she/he lives and works--the context that may be oppressive, stifling individual and social growth (Gibson, 2008: 271).*

### 3.5. Open and distance learning

Distance learning needs not be open at all (Rowntree, 1992:30). This suggests that there exists a difference between “Open Learning” and “Distance Learning”; for many decades, the term “Distance Learning” has been used to describe learning organised, dispensed and acquired from a distance; the prefix “Open” became attached to Distance Learning towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a result of three significant developments, namely, criticisms against the formal school system, GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) and Globalisation.

A number of criticisms have been leveled against the formal school system; first it is remarked that, apart from being costly to erect and maintain, the formal school system is not elastic and pliant enough to accommodate as many as would need education; additionally, it records a lot of wastage through a high percentage of failure of its products at private and public examinations (Garg and Lepotho, 2009; Biao, 1992; Combs, 1985); second, although the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was established in 1947, to regulate international interaction as it concerns specific issues and items, it was in 1994 that it was agreed that education should become an international saleable commodity; this agreement had profound positive effect on the development of Open and Distance Learning (Preece and Biao, 2011); third, the phenomenon of globalisation which suddenly turned the world into a global village, did much to encourage educational interaction among societies that hitherto would not have dreamt of educational collaboration as a result of the great geographical distance separating them.

As a result of these major social developments therefore, learning opportunities opened up to many inhabitants of the earth like it never did before and irrespective of their

geographical location. The concept of open learning then entered the educational diction and the prefix “Open” was added to “Distance Learning” to signify that apart from being learning managed from a distance, it is equally “Open Learning” wherein “Open Learning” is understood to be,

*..arrangements to enable people to learn at the time, place and space which satisfy their circumstances and requirements. The emphasis is on opening up opportunities by overcoming barriers that result from geographical isolation, personal work commitments or conventional course structures which have often prevented people from gaining access to the training they need (Rowntree, 1992).*

And to be:

*..a wide range of learning opportunities that both aim to assist learners in gaining access to knowledge and skills they would otherwise be denied and to give learners the optimum degree of control over their own learning (Dixon, 1987)*

### **3.6. Hiccups in the development of formal education and the growth of Open and Distance Learning in Africa**

In historical terms, we must start off with the view that the concept and philosophy of distance education are not alien to the African. As suggested by Kabwasa and Kaunda (1973), the talking drum has always represented both the medium and African consciousness of distance education; through vast plains, across a great many rivers and lagoons and across many hills and mountains, the talking drum has been used to convey messages and information of both simple and immeasurable value; the literate in the language of the talking drum has usually learnt his or her lesson and has become wiser for it.

Kabwasa and Kaunda (1973) confirmed this submission when they asked their pointed question and answered same thus:

*Is long-distance transmission of knowledge a new phenomenon in Africa? Certainly not. For long before radio or television were introduced in the continent during the colonial era, the ‘homo Africanus’ relied on his instrument par excellence-the drum- in order to communicate through distant space with his fellow man..... In a way, therefore, the ‘talking drum’ was a precursor of the modern correspondence education in so far as it linked the distant learner to his teacher or knowledge-holder (Kabwasa and Kaunda, 1973:3)*

However, if this introduction were accepted as an appropriate historical interjection, it is to be recollected at this juncture, that the focus of the current write-up is modern correspondence and distance education and not ancient concepts of distance education.

Consequently, the story of African open and distance learning must be discussed here, with two eras in mind, namely, the pre-independence era and the post-independence era. The pre-independence era refers to the colonial period and it is here situated between 1884, when Europe began its meetings that eventually culminated in the partitioning and sharing



of Africa (Robiquet, 1897; Halsall, 1998) as a cake would have been shared, and 1960, the beginning of massive decolonisation of Africa.

Two landmarks were recorded during the pre-independence era and these include the establishment on African soil of clearing houses for European Correspondence Colleges and the establishment of the University of South Africa (UNISA) as the first African Distance Education institution in 1946. The post-independence era, after recording a major achievement soon after independence, produced rather later, towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a number of weak ODL structures which nevertheless are gradually strengthening their roots.

### 3.6.1. Open and Distance Learning during the pre-independence era

During the colonial period, a few Africans enrolled as learners with overseas correspondence colleges; through most of the colonial period these learners received their course packages and returned assignments and correspondences overseas, through the post office. However, at the approach of independence, a number of these overseas correspondence colleges began to establish clearing houses in African countries with the view to both reducing the cost of postal correspondence to learners and accessing a larger market of correspondence education clients at independence.

Alongside this humble beginning of open and distance learning in Africa, came in 1946, the establishment of the University of South Africa (UNISA) as the first and foremost Open and Distance Learning institution in Africa (Wikipedia, 2011). Initially, UNISA combined the promotion of its own courses with those of some overseas correspondence colleges (Wikipedia, 2011); in other words, while it was possible to enroll for and obtain UNISA degrees and diplomas, opportunities were equally given to candidates to obtain degrees and diplomas of a few overseas correspondence colleges through UNISA.

This phenomenon carries both a historical connotation and practical significance; UNISA itself started in 1873, not only as mother institution to most other South African universities but as a clearing house for overseas universities such as Oxford and Cambridge universities (Wikipedia, 2011).

*Founded in 1873 as the University of the Cape of Good Hope, the University of South Africa spent most of its early history as an examining agency for Oxford and Cambridge universities and as an incubator from which most other universities in South Africa are descended. In 1946, it was given a new role as a distance education university and today it offers certificate, diploma and degree courses up to doctoral level (Wikipedia, 2011).*

As time went on however, the new ODL institution grew in autonomy and it launched itself into the African open and distance learning orbit with all the sophistication and resilience it could muster to claim the first position in a developing sub-educational sector of Africa.

Today, UNISA caters for about 300,000 learners spread throughout the world with a personnel strength of 4,000 academic and administrative staff. The certificates delivered by

the university enjoy international recognition and the university runs an open learning programme in addition to distance education as students who do not possess a university entrance matric can register for the University of South Africa's access programme. By July 2011, University of South Africa was ranked 9<sup>th</sup> out of 100 African universities and 1221<sup>st</sup> out of 10,000 universities in the world (Wikipedia, 2011; Webometrics, 2011).

Clearly, the University of South Africa rules over the African open and distance learning space. However, while South Africa remains to date the unequalled leader in the field of open and distance learning in Africa, the regions in the east, west and centre of Sub-Saharan Africa also have their own pale ODL stories of success to tell.

### *3.6.2. Open and Distance Learning during the post-independence era*

A stroke of economic meltdown hit the world in the 1980s which scuttled at least temporarily, the ambitious project of developing enviable formal school systems in various African countries (World Bank, 1988). As a result of the slowing down in impetus of formal education growth, a system of adult remedial education began to develop in major cities of African nations at about the same time (Mpofu and Amin, 2004; Biao, 1992); this system of education is made up of learning meetings organised in the evenings and weekends that aim at helping learners acquire knowledge, skills, certificates and diplomas which they were not able to obtain through the formal school system; apart from being cheaper to maintain than formal schools, the services of these remedial education centres came at relatively low cost to learners. Most of the adult remedial education classes ran high school (secondary school) level learning programmes and are by that token institutions that prepared numerous candidates for university or tertiary education.

Over the years, the products of these adult remedial education centres, joined the regular high school graduates to queue for admission into African universities; these universities have consistently not been able to provide space for most of the qualified candidates as a result of the availability of only limited placements within their premises. Tilak (2009) submits that only between 6 and 7% of those qualified to obtain tertiary education do get placement in African universities.

As a result of this shortage of places in African universities, many qualified candidates turned their search for tertiary educational opportunities towards other educational structures including open and distance learning institutions. This then, marked the beginning of the demand for distance education in post-independence Africa.

One most significant early achievement recorded in the realm of open and distance learning after independence, was the establishment in 1962 of the "Centre d'Enseignement Supérieur" in Brazzaville, Congo. This was a Correspondence College with its peculiarities. First, it was a college designed to serve a French speaking audience; secondly, the qualifications it granted were specifically tailored towards up-grading basic skills and preparing recipients for job; thirdly, in addition to serving candidates in search of tertiary institution qualifications, its main target audience is made up of rural populace and

extension workers--subsistence farmers, village women and development leaders-- (Dodds, 1973).

However, beginning from the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this college has begun to take on English-speaking populations of Africa; for example, it is currently operating in Kenya, Ghana and among English-speaking people of Cameroun.

After this significant early achievement, a number of open and distance learning institutions have come on stream among which only a few are major players within the ODL field; the institutions discussed here are those that are headed by an ODL specialist and/or staffed by an ODL-trained personnel to the tune of at least 15%; through sheer hard work and promotion of innovation, one or two ODL outfits have made it unto the list of the ODL institutions discussed here.

In East Africa, we may speak of only the ODL project, located at the University of Tanzania and that situated within Makerere University, Uganda; in Central Africa, no credible ODL project exists; in West Africa, Nigeria established in April 2001 an institution known as the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN); in Southern Africa, UNISA braises the trail; but the Botswana's, Lesotho's, Swaziland's, Namibia's and Zimbabwe's open and distance learning outfits, are other credible ODL projects that must be mentioned in that part of the continent.

More than a century ago, the geo-political entity known today as Tanzania had had to be governed by Germans, the French and the British at different periods in history; by the time Tanzania attained political independence in the 1960s, it had a chequered history indeed; the mainland having had a different colonial experience from the off-shore Zanzibar. Yet, at independence, national leaders decided to pool the two bits of the country together and marched with determination to make a success of the union (Mmari, 1999). Education was identified as an instrument for national development and integration; it was therefore vigorously promoted both at the community development level and at the formal school system level; while community development was promoted at the grassroots level, the formal schools, made up of primary, secondary and tertiary institutions, trained the low, middle and high level manpower that was to see to the development of the country.

The University of Tanzania which was the only university during the first years of independence to serve the country had capacity to admit only 30% of qualified candidates; this wastage was quickly noticed by the authorities and by 1988 the country set into motion the process of establishing an Open University whose objective was to provide increased access to educational opportunities to Tanzanians; by 1994, the Open University of Tanzania admitted 766 students as its first batch of open learning students. Between 1994 and 1998 the advent of the Open University increased access to higher education in the country by about 25% (Mmari, 1999).

During the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the university has been coping as well as it could with the global recession while at the same time fine tuning its strategies for better performance as soon as the difficult times were over.

The Institute of Adult Education and Distance Learning of Makerere University, Uganda was established by Act of Parliament no. 12 of 1975 ([www.iae.ac.tz/profile](http://www.iae.ac.tz/profile)). As an organ with the mission of promoting adult education, the institute has been technically in existence since 1960, first as an extra-mural studies arm of the Makerere University College and secondly as Department of Adult Education attached to the University of Dar-es-salaam between 1963 and 1974 ([www.iae.ac.tz/profile](http://www.iae.ac.tz/profile)).

Upon becoming Institute of Adult Education and Distance Learning (IAEDL) in 1975, this ODL outfit has toed the path of all other developing African ODL outfits by providing teacher education, literacy education and some amount of technical education; in this sense, it was not a significant enough open and distance learning outfit to be highlighted but for one event that occurred between 2005 and 2011.

A staff of Makerere University, Paul Birevu Muyinda began a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) study programme in 2005 during which an e-learning system that aims to increase interaction between facilitators and their distance learning students was developed; the initial testing of the invention christened Mobile Learning Model (M0LODUM) confirmed it as a groundbreaking innovation (Kisambira, 2008) and this event brought that one ODL outfit on the continent to limelight and to a status of importance.

The advent of M0LODUM is important to both IAEDL and African ODL family because the invention has the potentials to increase the population of Open and Distance Learning clients on the continent and the quality of learning offered by the ODL route. Confirming the potential advantages of this invention, Kisambira submitted as follows:

*The Department of Distance Learning at Makerere University has deployed an amazing mobile-telephone-based application to aid research supervision by students who learn and study long distance. Not only have they addressed a teething issue of limited collaboration between the distance learner and the supervisor; the department is also taking learning to a place it has never been before (Kisambira, 2008).*

Nigeria is the most populous black nation on earth; it equally posts one of the highest annual population growth rate in the world (National Population Commission, 2006); as a result of the combination of these factors with other socio-economic and environmental factors, the population of the country grew exponentially and all social amenities, including educational facilities, were stretched to a breaking point within the first two decades of independence.

For example, while at the close of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, about 25% success was regularly registered at the West African School Certificate Examinations, Nigerian universities showed a glaring lack of capacity to absorb even such a low number of qualified candidates (Biao, 1992; Okebukola, 2004); by the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Nigeria could absorb only 15 per cent of the about 1.5 million youths that regularly qualify to benefit from tertiary education (Ambe-Uva, 2007).

From the 1970s therefore, the need to seek other routes to higher education acquisition had become an issue in Nigeria; an aborted attempt was made to provide Nigeria with an Open

University in 1983; the plan eventually materialised only in 2001 with the establishment of 4 centres in Lagos, Adamawa, Borno and Kano States. Fifty learning programmes were rolled out and 32,400 pioneer learners were registered (National Open University of Nigeria, 2009). The National Open University of Nigeria is “Nigeria’s leading-and only specialist-provider of open and distance learning at tertiary level” (National Open University of Nigeria, 2009).

The Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA) comprises Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Namibia; other DEASA countries include Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, Angola, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Mauritius, the Seychelles, Madagascar, the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Africa (DEASA, 2010).

Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Namibia shared the common destiny of resisting apartheid; consequently, they naturally found themselves collaborating on many other fronts for the sake of collective survival in the face of the monster that apartheid was; one of the fronts where they collaborated was education. Dodds (1973) submits that initially, Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland ran a common university known as the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (UBLS) between 1964 and 1975. University of Namibia was originally modelled after the Afrikaner tradition with little contact with the outside world. While Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland ran a joint institution, the Distance Learning developed through the joint institution was committed to promoting community development.

When the joint institution got dissolved and each country set up its own university, higher education distance learning was developed in each of the countries. Botswana launched its Diploma in Theology in 1979 but could not make a success of it; it launched its distance education Certificate in Adult Education in 1982 and was able to run it till the end of the 1990s with about 27 students usually on the programme (Dodds et al, 1999). Beyond the 1990s, the Certificate in Adult Education has been upgraded to the Diploma in Adult Education by distance education and this Diploma programme is going on up to date, understandably with its problems of low enrolment, greatly reduced government support and low patronage by non-governmental organizations. However, within the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Botswana has managed to equip about 9,000 primary school teachers with a Diploma in Primary Education through distance learning (Kamau, 2009).

The National University of Lesotho (NUL) currently runs Diploma and Bachelor programmes in Adult Education and Education by distance learning mode; these programmes were put up a few years ago and the Diploma in Adult Education and Bachelor in Education programmes have particularly attracted impressive patronage. Swaziland established its Institute of Distance Education (IDE) in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to offer courses in Diploma in Law, in Commerce and B. A. in Humanities and B.Ed in Adult Education. The population on the various courses range between 30 and 100 learners. With courses in Law attracting the highest number of enrollees (Dodds et al, 1999).

Namibia went into independence with one university which was already equipped with a Department of Distance Education; this university’s department, in addition to three other public institutions offer tertiary level distance education; many courses such as in-service



teacher education, Bachelors in Education, Commerce, Law and the Sciences are taught and plans are at foot to introduce courses in Bachelor of Technology; the centres offering in-service training for teachers attract the highest number of learners that range between 1,000 and 2,000 (Dodds et al, 1999).

Zimbabwe Open University had its hey days between 1993 and 1999. Its humble beginning is to be traced to the establishment of the Centre for Distance Education within the University of Zimbabwe in 1993; it then became University of Zimbabwe College for Distance Education in 1997 before becoming the Zimbabwe Open University through a 1998 Act of Parliament (Nyaruwata, 2011).

Between 1993 and 1999, the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) made giant steps within the realm of open and distance learning as it not only attracted good heads in ODL around Africa, but also attracted international funding which enabled it develop materials, strategies and technologies that portrayed it as a truly promising African ODL outfit; to its credit, the solid ODL network established throughout all the provinces of the country must be highlighted. During its hey days, every aspiring learner residing in any part of Zimbabwe felt the presence and the intensity of the activities of ZOU through its provincial coordinates. However, it must be acknowledged that beginning from the year 2000, the political and economic reforms in that country have come to nearly completely erase the beautiful work accomplished during the initial years of ZOU.

For example, less than 8 per cent of the staff in Zimbabwe's conventional universities currently hold a Doctorate degree, a situation that temporarily led to the suspension of classes at the University of Zimbabwe during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Wikipedia, 2011; Nyaruwata, 2011); the few ODL specialists that served as backbone to the initial impressive achievements recorded in ZOU have been forced to relocate away from Zimbabwe and the gradual development of the soft ODL infrastructure (regular supply of electrical energy, availability of ever improving Information Communication Technologies, etc..) that held out such a great promise had equally been terminated; so have the development-oriented learning programmes introduced by the university diminished in quality and quantity. Yet, there are high hopes that, from the ashes of the initial toils and achievements of this promising ODL University, will rise again a great African ODL outfit at the end of the reforms.

Current observation suggests that the demand for open and distance learning will keep augmenting in Africa. What then are those other factors that continue to fuel ODL demand on the continent? Apart from the inability of conventional institutions to cater for the educational needs of teeming populations desirous to acquire education, a whole set of other factors account and will continue to account for the development of ODL in Africa.

For example, during the periods of struggle for independence in Africa, it was discovered by the elites that elementary and secondary education levels were not enough to effectively challenge colonial administration; a first university degree at least built greater confidence and elicited greater respect from the colonisers; consequently, a number of Africans who were not able to travel overseas for higher education, seized the opportunities offered by



ODL institutions to read for Bachelor and higher degrees while continuing their liberation movement activities.

During this same periods too, many Africans got incarcerated for their political views and actions as a strategy for breaking their resolve to fight for liberation; while in prisons across the continent, many of these confined liberation fighters conceived of learning and improvement in educational attainment as a continuation of the struggle and a preparation for a more sustained struggle after their eventual release; consequently, with the consent and help of prison authorities, they, too, learnt and acquired degrees and diplomas through ODL institutions that existed mainly outside the shores of Africa.

During the post-independence era, the fear of job loss, personal ambition, search for skilled manpower for the implementation of complex regional developmental agendas and globalisation are some of the factors that have fuelled expansion of the ODL sector.

By the 1980s, as a result of the economic recession at the time, Africa had started experiencing both significant unemployment problem and job losses; one strategy used by employers during that period to reduce work force was to set aside a time lag during which the work force in sections of enterprises or government organisations was directed to obtain higher relevant qualifications or be laid off; many found ODL institutions helpful in warding off the threat of job loss not only in the ability of these institutions to enable them acquire relevant qualifications that ultimately kept them on their jobs but in helping them keep their jobs while studying.

A number of individuals have always existed who have had the personal ambition of acquiring particular types of knowledge, skills and/or attitude; a number of reasons may account for such an ambition; the desire to learn may be for the purpose of practising a hobby or for preparing for a change of job at a later date; indeed, the learning may be for the purpose of upgrading skills on the current job for the purpose of retaining it. In other words, the reasons for learning could be both intrinsic and externally and socially driven.

Additionally, since becoming independent, African countries have sought to fast track their development through putting up gigantic developmental plans whose implementation can be facilitated by only the availability of not only a high population of literate citizens but by the availability within their borders of an appreciable population of citizens holding tertiary education qualifications (Biao, 2010).

For example, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the East African and the Central African Organisation, all have developed visions aimed at actualising major development plans within the first three decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

SADC aims to improve agriculture and agro-processing activities through substantial investment in irrigation infrastructure, through the development of innovative market linkages and through the development of preferential procurement mechanisms; it plans to reduce unemployment within the borders of member states to between 10 and 6% by 2030; SADC equally plans to embark on the development of light industries and to link all member state capitals by highway, rail road and waterway (SADC, 2011).

The East African Community (EAC) has bought into SADC's Vision 2030; therefore in addition to developing agriculture through the Strengthening of Trade in Agricultural Inputs in Africa (STAR) Project and through Integrated Regional Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan on Trans-boundary Human and Animal Diseases, and to poverty alleviation programmes run within member states, it is collaborating with SADC on many fronts (EAC, 2011).

Central Africa has equally bought into SADC's Vision 2030 and many countries in that bloc are involved in collaborative activities with SADC. ECOWAS rolled out in 2009, a five-point development plan it intends to attain by 2020; issues focused upon, include governance, the infrastructure, the private sector, women, children and youths and the utilization of the environment; in the main, the community wishes to run an ever-increasingly accountable government, an infrastructure able to support a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy and regional development; ECOWAS Vision equally seeks to operate a viable private sector, empower women, children and youths and encourage a sustainable use of the environment (ECOWAS 2009).

These various vision statements are of course consistent with the expectations of African populations; however, for their actualisation, almost all African nations' populations need to be literate and about 40% of those populations need to acquire higher education; the literacisation of the populations would enable as many people as possible understand the contents of the Vision documents while the high level manpower is needed for the successful implementation of the Visions; since no true development may take place without the participation of the people for whom the said development is designed, it is suspected that all current vision statements in Africa, which are so inspired by modern style of living, may remain dead letters without appreciable improvement in people's education.

At present, only about 6% of the relevant Sub-Saharan African population has access to higher education as stated earlier; therefore, in order to increase the chance of success of the various vision statements on the continent, work is to be done to increase both literacy rate and access to higher education in Africa.

Without our realising it, open and distance learning institutions, have been supplementing the conventional supply of higher education with the view to increasing the high level manpower that will eventually contribute to the actualisation of the continental vision statements. However, as could be seen a great effort is still needed to raise tertiary school enrolment from 6 to 40%.

Globalisation is another factor fuelling demand for open and distance learning on the continent. While Shiva (1997) in Arku and Arku (2011) advances three historical sources (European colonialism, the imposition of western development models and free trade) of globalisation, Saul (2004) also in Arku and Arku (2011) suggests that the true harbinger of globalisation is the economic crisis of the 1980s that forced industrialised countries' companies to look for cheap labour elsewhere as a result of the unfavourable restrictions brought on them at home.

Be it as it may, globalisation is a process that creates a borderless environment within which vigorous human interaction is promoted on all fronts including the realms of economy, trade, leisure, culture and education. Such a social interaction tends to introduce people into new habits, knowledge systems and attitudes that they may wish to try out.

Open and distance learning was one such practice that was fuelled by globalisation; the colossal advancement that has been recorded in the domain of ICT-supported open and distance learning during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is clearly to be attributed to the phenomenon of globalisation. Not only have many international brain storming sessions (conferences, workshops, roundtable discussions, etc.) been profited by, to improve the technological foundation and content of the African ODL space, numerous pieces of information garnered through the Internet and the world wide web have equally had a positive and globalising effect on African Open and Distance Learning practice.

#### **4. Achievements in open and distance learning space in Africa**

Eager to accelerate the pace of educational development within their borders and anxious to fulfill the aims and meet the targets of various international agreements on education, many African nations started to employ open and distance learning strategies as tool for the massification of education beginning from the late 1970s; this process of massification was first directed towards the training of teachers before it was pointed towards other areas of education.

For example, Nigeria, Kenya, Malawi, and Botswana in 1976, 1986, 1992 and 1994 set up ODL programmes to train massive and staggering numbers of teachers to enable them prosecute their respective universal primary education programmes (Kamau, 2009; Rumajogee, Jeeroburkhan, Mohadeb and Mooneesamy, 2003). In one year alone (2004), Nigeria produced through its ODL programme, 10,629 trained teachers where 30,000 trained teachers were produced in 2003 from all the existing government and private teacher colleges in the country. Within three years of the commencement of its teacher training programme by ODL, Malawi produced 18,000 trained teachers; it would have taken all Malawi teacher training colleges, 12 years to produce this number of teachers through the conventional method of teaching. Also Botswana and Kenya produced huge numbers of trained teachers within a short time which colleges of education in those countries would have rolled out not only at prohibitive cost but also after many years of teaching and training (Kamau, 2009; Rumajogee, Jeeroburkhan, Mohadeb and Mooneesamy, 2003).

Apart from advancing teacher education and education massification in general, open and distance learning equally has been used in promoting technical, vocational education and community development; additionally, the cost of providing education got reduced considerably wherever ODL was employed, since distance education is characteristically more cost-effective than conventional education (Bates, 2007; Rumajogee, Jeeroburkhan, Mohadeb and Mooneesamy 2003).

One other advantage of involvement in ODL that is not quite advertised is that some conventional institutions that are currently involved in the provision of distance education are obtaining surplus financial resources from the distance education project with which they supplement shortfalls in government subventions meant for the running of their institutions.

## 5. Challenges within open and distance learning space in Africa

The first and major challenge to orderly growth of the domain of ODL in Africa is absence of national ODL policies; while many ODL outfits spring up and while governments authorise and do license conventional and non-conventional tertiary institutions to dispense ODL programmes and courses, there are no national policies clearly delineating a path for ODL to run on. Where government directives (policy incubation) have been issued for either conventional or non-conventional institutions to run ODL courses, the very operationalisation of those programmes end up being muffled and contrived by the unenlightened actions of the of regulatory agencies.

For example, Barasa (2010) submits:

*Most open universities.....are open universities trapped in residential national education policy environments. National regulatory agencies prescribe the minimum entry academic qualifications that learners must possess in order to be admitted into degree programmes.....This closes the window on openness as to admission and undermines the very philosophy upon which ODL is predicated. For..dual mode universities, institutional policies for staff recruitment, training and promotion are often modeled on and similar to those in residential face-to-face universities. The result is that emphasis is on research with little on evidence for effective teaching and learner support as criteria for promotion(Barasa, 2010).*

The second challenge is that of social acceptance of ODL products. There is abundant skepticism as to the quality of graduates produced through the ODL route. In the words of Pityana (2004),

*....in many countries except possibly South Africa which has been practising distance education at tertiary level since 1946, there is no universal appeal for distance education among would be learners and suspicions remain about the quality of qualifications acquired through distance education (Pityana, 2004:12).*

Additionally, the dearth of ODL quality assurance frameworks (Barasa, 2010) is another of the challenges that the African ODL environment is expected to attend to if the growth of this sub-educational sector is to be sustained.

Clearly, the way out of the policy aridity and the quagmire of social skepticism and under-rated quality of ODL programmes is the conduct of more research with the view to encouraging the birth of viable policies and with the view to unearthing strategies for improving the quality of this developing sub-educational sector in Africa.

The third challenge is that of relevance of ODL programmes. One has always been of the view that ODL institutions need not replicate the programmes of conventional universities.

Similar suggestions emerged from the findings of the Lesotho Pan-African Tele-Education centre study whose report appears further within this chapter. It is therefore to believe that only a proactive, innovative and future probing Open and Distance Learning project will be seen as relevant and worthwhile in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The fourth challenge concerns dearth of trained personnel in the philosophy, principles and methods of Open and Distance Learning. While a large personnel is currently involved in running African ODL institutions, only a negligible portion of this personnel ever received formal training in the philosophy and principles of ODL. The Open University of Tanzania has just begun to give training leading to diplomas in ODL. It is expected that this area of the growing field of ODL will be taken quite seriously, very shortly by relevant institutions.

The fifth challenge concerns the low level of utilisation of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) within the area of ODL in Africa. The main issue that needs to be addressed before a high utilisation of ICT-based strategy may be experienced in Africa is the steady supply of electric power.

Unfortunately, no African country, including South Africa, is currently self-sufficient in electric supply; yet, one may not meaningfully run an ICT-based ODL project without adequate supply of electricity. All African ODL projects (except that of the African Virtual University that I did not discuss because it reaches a negligible population of African ODL clients) currently run solely on printed materials and minimal face-to-face meetings in order to circumvent unavailability of electricity; while, such a resourcefulness is commended, it should be stated that a combination of such a practice with some ICT-based strategies has a greater chance of impacting more positively on Open and Distance Learning projects.

The sixth challenge relates to the ease and credulity with which all ODL modes of delivery are embraced without discrimination or screening by open and distance learning institutions within the continent. While there may be value in employing some amount of multi-mode of delivery within the African ODL enterprise, it is certainly not conceivable that just any mode of delivery that may be invented anywhere on the planet will be suitable for the African ODL audience. Consequently, good practices dictate that careful trials of delivery modes or systematic researches be conducted to ascertain in the course of a limited time, the suitability or otherwise of any mode of delivery that may arrive on the African soil.

The main ODL modes in use in Africa at present are the correspondence education mode, long vacation courses mode, the weekend classes mode, Open University mode, non-interactive virtual classes modes and interactive virtual classes modes. Correspondence education mode is the oldest of all the ODL modes employed on the continent. However, the latest modes being employed on the continent are the interactive virtual classes modes which include the video conferencing mode and the Tele-Education mode; of these two modes, the Tele-Education mode is the newer. Currently, the newest and most famous of all open and distance learning programmes run through the Tele-Education mode in Africa, is the Pan-African e-Network.



*The Pan-African e-Network Project is a joint initiative of the Government of India and African Union and is funded by the Government of India at an estimated cost of US\$116 Million. It aims at imparting education to 10000 students of African countries participating in the project, using modern information communication technologies, from some of the topnotch universities of India. The eligible students enrolled in various programmes will be required to attend the classes in the learning centre set up in each member country as part of the project (Pan-African e-Network project, 2010).*

All existing 53 African nations (before the birth of South Sudan in September, 2011) hooked on to the Pan-African e-Network project in 2010. The project actually comprises two main components, namely, the Tele-Education and the Tele-Medicine components.

The Tele-Medicine programme seeks to link selected African medical practitioners (500 doctors and 1000 nurses) to the technological infrastructures, techniques and know-how developed by India or available in the field of medical practice in India; it is not a medical education programme that may lead to award of degrees in medicine; it is rather a medical empowering process that seeks to bring medical practitioners in Africa to collaborate with their colleagues in India in the diagnosis and treatment of illnesses, using the Tele-Medicine facilities and expertise available in India. On the other hand, the Tele-Education programme is an educational programme whose aim is to impart education with the view to awarding Diploma, Bachelor and Masters degrees in Management (Business and Finance), Technology (Computer Science and Information Technology) and International Languages (English, French, German and Arabic). Indira Gandhi National Open University, (IGNOU) New Delhi, Amity University, Noida, Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS, Pilani) University of Delhi, New Delhi and University of Madras, Chennai are the Indian universities partnering with selected institutions in Africa to implement the Pan-African e-Network project (Pan-African e-Network project, 2010).

On-line admission process, dedicated IP based network, live, interactive virtual classes, Off-line access (through the Internet) to archived lecture contents for review learning, digital library and dedicated Tele-Education portal for knowledge management are some of the special features of the Tele-Education programme (Pan-African e-Network project, 2010).

Lesotho signed up to the Pan-African e-Network agreement during the second half of 2010 and classes effectively began at the Lesotho learning centre, by April, 2011. The Institute of Extra-Mural Studies of the National University of Lesotho hosts the Lesotho Learning centre of the Pan-African e-Network. The current contributor was a one-time Deputy Director of the National University of Lesotho's Institute of Extra-Mural Studies. Through a study whose findings are reported below he sought to learn, among other things, the extent to which this new mode (the Tele-Education), holds potentials for bringing its contribution to the furthering of the ODL edifice that the African social, economic and educational experiences have begun to build so earnestly.

## 6. The study

The study sought to identify the characteristics of the clients that were the first to patronise the Tele-Education mode of delivering open and distance learning in Lesotho



and in Africa and to obtain these clients' views on the services offered them through this mode of learning. The study was conducted about one year after the programme had commenced.

**6.1. The design**

The study employed a descriptive survey design through which description and itemisation of basic characteristics and expressed views of the sample may be carried out.

**6.2. Population and sample**

A total of 217 learners were on the roll of the Lesotho learning centre at the time of this study. The intention was to turn the whole population of learners into the sample for the study by reason of the relative small number of learners at the centre. However, only 203 learners returned duly completed the data collection instrument handed to them. Eventually the completed copies of the instrument of 200 learners were finally considered for final analysis for ease of computation. Consequently while the population of the study was 217 learners, the sample was made up of 200 learners.

**6.3. Instrumentation**

A 6-item inventory was designed which sought to elicit information on the demography of learners, learners' preference for meeting periods, comfort at the learning centre, learner support services and learners' psychological experiences. The validity of the inventory was ensured through the selection and inclusion on the instrument of such items that are strictly relevant to the aspects of ODL studied.

**6.4. Findings**

The findings are here summarized in seven tables which are each followed by a detailed explanation of the data contained in them.

**Table 1** shows that about two thirds (65%) of the learners in the Lesotho Tele-Education centre were female.

More than half of all the learners (53%) were aged between 26 and 35 years; specifically, 32% of the learners were aged between 26 and 30 years while 21% were aged between 31 and 35 years; only 1% and 2% of all the learners, were aged between 41 and 45 years and between 46 and 50 years respectively; interestingly, 13% of all the learners were found to fall within the age brackets of 16 and 20 years.

About half the learners (51%) were married while a large percentage (45%) of them were single. About two thirds (67%) of all learners were civil servants while 20% of the learners were working in some companies; six per cent of them were self-employed while 7% of them were not working.

S/N									Total
1.	<b>Gender</b>	Male	Female						
		70 (35%)	130 (65%)						200
2.	<b>Age</b>	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	
		26 (13%)	20 (10%)	64 (32%)	42 (21%)	42 (21%)	2 (1%)	4 (2%)	200
3.	<b>Marital status</b>	Married	Single	Divorced	Widow(er)				
		102 ( 51%)	90 (45%)	2 (1%)	6 (3%)				200
4.	<b>Work status</b>	Not working	Self-employed	Civil servant	Company worker				
		15 (7%)	12 (6%)	133 (67%)	40 (20%)				200
5.	<b>Courses</b>	Business & Finance Management	Technology	International Languages					
		166 (83%)	34 (17%)	0 (0%)					200
6.	<b>Course duration</b>	6 months	1 year	1year 6mths	2yrs	2years 6 months	3years		
		16 ( 8%)	60 (30%)	26 (13%)	64 (32%)	0 (0%)	34 (17%)		200
7.	<b>Desire for foreign degrees</b>	Very High	high	medium	Low	Very low			
		30 (15%)	156 (78%)	14 (7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)			200
8.	<b>Other motivations for participation</b>	Obtain higher degrees. 40	Change job 21	Compete for higher position of responsibility 36	Convenience of reading while keeping one's job. 103				
		189 (95%)	40 (20%)	96 (48%)	200 (100%)				

**Table 1.** General Information on the learners of Lesotho Centre of Pan-African Tele-Education programme

Eighty-three per cent of the learners were reading Business and Finance courses; only 17% of the learners read Technology courses; none of the learners read International Languages.

Three quarters (75%) of the learners were enrolled on courses that lasted between 1 and 2 years; about the same number of learners (30% and 32% respectively) enrolled on a 1-year and 2-year study programmes; only 17% of the learners were undergoing a 3-year programme as at the time of this study.

As for one of the motivating factors for participating in the Pan-African Tele-Education programme, 93% of the learners indicated that the desire to obtain a foreign tertiary education qualification counted as one main reason.

All respondents were unanimous about the fact that the convenience of reading while retaining one's job was one main reason for enrolling into the Pan-African Tele-Education programme as 100% of the learners agreed to this inventory item; in addition, this last item of the first section of the inventory that allowed for multiple and ranked responses, revealed

that the motivation to obtain a higher degree for the sake of it, spurred 95% of learners to register for the Tele-Education programme; forty-eight per cent of learners enrolled on the programme as a means for eventually competing for higher positions of responsibility within either the civil service or companies on completion of their studies; on the other hand, 20% of learners registered with the Pan-African Tele-Education programme with the hope of changing job on completion of study.

S/N		Yes	Perhaps	No	Total
1.	<b>weekends</b>				
		181 (91%)	7 (3%)	12 (6%)	200
2.	<b>After work hours</b>				
		176 (88%)	19 (10%)	5 (2%)	200
3.	<b>During work hours</b>				
		10 (5%)	2 (1%)	188 (94%)	200
4.	<b>During lunch break periods</b>				
		74 (37%)	7 (3%)	119 (60%)	200
5.	<b>Night classes</b>				
		44 (22%)	8 (4%)	148 (74%)	200
6.	<b>Pre-work hour classes</b>				
		6 (3%)	2 (1%)	192 (96%)	200

**Table 2.** Preferences for meeting period among Lesotho Centre Tele-Education learners

S/N		Comfortable	Averagely comfortable	Not comfortable	Total
1.	<b>Chair</b>				
			178 (89%)	22 (11%)	200
2.	<b>Writing desk</b>				
			81(40%)	119 (60%)	200
3.	<b>Weather</b>				
			169 (85%)	31 (15%)	200
4.	<b>Lighting</b>				
			193 (97%)	7 (3%)	200
5.	<b>Noise control</b>				
			186 (93%)	14 (7%)	200
6.	<b>Cleanliness</b>				
			183 (92%)	17 (8%)	200

**Table 3.** Comfort at the learning centre

Table 2 shows the summary of learners' responses regarding the time of the day they would prefer to have their classes. Learners were encouraged to post multiple responses against this second section of the inventory and to rank order those responses. Table 2 reveals that 91% of learners would like to have their classes during weekends; another group made up of 88% of learners indicated that they could have their classes after work hours; only 37% and 22% of learners indicated that lunch break periods and night classes were acceptable.

Other suggestions such as pre-work hours classes (6-8am) and during work hours classes attracted only 3% and 5% positive answers respectively.

Effectively, the summary of the data in table 2 is that two choices (weekend classes and after work hour classes) were made by respondents.

Table 3 reveals that between 85% and 97% of learners agreed that the chairs used at the centre were averagely comfortable and that the lighting, cleanliness, weather and noise control were of average quality. However, 60% of learners submitted that the writing desks at the centre were of poor quality and were not comfortable.

On the whole, the comfort at the centre has been adjudged to be of average quality.

		excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Total
1.	Services of Tele-education attendant						
		2 (1%)	6 (3%)	185 (93%)	7 (3%)	0 (0%)	200
2.	Provision of Additional learning resources						
		0 (0%)	0 (0%)	16 (8%)	178 (89%)	6 (3%)	200
3,	Availability of study space						
		0 (0%)	0 (0%)	132 (66%)	61 (31%)	7 (3%)	200
4,	Provision for tutorials						
		0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (2%)	197 (98%)	200
5,	Provision for Internet Café						
		0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	199 (99%)	200
6.	Provision for Business centre						
		0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (2%)	196 (98%)	200
7.	Provision for restaurant services						
		0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	199 (99%)	200

**Table 4.** Learner support services

Table 4 shows that between 98% and 99% of learners submitted that the provision made by the centre for tutorials, internet café, business centre and restaurant services was poor. In actual fact none of these services was provided by the centre. However, the services of the Tele-Education attendant were adjudged to be good by 93% of respondents.

S/N		Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Total
1.	Ease in understanding the Lecturers (Lecturers' pronunciation)						
				125 (63%)		75 (37%)	200
2.	Facilitator-learner interaction						
				75 (37%)		125 (63%)	200
3.	Clarity of images						
			33 (16%)	92 (47%)		75 (37%)	200
4.	How well does Tele-Education facilitation resemble face-to-face teaching-learning technique			25 (12%)	66 (33%)	109 (55%)	200
				25 (12%)	66 (33%)	109 (54%)	200
5.	What is your assessment of female lecturers?						
			167 (84%)			33 (16%)	200
6.	What is your assessment of male lecturers?						
			200 (100%)			0 (0%)	200
7.	Performance of the interaction gadgets (speakers, microphones, headphones, etc..)						
				83 (41%)	117 (59%)		200

**Table 5.** Instructional processes

Table 5 shows that after about one year of instruction, 63% of learners indicated that they never had any real problem following and understanding the pronunciation and way of speaking of their Indian lecturers; however, 37% of learners still reported some difficulties in following their lecturers as a result of their way of speaking English language which is different from the way Southern Africans speak English.

When the inventory sought to know the extent to which Tele-Education mode resembles face-to-face teaching, more than half (55%) of learners submitted that there existed no similarity between the two modes of facilitating learning; thirty-three per cent of the learners responded that there existed a minimum amount of similarity between the two modes of instruction while about 12% of learners submitted that there existed a large amount of similarity between the two modes of instruction. Additionally, 63% and 37% submitted that, through the use of Tele-Education mode, facilitator-learner interaction was low and high respectively.

When the respondents were requested to assess the performances of both female and male lecturers, they rated male lecturers as being over and above female lecturers; this is because 84% of the learners found female lecturers to be good lecturers, but 16% of them found them to be poor in lecturing skills; on the other hand, 100% of learners submitted that male lecturers possessed good lecturing skills.

Sixty-three percent of learners, found the images coming through the screen good and clear; but 37% of learners submitted that the images were poor in quality. The interaction gadgets (microphones, speakers, etc..) were found to be of good quality by 41% of learners while 59% of learners submitted that they were only of fair quality.

		Very High	High	Average	Low	Total
1.	Ability to summarise oral presentations					
			103 (52%)		97 (48%)	200
2.	Speed in note taking					
			91 (45%)		109 (55%)	200
3.	Possibility to study 3-4 hours a day					
			66 (33%)		134 (67%)	200
4.	Have a high or low probability of missing 30% of each semester classes.					
			137 (31%)		63 (69%)	200
5.	Academic self-concept					
			125 (63%)		75 (37%)	200

**Table 6.** Probability of success in learning

Table 6 shows the manner in which learners fared academically through their responses to issues that are critical to success in learning. These issues include, ability to summarise oral presentations that may have been listened to, demonstration of speed in note taking, ability to study for at least 3 hours a day, demonstration of high academic self-concept and regularity of attendance at learning meetings.

Fifty-two per cent of learners indicated a high ability to summarise oral presentations; but 48% of learners indicated that a low ability to summarise oral presentations that they may have listened to.

While 45% of learners indicated that they possess a high enough speed to take all the major notes on a lecture, fifty-five per cent of learners indicated that they are not able to capture all major notes of a lecture.

Only 33% of the learners indicated that they are able to study for a minimum period of 3 hours a day. All remaining 67% of learners submitted that they are not able to study for about 3 hours a day.

Thirty-one per cent of learners indicated that it is highly probable that they miss 30% of the classes while 69% of learners indicated that the chances are low that they miss up to 30% of the classes.



Sixty-three per cent of learners posted high academic performance; while 37% of respondents posted low academic self-concept.

S/No.	Issues	Percentage
1.	The use of calculators is forbidden during examinations	200 (100%)
2.	Examination questions reflect Indian realities more than African realities	122 (61%)
3.	Time is always in short supply to carry through the activities of Pan-African ODL	108 (54%)
4.	ODL Learners do not enjoy government financial support	74 (37%)

**Table 7.** Free comments

Table 7 reflects the summary of learners' other comments that were freely offered after the main concerns of the study inventory had been attended to by them.

All (or 100%) of the learners expressed surprise and perhaps disappointment that the use of calculators was forbidden in the first examinations they sat for at the Pan-African ODL programme; when, in further casual interaction with the researcher, they were asked to assess the extent to which such a regulation affected their performance in the examinations concerned, they almost all submitted that there was no real adverse effect to their examinations; they submitted that they were rattled by the directive because they did not expect it.

Sixty-one per cent of the learners, submitted that both examination and study materials reflected more Indian realities than African realities. When asked again about the collateral damages that a situation such as this may have had on their study, most of the learners responded that there were no real damages as they were studying disciplines that had international outlook in their theories.

Fifty-four percent of the learners indicated that availability of time for the purpose of carrying out and completing the activities required by Pan-African Open and Distance Learning was a challenge to them. On the other hand, 37% of the learners expressed their frustration at the fact that only very few ODL learners received financial support from Lesotho government.

Although the 7 tables laid out here, contain data collected only from Lesotho, a keen observer of the African Open and Distance Learning scene would note that the near totality of the data displayed by those tables reflect the African situation; apart from being a country desirous to employ all forms of education to improve the lots of its people, Lesotho is also symbolic of African countries with a high population of youths that are jostling in all directions with the view to ultimately making a decent living through education and skills acquired either through formal or non-formal education. In other words, using the same instrument, if this same research were conducted among Pan-African ODL learners in other African countries, the findings will not be significant different from the current ones.

Therefore the discussion of the findings of this study is based upon the assumption that Lesotho is representative of all African nations in this context; consequently, in the lines that follow, the findings are generalised to the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa and their discussion is carried on as though they were derived from an African wide survey.

## 7. Discussion of findings

A number of issues have been thrown up by this study which reveals current peculiarities of African open and distance learning. These issues include the age brackets occupied by African ODL learners, the types of courses opted for in open and distance learning, request for tutorials in open and distance learning programmes and the issue of language of instruction as it concerns the facilitator; other issues include the socio-psychological determinants of success in open and distance learning, friendliness or learning conduciveness of ODL centres and relevance of learning materials to African realities.

### 7.1. Age of learners

This study revealed that 23% or about a quarter of all learners fell within the age brackets 16-25 years; it was equally revealed that 32% or about a third of all the learners fell within the age brackets 26-30 years while 55% or more than half of all the learners fell within the age brackets 16-30 years. A total of 76% of all learners have been found to fall within the age brackets 16 to 35 years.

Ages 16 to 35 years constitute an acknowledged age grouping for the youths of any society; in Africa, these are the same age brackets within which about 90% of regular or formal tertiary institutions students fall into; therefore, if more than three quarters of the ODL learners fell within this age grouping, it should be deduced that open and distance learning is already serving the youths of Africa as an alternative tertiary education sector. It is also an indication that if African nations were willing to offer tertiary education to their teeming youths, they will have to more than double the number of their existing tertiary institutions.

One other curious finding was the fact that 13% of all learners were found to be aged between 16 and 20 years; these are age brackets within which high school or secondary school students are usually found; persons who are able to complete high school education before or by the ages 16-20 years are considered brilliant students and should normally have got placement in formal tertiary institutions.

The researcher could engage only a few of the learners within these age brackets in post-study interviews that turned out to be quite revealing; these learners actually made very good grades at their respective end of high school examinations; it could not have been otherwise since the Pan-African Tele-Education project did not lower entry qualifications for the purpose of admission into the various open and distance learning programmes. However, a number of other reasons informed the choice of open and distance learning mode over the formal tertiary education mode; learners within this age brackets declared that they were engaged in income generating activities as shop keepers, security guards, petit traders and even street vendors; apart from the fact that they did not have the required amount of money to register full time in tertiary institutions, they found open and distance learning mode offering them the double opportunity of earning a living for themselves and their families and of acquiring skills; these were not the only attractions offered by the Pan-African open and distance learning project; these youths equally submitted that the financial

courses they were reading were dear to their heart as they saw in them an opportunity to break the vicious cycle of poverty that kept them in their present situation.

## 7.2. Preferred courses

Eighty-three per cent and 17% of learners were reading business and technology courses respectively; courses such as these, offered greater opportunities of employment (both self and paid employment) to learners on the African labour market than International Languages that not a single learner registered for. Modern strategies of carrying on business and Information Communication Technologies are new domains of economic and professional activities in Africa; as such these domains that still boast of a great room for expansion are gradually growing, offering employment opportunities to persons with the right kind of skills.

Therefore, with greater needs-generated course offerings, open and distance learning institutions may end up being viewed as more beneficial to learners than formal tertiary institutions which Babalola (2007) described as being obsolete in their course offerings and as being institutions that equip their clients with knowledge and skills which the African labour market does not need.

Specifically, Babalola (2007) reports that:

*In 2006, the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) conducted a large survey involving more than 10,000 online participants, to track the “products” of Nigeria’s educational sector. One of the objectives is to determine who the products are, their backgrounds, capabilities and needs to inform a long-term strategic planning process for the education sector. The survey targeted the beneficiaries of Nigeria’s secondary, tertiary, technical or vocational institutions and the individuals who graduated or discontinued their education from these institutions between 1995 and 2005. The survey clearly showed a disturbing trend that over 60% of participants were unemployed or under employed.*

Babalola (2007) then concluded that the 2006 findings confirmed the 2002 World Bank findings concerning mismatch between tertiary education teaching and labour market requirements. He further pointed out that tertiary graduate unemployment is further fuelled by i)lack of consultation with the private sector, ii)deficiency of practical skills at the level of graduates, iii)lack of qualified personnel to teach vocational skills and iv)high demand for skilled workers by the private sector.

## 7.3. Preferred learning meeting periods

Ninety-one per cent and 88% of the learners indicated weekends and post-work hours respectively as the preferred learning meeting periods. Throughout Africa, the Pan-African Tele-Education classes currently hold during work hours.

A few months after the take-off of the Pan-African Tele-Education, the organisers in India were notified of concerns expressed by learners across many centres on the continent

regarding learning meeting periods; as a result of consultation over the matter, an arrangement now exists whereby all live lectures are recorded and posted on the Pan-African e-Network platform so that learners who may have missed lectures may still catch up on these lectures and even enjoy them, albeit through secondary source.

The selection of convenient meeting periods for the purpose of participating in learning remains a serious challenge in open and distance learning; while self-study mode seems to be a solution to this challenge, the challenge of maintaining motivation to learn at a constantly high level at all time has been found to be another problem that constantly faces those learning alone; this motivational problem is usually resolved and overcome through group learning as the presence and prompting of peers and mates usually result in a generation of an internal energy that goads and motivates.

However, arrangement for out-of-work time meeting periods need to be arrived at soonest in a consultation that should involve learners and organizers of the Pan-African Tele-Education, if we must avoid the loss of a high number of learners.

#### **7.4. Comfort at the centres**

Naturally, the comfort that may be found at the learning centres is a function of the level of resources that are available to the country and institution hosting the centre.

Learners found the Pan-African Tele-Education centre at Lesotho averagely comfortable; if Lesotho with a GDP per capita of \$1605 and Human Development Index ranking of 141 out of 169 countries (UNDP, 2010), could provide a centre adjudged to be averagely comfortable, most Pan-African Tele-Education centres in Africa can be judged to be comfortable.

#### **7.5. Learner support services**

Of all the identified learner support services, the running of tutorials and the provision of internet café, business centre and restaurant services were declared as being poor by 99% of the learners; in fact these services did not exist at the Lesotho Centre.

Although in many centres across Africa, internet café, business centres and restaurant services may exist because of the availability of means and resources to provide these things, observation has shown that open and distance learning institutions on the continent usually play down on the need to provide tutorials to their learners; the general notion is that distance education learners are mature and independent enough to run and guide their own learning. Yet, the fact is that these learners initially were schooled in our formal educational institutions where no particular instruction was given to them in the area of learning how to learn; while through previous efforts at resolving and surmounting difficult learning experiences and while the ever sharpening process of introspection acquired through inner maturation would have availed these learners of some techniques of learning adapted to their various situations, these learners cannot be said to be equipped with a good enough range of learning techniques and habits that have been tested and proven reliable

through studies and observation. True, a few useful study skills and habits will remain personal and unique to learners, but the vast majority of good study skills need to be consciously learnt.

In addition, it is realistic to believe that some aspects of the subject matter being taught could prove stubborn to understand and penetrate even in a highly interactive setting as the one offered by the Pan-African Tele-Education; group discussions and tutorials are usually the tools with which these difficulties in understanding are overcome.

## 7.6. Instructional processes

The manner of speaking English language by Indian lecturers, similarity between face-to-face teaching and Tele-Education and gender differences in lecture delivery were the three main issues that were highlighted in regards to instructional processes.

Although initial difficulties are usually faced in communication when two or more persons drawn from different linguistic backgrounds begin to use a common language, these difficulties are known to vanish under the process of habituation; habituation is a process whereby a constant and continued use or exposure to a language or a phenomenon ends up creating a harmonious condition between the phenomenon and the person exposed to it (Bello, 1988); in the case of language use and listening, the hearing organ and the brain have the ability to adjust within a short time to new types of sounds with the view to deciphering and comprehending them; as such, while 37% of learners submitted that they still experience comprehension difficulties one year after beginning to listen to Indian lecturers speak English, these learners nevertheless admitted that they have made a lot of acoustic progress and adjustment since only the understanding of very few words escaped them a year after the beginning of their classes as compared to the large number of words they could not understand a year earlier; this implies that the manner in which the language of instruction is spoken for purposes of promoting open and distance learning is not an issue as both facilitators and learners ultimately reach a level playing field in this matter.

More than half of the learners did not detect any similarity between Tele-Education and face-to-face modes while a third of the learners only spotted a slim similarity; yet, the Tele-Education mode is a highly interactive teaching-learning mode; is it that nothing can replace the human teacher? This lack of similarity however, did not have any repercussion on their learning.

The other interesting finding was that the learners who were made up of 35% male and 65% female, found overwhelmingly, male facilitators to be better facilitators than female facilitators. Although the difference in performance between male and female facilitators was not significant (84% of learners submitted that female facilitators were good but 100% of learners stated that male lecturers were good), this finding merits some attention. Is there any element of gender attraction in this finding whereby a group of predominantly female learners would prefer to be taught by male facilitators? No attempt was made to answer this question during this investigation.



## 7.7. Success in learning

High academic self-concept (Reasoner, 2010), speed in note-taking, 3-4 hours study a day and ability to summarise accurately a piece of writing that was read or a talk that was listened to (Lammers, Onweugbuzie and Slate, 2001; Kleijn, Ploeg and Topman, 1994) have all been identified as factors promoting success in learning.

Although, 63% of learners had a high academic self-concept, only 33% are able to read for 3 hours a day and only 45% were fast in note-taking and only 52% of them can adequately summarise an oral presentation; the percentages concerning daily period for reading, note taking ability and capacity to summarise are too low to allow the prediction of success in learning; therefore, while learners showed a fairly high academic self-concept, the deficiencies in these other abilities indicate anything but probability of a significant success in learning.

Indeed, inability to reinforce the confidence and study skills of learners has begun to impact negatively a few African ODL outfits as Abiodun (2010) reports in the following lines:

*Given the benefits of distance education, the recent sharp decline in enrolment of learners for distance education in Nigeria might suggest the existence of fundamental problems in the provision of distance education. This trend, if not addressed, would undermine the purposes of establishing distance education centres in the Nigerian education sector. Jaiyeola (2000) reported that students' enrolment rate for distance education programmes dropped from 75% in the year 2006 to 55% in the year 2008. Lewis (1994) suggests the reasons for relatively high rate of dropout include learners finding themselves in unfamiliar situations. In addition, many learners associate learning with being taught by a teacher who is physically present, while others who are unfamiliar with distance learning packages are finding learning more difficult since many of them lack capacity to learn this way (Abiodun, 2010:90).*

## 7.8. Free comments

Under "free comments", three comments need some discussion; the first touches on absence of the reflection of African realities in Pan-African Tele-Education lecture and examination contents; the second concerns the unavailability of government scholarship for open and distance learning clients and the third regards learners' expressed concern for lack of time to adequately attend to their studies.

Although all learners indicated that the fact that next to no African realities were contained in their lectures and examinations, had no adverse effect on their learning, there is need to remedy the situation; injecting and spicing learning contents with scenes and images familiar to learners has the potential of motivating them to learn beyond points imaginable by the facilitator; additionally, this sort of motivation usually translates into success results that would be better than the result learners would have obtained in a situation devoid of the realities of their milieu.



The findings of this study as they regard the current age brackets of ODL learners and the choice of courses the learners seek to read in ODL institutions point to the fact that open and distance learning institutions have become both a complement and in some respects, an alternative to formal tertiary institutions on the continent; the importance of an institution such as this can no more be underplayed.

Since independence in the 1960s, African governments have developed elaborate study scholarship systems for formal tertiary education students; up to date, these same governments have not thought of developing similar systems of scholarship award that would enable distance education learners enroll in ODL institutions within or outside the continent; the time has obviously now come to consider seriously a type of scholarship system such as this, since open and distance learning is gradually advertising its merits and has in fact established its strong hold in parts of the African continent.

Learners' expression of unavailability of time for their study is nothing new or odd since learning in adulthood is only one out of the numerous social, professional and civic tasks the adult citizen is expected to perform. However, that which is yet to be taken seriously within learning circles is the recognition of time management as a study skill issue; the acceptance of this fact will ultimately bring facilitators to deliberately tutor learners on how to share and use the daily, weekly and monthly periods of the time available to them in a way as to transmute this scarce resource from an obstacle into an asset.

### **7.9. Acceptability level of the Tele-Education mode**

Judging from respondents' responses under "Instructional processes" and "Learner support services", the Tele-Education mode of delivery is a potential viable ODL mode of delivery where African ODL institutions are committed to resolving the challenges associated with the recruitment of well trained and equipped Tele-Education attendants and the acquisition and reinforcement of technologies that will bring in sharper images through the waves.

Although respondents' responses suggested that nothing seems to be able to replace the human teacher, it was clear that learners acquired learning without hindrance associated directly to the operation of the Tele-Education mode of delivery except that which may be connected with the supply of the right technologies. Additionally the human teacher is not indispensable within the field of open and distance learning where the learning environment is continuously improved to support learning without the human facilitator.

## **8. Recommendations**

The following recommendations flow from the study:

- Weekend or post-work hours classes have been overwhelmingly selected by learners as most appropriate. It is recommended therefore that the management of the Pan-African Tele-Education project should adjust its current beaming hours to accommodate this wish of the learners.

- This study has revealed that learners of open and distance learning institutions tend to come with specific educational and training needs in mind (e.g. those with high prospects for employment); this phenomenon offers a unique opportunity to ODL institutions to design and offer alternative courses to those offered by conventional tertiary institutions that have proven too rigid, bureaucratic, conservative and sluggish in responding to the learning challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This opportunity would have been seized when ODL institutions begin to engage with their potential clients with the view to seeking their views on their educational preferences and the reasons for such preferences; the analysis of those views will ultimately guide these institutions toward designing relevant learning programmes but also toward attracting to their gates, enthusiastic crowds of new types of learners.
- Ignorance of the existence of useful study skills and techniques by both ODL facilitators and learners currently constitute a menace to what would have otherwise been a noble contribution of open and distance learning to the educational field of Africa and the world. For example, as a result of lack of ability to manage their time effectively, learners drop out of study programmes in massive numbers; a number of them too who have the intellectual potentials to succeed, have failed as a result of poor study skill or habit. This is why it is here recommended that study skills courses should henceforth be made a part of the curricula of open and distance learning institutions.
- Since injecting into and coating lecture contents and deliveries with African realities will ultimately motivate learners to learn much better than previously, it is recommended that facilitators and course designers should make a deliberate effort to learn about African realities with the view to enriching their teaching and course contents.
- Without doubt, open and distance learning has now proved itself as an educational option that can no more be ignored on the African scene; that which is therefore expected at this point in time is the support of African governments to this emerging useful educational institution and option; government support may come in the forms of policies recognizing the value of ODL institution, material and financial support and study scholarship awards to learners.
- As a follow-up to government's support to open and distance learning institutions on the continent, relevant and competent institutions should intensify the training of specialised personnel in this emerging educational sector.
- In direct relation to the adoption of the Tele-Education mode, the training of specialised personnel should focus on the provision of competent Tele-Education attendants. Also, ODL institutions through the numerous African ICT regional and national initiatives should attempt to secure the right technologies with the view to profitably employing the Tele-Education mode for the further development of Open and Distance Learning in Africa.

Although challenges remain to overcome, by way of testimony of the good omen that ODL is, and as a way of appeal to all stakeholders to support this developing educational option, it should be submitted that the achievements this far recorded within the realm of open and distance learning in Africa are encouraging and highly motivating.

## 9. Conclusion

While a few notable achievements have been realised in the field of open and distance learning in Africa, this space still remains almost a virgin when one conceives of the boundless areas for intervention and the vast section of the space yet to be explored. The 21<sup>st</sup> century offers a lot of internal and external opportunities through which African nations may use open and distance learning as a tool for development.

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