



AN ANALYSIS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN DISTANCE LEARNING EDUCATION

Sheriff Ghali Ibrahim And Aliyu Muhammed Dobi

Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Abuja, Abuja-Nigeria

ABSTRACT: *Research findings have unarguably linked national developments to Education. Studies into the developmental process of most successful nations reveal that education has been the major driving force. Unfortunately, educational opportunities provided by conventional leaning system are inadequate in Nigeria and other third world countries of Africa, Asia, South America and the Caribbean. However, distance learning education has been suggested and adopted especially by Nigeria as an alternative means of enabling her teaming population acquire Education which is likely to be denied them by the limited capacity of the conventional institutions. The paper examines the role an alternative Distance Learning Educational service is capable of playing in the attainment of sustainable development. In so doing, the paper relied on the Secondary source of data collection for information through which related literatures were reviewed. Our findings show that Distance Learning, if properly planed and managed, is capable of leading to development of states because of its flexibility and conveniences. It was realized that the Distance learning can actually be used to balance the Education deficit in the country by increasing the people's access to education, improving our human security and productive capacity which will translate in to development. The paper recommends that an improved attention be given to the system through modernization of various Distance Learning institution, learning process as well as her curriculum to meet the development goals of the country.*

KEYWORDS: Sustainable Development, Distance Learning, Education, Analysis, National Developments

INTRODUCTION

The history of all developed societies has a great link to their investment in human resources and most especially the educational sector. As argued by many scholars, education at all stages or era of human life is the foundation for national social, economic, political and human development. It is an effective instrument of positive change in the society and a fundamental social institution for transmitting basic knowledge including values, norms, skills and culture to the younger ones in the society. Ololube and Egbezor (2012) describe education as the process by which children, youths and adult learn abilities, attitudes and other forms of behavior which are of positive values to the society in which they live. For Nwosu (2010), "education is a mobile treasure that travels with an individual throughout life." It enables one to grow and develop, so that he or she is empowered to achieve his or her aspirations (Nwosu, 2010). From the forgoing expressions, education (mostly formal) is concerned with the process of building, training and developing the inborn potentials and capabilities of the individual learner so as to make him or her useful member of society. It is



a systematic process that influences people's knowledge, skills and attitudes and transmits and develops the cherished cultures, values, skills and attitudes of the community. This development enables learners to become functional adults who will take care of themselves and their families and contribute to sustainable national development.

The relationship between education and national development which is sought by all states has made it that education system (formal) is mostly fully state-financed and operated. In some countries however, the state allows and certifies private school systems to provide a comparable education alongside public institutions. In recent time, especially the 20th century many nations both advanced and less develop have been occupied with the effort to better provide for their citizens' needs through a set of programmatic provisions, including education which can be argued to have taken the lead. Hence the extent, to which nation-states were able to transform themselves into service states by providing programs for well-balanced living especially through human resources development, became a hallmark of their modernity and the adequacy with which they sustained these provisions became a predictor of their political credibility, stability and all-round societal development (Oboada & Jerome, 2012).

With the discovery and admission of this great role of education to national development, the quest for education by the government and the masses had drastically increased. Experiences both nationally and internationally have shown that conventional education is extremely hard pressed to meet the demands of today's socio educational milieu especially for developing countries like Nigeria and this calls for an alternative source. UNESCO (2002) stated that "in efforts to meet the new and changing demands for education and training, open and distance learning may be seen as an approach that is at least complementary and under certain circumstances, an appropriate substitute for the face-to-face methods that still dominates most educational systems". As suggested by UNESCO, the problem of unfulfilled quest for education versus actual supply of educational services alongside other silent factors, contributed had to the acceptance, growth, and implementation of distance education program in Nigeria as a means to bridge the gap between demand and supply in education.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Distance Learning

As the name implies, Distance Learning simply has to do with the learning that takes place where there is a distance of place and in time or period between the learner and the teacher learning facilities and the learning institution. It is that learning process where the learner and the person that is impacting the knowledge are separated by a distance of time as well as place, from the learning institution and equipment. Kaplan, Michel and Andreas (2016) defined Distance learning as that type of education where the student may or are not always physically present at a school. It is a system of education that involves correspondent courses where the students and y the instructors communicate through post. Other forms include on-line education and part time learning and teaching arrangement like; Sandwich program, Part-Time Teacher Training Program (PTTP), National Open University, program, adult literacy education program, National Teachers Institute (NTI).



Development

The World Bank in (2004), defined development as the actualization of an implicit potentiality such as patterned growth and maturation of a seed or an initial germ cell, or human person. It is a positive change or an increasing unfolding of the potentialities of a given reality. In relation to human, Uwadia (2010) sees it as the integration of the various segments or sectors, natural, physical, acquired and human of a people towards the full working out, permanently and cumulatively of their being, as persons of their nation and their real productivity.

Development is the process by which people create and position themselves and their life activities to realize higher levels of civilization in accordance with their own choices and values. This implies that Development is not solemnly about economic prosperity, but encompasses changes in other aspects or sectors such as psychological, social, political and environmental for the betterment and well-being of society. It goes beyond improvement in incomes and output but a multi-dimensional process that involves the reorganization and orientation of the entire economic and social system with changes in institutional, social and administrative structures as well as in popular attitudes.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development can be defined as the positive changes and growth in the society on a persistent or consistent base. The United Nations General Assembly through the Brundtland Commission (1987), defined sustainable development as that development that meets the present needs of the people without compromising or destroying the abilities or potentials of the future. By sustainability, it refers to the situation where a defined behavior or pattern is maintained indefinitely. So, changes in the society can only be classed sustainable if they stand the test of time or have the potentials of lasting.

Theoretical Framework

The concept of development especially when attached with the dependent variable “sustainable” entails a holistic change in or of the society. It is an all-round growth which goes beyond the growth in states GDP, but encompasses a general improvement in all sectors as well as the quality of life. According to the United Nations Development Program (1999), development refers to a state of better education, higher standards of health and nutrition, poverty reduction, cleaner environment, increasing access to and equality of opportunity, greater individual freedom, and the facilitation of a richer cultural life.

To examine the role of distance learning and the educational sector in general in achieving sustainable development, we will adopt the Capability Theory as advanced by economists such as Milton Friedman, Gary Becker and Jacob Mincer after World War II and later Amartya Sen in the 80s. When discussing development from the Capability Approach, the major proposition is that development occurs when people are more able to achieve what makes their lives valuable to them. That is, progress, development or poverty reduction occurs when people have greater freedom. What this means is that the Capability Approach extends the promoting factors and indicators of development from mere income or economic growth as ends in themselves, to that of growth of people and enhancing the quality of the human condition that can and is only better achieved through education.



At the core of capability approach is the focus on what people are effectively able to do and to be, that is, on their capabilities on achieving development. Sen (1979) argued that in Social evaluations and developmental policy design, the focus should be on what people are able to do and be, on the quality of their life, and on removing obstacles in their lives so that they have more freedom to live the kind of life which upon reflection, they find valuable. The capability approach to development evaluates policies according to their impact on people's capabilities. It asks whether people are being healthy, and whether the resources necessary for this capability are present. It asks whether people are well-nourished, and whether the conditions for this capability are met. It asks whether people have access to a high-quality education and whether the necessary condition and opportunities is available (Robyn 2003).

Therefore, borrowing from the basic assumption of Sen (1979) and other capability theorists, the introduction, development and sustenance of distance learning education programs will lead to sustainable development. This is because Distance Education aims at increasing access to education for those who have difficulty in accessing it within the mainstream such as the poor, illiterate, women, marginalized and those living in remote areas, thereby making the state population a productive one in a situation that forms part of the major prerequisites for sustainable development. Distance Education is the affordable and most accessible means of formal knowledge acquisition to help develop the citizen's capabilities. Distance learning's accessibility and affordability, makes it an important vehicle through which ordinary people can get educated and contribute to national development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of distance learning has been given deferent definitions by deferent scholars even though with some common terminologies and peculiar definitional intends. Distance Learning is a system characterized by time savings from the commute to class, the potential increase of class seats, and a general opportunity for people to get an education that otherwise maybe would not. Distance education entails much less financial overhead and infrastructure from the school.

As conceptualized by scholars, it is an educational system that makes learning possible at the convenience of both the learners and the teachers. Adebayo (2007) defines Distance Learning as the type of education that takes place outside the conventional school system where knowledge is imparted without necessarily having personal interaction with students or learners. In the same vein, Creed (2001) conceived of distance learning as an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone far removed in space and time from the learner. It is the delivery of useful learning opportunities at convenient place and time for learners, irrespective of institution providing the learning opportunity (Kaufman, Watkins and Guerra 2000). Of great importance in relation to distance learning is its flexibility and access to instruction. It's been argued that the distance educational mode opens up educational opportunities for a lot of the population as possible as it accommodate heterogeneous learning styles, and provide access to remote and normally inaccessible under-represented groups and people in different circumstances. In line of this argument, the Federal Ministry of education (2012), defines Distance Learning as any form of learning in which the provider enables individual learners to exercise choices over any one or more of a number of aspects of learning. Alaezi (2005) refers to open and distance learning



as educational patterns, approaches and strategies that permit people to learn with no barriers in respect of time and space, age and previous educational qualification – no entry qualification, no age limit, no regard to sex, race, tribe, state of origin etc.

From the argument of Dodds, It allows students to access class when and where it is most appropriate for them, and as such, it offers the opportunity to balance life's demands of family, work, and the countless other competing requirements. Dodds (2005) argued that open and distance learning is an approach which combines the principles of learner centeredness, lifelong learning, flexibility of learner provision, the removal of barriers to access learning, the recognition for credit of prior learning experience, the provision of learner support, the construction of learning programs in the expectation that learners can succeed and the maintenance of rigorous quality assurance over the design of learning materials and support systems.

Distance education is the means by which the teacher is taken literally to the student, a teaching and learning process in which students are separated from the teachers by a physical distance which is often bridged by communications technologies (Dhanarajan, 2008). Berge (1998) opined that distance learning was the acquisition of knowledge and skills through mediated information and instruction, encompassing all technologies and other forms of learning at a distance. It is a planned teaching and learning, connects learners at a distance, designed to encourage learner interaction, uses audio, video and computer technologies as delivery modes, delivery modes evolve as technology expands and grows.

The California Distance Learning Project in (2015) outlined the basic feature of distance learning to include: the separation of teacher and learner during at least a majority of each instructional process , separation of teacher and learner in space and or time, the use of educational media to unite teacher and learner and carry course content, the provision of two-way communication between teacher, tutor, or educational agency and learner and control of the learning pace by the student rather than the distance instructor. In summary, distance learning Provides educational access to learners not enrolled in conventional educational institutions and can augment the learning opportunities of current students a process that have always evolve to incorporate emerging technologies. It provides educational opportunities needed by anyone, anywhere and at any time. It provides increased educational opportunities to a larger population in different situations and needs because it allows for more students to take classes. Both students and employees with distance problems can benefit because it is more flexible in terms of time and can be delivered anywhere

DISTANCE LEARNING AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The idea of distance learning educational program was a product of the problem of unsatisfied demand for education versus actual supply of educational services by regular higher institutions as a means to bridge the gap between demand and supply. This was aimed to be achieved through a complementary function of the system on the life of the citizens or an outright replacement for the role of the regular educational system in the struggle for national development. The areas in which the distance learning have or will contribute to sustainable development include:



Increase Access to Education

First and major, among the impact of distance learning in the process of nation building is the increase in people's opportunity to access educational services. The distance learning program is an alternative mode of educational delivery. As argued in the literatures reviewed above, the major characteristics which form the bases or essence distance learning is to enable the segment of the population who do not have the opportunity to attend regular or conventional educational settings. Nwaocha and Iyama (2008) asserted that the people who would have found it impossible to attend the conventional school system benefit from the distance learning and as such, the percentage of the country's population in school would be increased and making a larger percentage of the population literate and favorable for development.

This is helping in meeting with the stated objectives of the National Policy on Education that 'maximum efforts shall be made to enable those who can benefit from higher education to be given access to it. Such access may be through universities or correspondence courses, open universities or part time, e learning and work study programs (NPE, 2004).

Social and Intellectual Enhancement

The Distance learning is a means through which citizens in the educational sector especially, as well other sectors enhance their capacities and status which translates in to development. Distance learning brings more freedom of access as well as a wider range of opportunities for learning and qualifications, thereby improving their social status to the learners. It is often a cheaper means of attending school for the working-class student since some people may not be able to leave their places of work to go to school full time. The above stand is proving by the number of Men of the armed forces and other security agencies that are registered in large numbers for distance learning to enhance their social status. On the part of the teachers, **Dennis** observed that Nigeria can now boast of capable and competent teachers working in its education sector, with improvement in the quantity and quality and overall capacity of education managers as well as school administrators necessary to lead the nation's educational system (Dennis, 1997).

The NTI has played a great role in achieving this by registering serving teachers in its Nigeria Certificate in Education and the pivotal Teacher Training Programs, thereby improving the quality of those teachers already working in the field. For instance, Aderinoye (2001) cited that over a period of eight years, the total number of primary education teacher graduates rose from 45,150 to over 300,000. Between 1990 and 1992 alone, the NTI graduated 21,000 Certificate in Education holders. This figure compares with the combined total of 58,000 teachers graduated by the nation's 58 conventional colleges of education (Aderinoye, 2001). The NTI's Teacher Training Program, designed to support the introduction of the Universal Basic Education scheme introduced in 1999, produced 19,025, 20,800, and 15,587 qualified teachers in the years 2000, 2001, and 2002 respectively (NTI, 2003). These have helped in reducing the rate of school dropout; maintain stability and quality of education services.

The implication of the following developments is that it will invariably translate in sustainable development because there exist correlations between qualitative education and balanced development. It is widely argued that when people are developed intellectually, their skills or methods of doing things is improved or modified. In agreement with this,



Fabunmi (2004) submitted that the emergence of the Distance Learning in the continent, will help to create the required change in skills, values, attitudes, knowledge and so on, that are relevant to the development of the people and the nation. So, when people have access to qualitative education deprived them in conventional higher institutions through Distance Learning educational program, they will improve and perform their duties efficiently.

Enhancement of Human Security

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Global Environmental Change and Human Security Science plan (GECHS) in (1996 and 1999) respectively, described “Human Security as a situation when and where individuals and communities have the options necessary to end, mitigate or adapt to threats to their human, environmental and social rights, safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease, and oppression and also from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of everyday life. Central to this are issues of poverty, famine, desertification, epidemics, conflicts, etc. which represent threats to Human Security in Africa Where you have not adequate education provided by conventional system. Hence, Distance Learning presents an alternative framework in equipping individuals and communities to respond more effectively to such threats.

Distance Learning is an effective mechanism in enhancing Human Security through its ability to provide educational access to those living in rural communities, especially in conflict and post-conflict communities where conventional education cannot effectively serve the people. This is achieved through poverty alleviation, and human empowerment programs as well as making information accessible to the people mostly through group discussions. In the area of health, the inefficient means of curing HIV/AIDS epidemic for instance, placed the duty of preventing the spread of the epidemic, and to mitigate its impact on the society, on the educational sector a task the conventional educational system could not effectively deliver, hence distance education became an alternative source. In support of this, Terhembra and Eunice (2009) Argued that a better framework for the fight against HIV/AIDS was provide by Distance education through its flexible mode of instructional delivery and geographical penetration.

The system also appears to be the most suitable means for empowering the underrepresented groups through poverty alleviation programs, especially fulltime house wives, working women, and the nomadic women, thereby enhancing their literacy and enabling them to play a constructive role in nation building by reducing the cost of education while enhancing access and quality of education, thereby turning the educational triangle on its head, a triangle that has long depicted how education is constrained (Olakulehin, 2008).

Economic Growth and Development

The ultimate impact of the distance learning education is creating a literate society which is viable for developmental processes as it makes it possible for majority of the country’s population to acquire education or other informal knowledge through its flexible programs, which would not have been possible if left to the conventional education institution and system. Okebukola (2010) submitted on the importance of education to the development of any nation and was upheld by World Bank research (2012) that there is no nation that have had meaningful development without investing hugely in education as it is the main plank for economic development.



The distance learning is a means that afford many people the opportunity to become learned hence becoming productive personnel in any profession they choose or are currently engaged in, hence contributing to the economic growth of the nation through better performance. In the same, the system makes it possible for employers to organize in-service training for their staff without necessarily releasing them for long periods of productive time.

As a means of alleviating poverty, human empowerment and other measures to ensure human security that is needed for sustainable development, Imhabekhai (2004) Opined that a well – organized Distance Learning can assist in training adult persons who have sufficient and responsive knowledge, skills, attitudes and values as would help them lead truly productive and functional life and there by contributing to national development. As Education is stimulants of creativity, a state thriving for development will hardly make it with inadequate provision of Education for her population. So, with Distance Learning, citizen will be creative and would be able to generate and apply creative solutions to the nation’s economic problems. It will enable citizens Invent new ways or working tools through research which are pillars of the productive sector of the economy.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Education remains the only foundation on which the structures of sustainable development can be built. Development in a sustainable context goes beyond good policy statements on papers as it only becomes meaningful if they (policies) are implemented. The implementation process requires or is best done through the service of experts from all segments of the society and not the political officers alone. Since the conventional educational setting is not capable of producing these required hands needed for the implementation strategies, the flexibility, convenience and accommodating ability of the Distance Learning Education makes it an important institution that must be harnessed, developed and promoted so long as we want to achieve sustainable development.

REFERENCE

- Adebayo, A. M. (2007). Open and Distance Learning in South/West geopolitical Ado – Ekiti, Ekiti State
- Aderinoye, R. A. (2001). Alternative To Teacher Training. In H. Perraton (Ed.) Cost Effectiveness in Teacher Training. Paris: UNESCO.
- Alaezi, O.A (2005). National Open University Plan: Enhancing Higher Education
- Brundtland Commission (1987). Report of the world commission on Environment and Development; united nations.
- CDLP (2015) California Distance Learning Project
- Creed, C. (2001). The Use of Distance Education for Teachers. Cambridge; Defining and Sustaining Useful Results. Education Technology.
- Dennis, N (1997). Schools ponder new global landscape, Science, 277, July 18,.
- Dhanarajan, G. (2001). “Combating Poverty through Adult Education. Silver Jubilee Celebration of the Institute of Distance and Continuing Education. University of Guyana.



- Dodds, T. (Ed.) (2005). *Open and distance learning in southern Africa. A collection of papers compiled for the Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA)*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Fabunmi, F. A. (2004). The role of libraries and information centres in distance and open learning education. In E.O. Fagbamiye.
- Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) *National Policy on Education* Lagos Government Press.
- Federal Ministry of Education (2015). *National policy on open and Distance Education*.
- GECHS (1999). "Global environmental change and human security service plan". IHDP Report, No. 11, Bonn IHDP.
- Imhabekhai, C. I. (2004). *National Open University of Nigeria: A Wasteful or Worthwhile Venture*. In E. O. Fagbamiye.
- Kaplan Andreas M, Haelein M (2016). *Higher education and the digital revolution; Business Horizons*.
- Kaufman, R., Walkins, R.& Guera, I. (2000). *The Future of Distance Learning: National Open and Distance Learning Programmes*, Abuja: Government NERC Press. Nigeria.
- Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education, Vol 1, 1:2
- Nussbaum, Martha (1988) *Nature, functioning and capability: Aristotle on political Distribution*, Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy, Supplementary Volume.
- Nwaocha V. O. & Iyama H. C. (2008). *Open and Distance Learning: Successful Implementation In Nigeria*. Paper presented at the 2nd ACDE Conference and General Assembly,
- Nwosu, E. N. (2010). *Sexuality education as a vaccine for HIV/AIDs prevention among school adolescents*, Nigeria Journal of Sociology of Education,
- Oboada A. Uriah & Jerome Ibejika Wosu (2012) *Formal Education as a Panacea for Sustainable National Development: A Theoretical Discussion* International Journal of Scientific Research in Education Vol. 5(2)
- Okebukola, P.O. (2010). *Health Insurance and Attainment of Health Security in Africa: The Case of the National Health Insurance Scheme of Nigeria*. In O. Obasanjo, A.L. Mabogunje & P.
- Olakulehin, F.K. (2008). *Policy formulation and capacity building for improved access to higher education in Nigeria*.
- Ololube, N. P., & Egbezor, D. E. (2012). *A Critical Assessment of the Role/Importance of Non-Formal Education to Human and National Development in Nigeria: Future Trends*. International Journal of Scientific Research in Education.
- Robeyns Ingrid (2003) *Sen's capability approach and gender inequality: selecting relevant capabilities*. Feminist Economics.
- Sen, Amartya K. 1979. "Informational Analysis of Moral Principles." In Ross Harrison, Ed. *Rational Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Terhemba.A and Eunice. A (2009). *Open flexible learning as a strategy for enhancing human security in Nigeria: International Journal of Education and Development using Information and Communication Technology (IJEDICT)*,
- UNDP. (1996). *United Nations Development Programmes, Human Development Report*.
- UNDP. (1999). *United Nations Development Programmes, Human Development Report*.
- UNESCO (2002). *Open Distance Learning: Trends, Policy and Strategy Consideration*. Paris, UNESCO
- World Bank (2012). *World Bank Sees Progress Against Extreme Poverty, But Flags Vulnerabilities*. Retrieved May 14, 2012 from <http://web.worldbank.org>