

THE MASS MEDIA IN DISTANCE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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INTRODUCTION

Distance education is not a new concept in Nigeria. During the thirties some Nigerians passed different examinations and earned commendable education qualifications from the overseas universities and examination bodies through distance education while staying at home.

In this paper, we are to examine the use of mass media in distance education in the country. First, we are to give the historical antecedents of distance education in Nigeria. This will enable us have some grip on the practice of distance education in the country. Secondly, the prospects and constraints based on the appraisal of the facilities will be discussed. Lastly, suggestions are to be proffered towards the use of the mass media for boosting distance education in the country.

HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS

The British colonial administration was non-chalant over establishment of university institutions in West Africa. The London University conducted its first Matriculation Examination in Lagos in 1887 and this heightened the demand of workers for continuation classes. This resulted in the establishment of continuation classes in Lagos and Evening schools in different parts of the country. Some Nigerians turned to correspondence institutions abroad, such as, University Correspondence College, Wosley Hall and Rapid Results College, all in Britain (Omolewa, 1982). Thus, by 1930 some Nigerians had passed London Matriculation and the degree examinations through correspondence courses.

The first higher education institution established in Nigeria was the Yaba Higher College in 1934. But this institution did not fully satisfy the higher education aspirations of the Nigerians. It was adjudged by the public opinion to be inferior to those in Britain and abroad in its curriculum, policy and administration (Anyanwu, 1987:16). To worsen the situation, the products were placed on subservient positions to their British counterparts. Those who had strong family backings were sponsored to travel abroad for higher education while the less privileged resorted to correspondence education to gratify their higher educational aspirations.

The first government effort towards providing opportunities for adults or workers to attain their higher educational ambitions was the publication of the Asquith and the Elliot Reports of 1945. As a matter of fact, these commissions were set up mainly on higher education (Asquith for the colonies in general, and Elliot for West African colonies). But in their reports they realized that any university institutions should, in addition to their intra-mural programmes, take care of the public outside their walls. For instance, the Asquith included that the university colleges should start from their earliest stage to cater for "*those members of the population whose studies must necessarily be restricted to the leisure left from their other work*" (Osuji, 1981:90).

Consequently, the Oxford Extra-Mural Delegacy started extra-mural classes in Nigeria in 1947. However, this was not a distance education programme as it was the normal classroom teaching. The only difference was that the classes were done during the evenings when workers might have finished their daily assignments as during the weekends. In 1949 the newly established University College, Ibadan, took over the extra-mural classes throughout the country.

The first time distance education was mentioned by any government Commission was the Ashby Report of 1960 in connection with the recommendation for a university of a unique character (University of Lagos), which in addition to offering both day and evening courses leading to degrees, and in order to cater for the interest of workers outside Lagos, should have a Correspondence Department (Osuji, 1981:97).

The new universities that emerged as from 1960 joined the University of Ibadan in offering extra-mural programmes. For instance, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, took over the Eastern Region as from 1962/63. In October 1971, an Adult Education and General Extension Unit was established in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, to carry out the outreach programmes of the University in the Northern Region. The Unit embarked on, from the beginning, face-to-face teaching and radio programmes. This Unit also planned in 1974 to offer correspondence courses with face-to-face teaching and radio back-up lessons to prepare people for Part-Time B. Ed degree; and to prepare candidates for G.C.E examination. Unfortunately, the projects did not take-off.

However, the two Universities that successfully embarked on distance education were the University of Ibadan and the University of Lagos.

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

The earliest plan for starting distance education in any Nigerian higher education was made by the University of Ibadan during the middle of the sixties. The aim was to prepare pre-university science candidates through correspondence, face-to-face contacts and possible use of radio and television (Akintayo, 1994:17). Unfortunately, this project could not take-off because the National Universities Commission (NUC), approving it in 1967 added a proviso that it would be started experimentally only with external funding. This was because only the University of Lagos was earmarked in the NUC's Quinquennial Plan (1966-1970) for operation of Correspondence and Open Studies in the nation's university system. The plan, therefore, did not take-off because the University could not secure any external funding.

During the seventies another attempt for External Degree Programme also failed even after admission exercise had been made. Not minding the two subsequent failures, a renewed attempt was made, the proposal of which was approved by the Senate of the University on August 22, 1986. Thus, the first set of 1,000 students of the External Degree Programme (ESP drawn from all parts of the country matriculated on April 8, 1989 (Akintayo, 1994:117-119). Since then the programme has been going on successfully with the modes of operation which include:

- Correspondence materials—preparation, production and supply of written course texts to students.
- Face-to-face contact sessions at the centres for at least 12-week intensive teaching session at the University of Ibadan prior to the end of session examination.
- Unfortunately, broadcasts and narrowcast which were to be included have never been used because of financial constraints.

UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS

The Correspondence Studies Unit (COSU) now Correspondence and Open Studies Institute (COSIT) was established out of the defunct Continuing Education Centre (CEC). The first sets of students were admitted in January 1976 to undertake courses in B.Sc. education in science subjects and B.Sc. in Accounting and Business Administration; and also postgraduate diploma comes in Education. The modes of operation include:

- Correspondence materials, course tests and textbooks prepared and distributed to students.
- Face-to-face contact session includes one-week induction and a four-week long vacation course. These take place at the University. There are also weekend seminars at the Zonal Centres throughout the country conducted by the academic staff of the University in co-operation with contact tutors at the study centres. In addition, there are study centres where students converge every weekend every weekend to have contact with fellow students and to collect their materials.
- Broadcasts and narrowcasts. With the aid of the Education Broadcasting Division of the then Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, this mode was possible. Unfortunately, the electronic media are no more used. There is now much reliance on the distribution of correspondence texts to students.

PROSPECTS AND CONSTRAINTS

As an industrialized form of education, among the elements in distance education are the use of mass media (print and electronic), occasional face-to-face tutorials between teachers and students, and involvement of different role players (Maduka, 1982:4). Distance education is an industrialized form of teaching, because ideally, it involves radio and television programmes which are integrated with written materials and transmitted at specific times. Also it involves a substantial book publishing in form of correspondence and other teaching materials (Tunstal, 1974:7).

Unlike in a non-distance education situation, where a lecturer prepares his lectures and teaches himself, a distance education lecturer does not work alone. Distance education involves a division of labour. For instance, the central academic staffs work, not individually, but as part of a course team. They prepare correspondence units which are printed, and broadcast programmes which are recorded. Thus, we have organization of academics, telecasts, communication experts, printers and administrators coming together to use the mass media with occasional face-to-face tutorials to deliver educational programmes to the masses of people (Tunstal, 1974:8).

The print media are very necessary. The COSIT of the University of Lagos and the ESP of the University of Ibadan have successfully been using the media in their programmes. Thus, correspondence texts and course texts are distributed to students. But the extent to which the course booklets could be comprehensive enough as to accommodate all that students need to widen their knowledge in their areas of study remains a doubtful possibility. This, therefore, accentuates the need for well-stocked libraries at both the headquarters and the study centres. Libraries constitute the "storehouse of knowledge", therefore students should be availed the opportunity to attain more knowledge. It is very desirable to establish special libraries at the headquarters and at the study centres which should ideally be established at tertiary institutions. Unfortunately, there are very few public libraries in the country and these are in some urban towns.

The electronic media (radio and television) are great assets in distance education. In the traditional face-to-face teaching, the teacher is seen and heard by the students. The television very much represents the physical teaching because of its audio-visual nature. Besides bringing reality, the television is useful in teaching great audience at the same time.

The television sub-system makes much contribution towards efficiency and effectiveness in distance education. In Nigeria, the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), the states' television and the private television stations can reach all students within the country and beyond. But the problem associated with this sub-system is whether a separate channel will be assigned to distance education or the programmes be sandwiched with the regular programmes of the existing channels. Or, to establish separate television houses for the purposes of distance education. Whichever alternative, disruptive problem of incessant power outages in the country will pose a limiting factor. Thus, while there is the prospect of using television to boost distance education in the country, there are many constraints surrounding the usage (Osuji, 1981:141; Akinyemi, 1986:96).

The radio is cheaper than television in both price and maintenance. Added to its cheapness is its portability. There are many radio stations, owned by the Federal and state governments and the private individuals in the country. Unfortunately, the endemic power outages in the country poses a limiting factor to the extent to which the radio can be used to effectively broadcast educational programmes. On the whole, like the television sub-system, the radio has the problem of being frustrated as a result of unreliable electric power supply in the country. As discussed above, the ESP and the COSIT of the University of Ibadan and the University of Lagos respectively could not cope with the use of the electronic media in their programmes.

CONCLUSION

In this paper an appraisal of the extent to which the mass media have been used in distance education in the country has been made. Apparently, the Universities of Ibadan and Lagos made bold and commendable efforts, but while the print media seemed successfully made use of, the electronic media were beyond the capability of the institutions.

Based on the findings, for effective distance education in the country, a separate tertiary institution, such as the Nigerian Open University (NOU), which was formerly aborted but recently reopened should be well equipped and maintained. It should be assigned special radio and television channels. Or, in the alternative, separate radio and television stations should be established for the use of the institution. The programmes of the two institutions highlighted are geared to award of degrees and diplomas which Dore (1976) calls "Diploma Disease". Distance education should provide for the interest of all who need different programmes including liberal education. Also, public libraries should be established in all the big towns and there should be well-stocked libraries at the zonal centres, which should ideally be at tertiary institutions. Furthermore, there should be an assemblage of different and relevant role players who will use their expertise towards efficient and effective distance education in the country.

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