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TRENDS AND CHALLENGES OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING PRACTICE IN AFRICA

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Preamble:

Open Distance Learning (ODL) education has experienced remarkable growth in national and international scenes since the early 1980s. In spite of recent phenomenal developments in the world of electronic networks, especially the recent global attention to the Internet, which has provided the primary technological thrust, several other emerging technologies have also promised to change the landscape of education in general, and distance education in particular drastically. The field of distance education is therefore, at the centre of dynamic growth and change. This dynamic change has affected the trend of ODL as well as brought into limelight some challenges especially from Africa point of examination.

Purpose of the paper:

Accordingly, therefore, the main thrust of this paper is to carry out an overview on the trend of ODL in Africa and also identify some challenges associated with dynamic development noticeable in the trend.

Discourse:

The concept of ODL is defined as any educational process in which all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner, with the effect that all or most of the communication between teachers and learners is through an artificial medium, either electronic or print (UNESCO,2000). ODL is preferred over other types of education because it could be

employed to expand the limited number of places available, accommodate low or dispersed enrollment as well as make the best use of the limited number of teachers available. (Commonwealth of Learning, 2003). ODL in Africa has experienced a number of 'fundamental changes' in its practices. These fundamental changes, according to Adekanmbi (1993) reflected in the range of programmes and subjects offered and in the nature of collaborative ventures embarked upon. For instance, there are waves of distance educational revolutions across the African continent from Nigeria to Tanzania; South Africa to the Sudan; Rwanda to Ghana; Zimbabwe to Kenya, and so on. African nations are therefore, currently experimenting with different ODL models such as single to dual with a view to increasing access to higher education. There are many initiatives to establish networking through national and regional associations in order to strengthen and improve capacities for ODL in the region.

Despite these efforts Singh & Paliwa (2012) posited that common problems identified in open distance learning include the need for face-to-face tutorial support (which is expensive) and course material development (which is often unreliable and unsustainable). Professional development of educators is also often limited and sporadic. Administrative systems are often underdeveloped. Course fees are often beyond the reach of the learner. Unrealizable infrastructures make communication systems by way of roads, the postal service and telecommunication facilities and services difficult. There are funding constraints and no ready-made solutions that are applicable in every country.

Conclusion and recommendations:

From the foregoing, ODL programmes will continue to flourish in Africa. It is, therefore, recommended among others, that African Governments, through seasoned educational policymakers and planners should invest more in ODL through budgetary allocations and cost sharing at higher levels of education.

keywords: open-distance learning, trends, challenges, africa.