

THE IMPACTS OF ONLINE EDUCATION ON THE EDUCATIONAL ADVANCEMENT IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA (NOUN).

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Abstract

Online education in Nigeria is a recent phenomenon that is embraced by the populace. Some Two decades ago, online education was unthinkable but with the present realities such as internet and enhanced technology, Nigerians are experiencing transformation in learning and new fields of educational research. The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), identified with the Federal Government of Nigeria, is a distance learning higher institution aimed at awarding all levels of degrees to the populace especially the working class people due to tight schedules and other factors. The study reviews extant literature on online education such as Collins (2002) whose definition of Online education focuses on the “ the creation and proliferation of the personal computer, the globalization of ideas and other human acts, and the use of technology in exchanging ideas and providing access to more people”. It is a form of education that has to do with distance learning. It involves the use of internet for learning purposes. Greenberg (1998) defines contemporary distance learning as “a planned teaching/learning experience that uses a wide spectrum of technologies to reach learners at a distance and is designed to encourage learner interaction and certification of learning”. In other words, it involves the use of internet to receive lectures, write examinations and get degrees without having any face to face discussion with any teacher or lecturer and also without having any physical classroom. In addition, the critically evaluates the impact of online education on the standard of education in Nigeria, using the case of NOUN. This study uses both primary and secondary data in order to elicit information on the impacts of online education on the educational system and the how it affects the standard of education in Nigeria, whether positively or negatively. This study also gathered information about the performances of the products from distance learning institutions in the labour market.

Keywords: NOUN, Online, Education, Nigeria.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The role of education in human development cannot be over emphasized. It has been described as an important tool in any human society, which makes man to develop faster than other creatures. Education is the bedrock of all human sectors – political, medical, and agricultural, security, etc. This perhaps makes true the saying that, no nation can rise above the quality of education its citizens receive. Generally, Education aims at: careful observation of the given conditions to see what are the means available for reaching the end and to discover the hindrances in the way; it suggests the proper order or sequence in the use of the means; it makes choice of alternatives possible, because we can predict the outcome of acting this way or that way and then compare the value of the two courses of actions before passing judgment upon their relative desirability. It is an instrument of change; and it is an instrument of innovation and invention. The creativity, resourcefulness and imaginative abilities of learners are sharpened as they go through various educational programs (Whawo, 1997).

The history of distance education in Nigeria dates back to the correspondence education as a means of preparing candidates for General Certificate in Education, a prerequisite for the London Matriculation Examination. The first indigenous distance learning programme was an English Radio programme of Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation that followed independence in 1960. The programme was primarily targeted at primary and secondary school levels and covered core courses at both

levels with more emphasis placed on the teaching and learning of Science, Mathematics and English. The technology driven distance learning came into existence almost the same time with the first indigenous distance learning with the emergence of Educational Television programmes of the then National Television of Nigeria (NTV) (Adu et al, 2013).

There was also Schools Educational Broadcast of the Radio Nigeria stationed in Lagos and relayed all through the federation. All radio stations were required to hook at specific times of the day during school hours for broadcasting of programmes. In the last 31 years, University education programmes in the country began to witness a lot of changes in terms of instructional delivery mode in some of our tertiary institutions. The Correspondence and Open Studies Unit (COSU) of University of Lagos that started in 1974, which later changed to Correspondence and Open Studies Institute (COSI) and now known as Distance Learning Institute was the first attempt made to establish a distance education unit as part of a University in Nigeria. It began initially to offer programmes in science education at first degree level in Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, Physics and Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) for degree holders that did not possess teaching qualifications.

The National Teachers' Institute (NTI) started as a distance education institution in 1976 (as the first dedicated distance education institution) with the support of UNESCO. It began by training Grade Two Teachers (TC II). In 1990, the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) programme was introduced when the expectation was that the minimum teaching certificate in Nigeria was expected to be NCE. The Institute also introduced the PGDE programme in the year 2005. Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) also started its distance education through a training programme known as Teachers-in-Service Education Programme (TISEP) for Grades Three and Two teachers and later the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE). Also in November, 1972, the University also established a University of the Air Programme for teachers in secondary schools and teacher training colleges. The Distance Learning Institute of the University of Ibadan which started in 1979 as External Degree Programme of the university is another institution which adopted the distance learning mode. The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), was established in July, 1983, by an Act of the National Assembly as the first distance learning tertiary institution in Nigeria when it became crystal clear to the then Federal Government that the ever growing demand for education by her people cannot be met by the traditional means of face-to-face classroom instructional delivery (Adu et al, 2013).

The institution was closed down few weeks after its establishment and the Act that established the University was suspended in 1984 by the then Federal Military Government that overthrew the civilian government. Many years after the closure, the compelling reasons that informed the earlier establishment of the university as well as the need to fill the gap created by the Federal Government clamped down on mushroom outreach study centres of many conventional universities all over the country and the need to take advantage of emerging developments in the field of ICTs which have revolutionised the techniques and methods of instructional deliveries in the distance learning mode necessitated the reactivation of the suspended NOUN Act of 1983 in 2002. This paved the way for the resuscitation of the NOUN.

Since Independence, Nigeria has continued to demonstrate an irrevocable and unwavering commitment to education as a tool for national and personal development, and as an inalienable right of her citizens. The socio-economic dimensions of providing education for all are huge, bearing in mind the population of the country and the competing basis for resources amongst the compelling needs of the society. It must have occurred to the then Federal Government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari that the ever growing demand for education by the people cannot be met by the traditional means of face to face classroom instructional delivery. It did appear the way forward to embrace open and distance education. Thus, by an Act of the National Assembly, the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) was established in July 1983. However, it was closed down a few months later in 1984 by the Federal Military Governments that overthrew the civilian government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari (Ifeanyi, 2014).

Many years after the closure, the compelling reasons that informed the earlier establishment of the university were still confronting the country. Several other reasons had also emerged. These include the need to fill the vacuum created by the profit oriented outreach programmes of many conventional universities in the country, the necessitating needs for economic funding of education, and the need to take advantage of emerging developments in the field of information communication technologies which have revolutionised the techniques and methods of instructional deliveries in the distance learning mode. Thus in 2002, the National Open University Act of 1983 which had been suspended in 1984 was resuscitated by former President Olusegun Obasanjo (Ifeanyi, 2014).

This paved way for the resuscitation of the NOUN as we have it today. This rebirth has renewed the focus to make education available to as many people as have the ability, and are willing and ready to benefit from the quality education provided through flexible and affordable distance learning.

In Nigeria, the adoption and deployment of open and distance education delivery systems is just on several grounds. These include: providing of education for all and promotion of lifelong learning, filling the gap created by the closure of outreaches/satellite campus, cost effectiveness, improved economies of scale, flexibility of delivery system, maximum utilisation of academic personnel, on the job teacher training, poverty eradication, vocational and lifelong education, provision of non-formal education, reaching the unreached, propagation of national orientation (Ifeanyi, 2014).

Online or distance learning education has met with some levels of hostility in Nigeria and there is an ongoing debate as to whether the online education has actually advanced education in Nigeria. This study will focus on key informants like the students, the facilitators, the students that have graduated and are working which will ensure factual and logical conclusion of this research work.

It is against this background that this study seeks to evaluate the impacts of online education on educational advancement generally. It also seeks to examine the effectiveness of the on-line learning procedure and how rewarding this type of education is to the students, the facilitators and the society at large

This study will be divided into other part which includes the literature review, data analysis, data interpretation, recommendation and conclusion.

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.1 Education

Education may be defined as a purposive, conscious or unconscious, psychological, sociological, scientific and philosophical process, which brings about the development of the individual to the fullest extent and also the maximum development of society in such a way that both enjoy maximum happiness and prosperity. In Short, education is the development of individual according to his needs and demands of society, of which he is an integral part.

Education in its general sense is a form of learning in which the knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through storytelling, discussion, teaching, training, and or research. Education may also include informal transmission of such information from one human being to another. Education frequently takes place under the guidance of others, but learners may also educate themselves. Any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts may be considered educational.

2.1.2 Online Education

Keegan (1988) discusses online education as characterised by the separation of teachers and learners that distinguishes it from face-to-face education, the influence of an educational organisation which distinguishes it from self-study and private tutoring, the use of a computer network to present or distribute some educational content, the provision of two-way communication via a computer network so that students may benefit from each other, teachers and staff.

Online learning can be the most difficult of all three to define. Some prefer to distinguish the variance by describing online learning as “wholly” online learning (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005), whereas others simply reference the technology medium or context with which it is used (Lowenthal, Wilson, & Parrish, 2009). Others display direct relationships between previously described modes and online learning by stating that one uses the technology used in the other (Rekkedal et al., 2003; Volery & Lord, 2000). Online learning is described by most authors as access to learning experiences via the use of some technology (Benson, 2002; Carliner, 2004; Conrad, 2002).

Both Benson (2002) and Conrad (2002) identify online learning as a more recent version of distance learning which improves access to educational opportunities for learners described as both non-traditional and disenfranchised. Other authors discuss not only the accessibility of online learning but

also its connectivity, flexibility and ability to promote varied interactions (Ally, 2004; Hiltz & Turoff, 2005; Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005). Hiltz and Turoff (2005) in particular not only elude to online learning's relationship with distance learning and traditional delivery systems but then, like Benson (2002) makes a clear statement that online learning is a newer version or, and improved version of distance learning. These authors, like many, believe that there is a relationship between distance education or learning and online learning but appear unsure in their own descriptive narratives. While some authors explicitly define e-Learning, others imply a specific definition or view of e-Learning in their article. These definitions materialize, some through conflicting views of other definitions, and some just by simply comparing defining characteristics with other existing terms. In particular, Ellis (2004) disagrees with authors like Nichols (2003) who define e-Learning as strictly being accessible using technological tools that are web-based, web-distributed, or web-capable. The belief that e-Learning not only covers content and instructional methods delivered via CD-ROM, the Internet or an Intranet (Benson et al., 2002; Clark, 2002) but also includes audio- and videotape, satellite broadcast and interactive TV is the one held by Ellis. Although technological characteristics are included in the definition of the term, Tavangarian, Leypold, Nölting, Röser, and Voigt (2004) as well as Triacca, Bolchini, Botturi, and Inversini (2004) felt that the technology being used was insufficient as a descriptor. Tavangarian et al. (2004) included the constructivist theoretical model as a framework for their definition by stating that e-Learning is not only procedural but also shows some transformation of an individual's experience into the individual's knowledge through the knowledge construction process. Both Ellis (2004) and Triacca et al. (2004) believed that some level of interactivity needs to be included to make the definition truly applicable in describing the learning experience, even though Triacca et al. (2004) added that e-Learning was a type of online learning.

2.1.3 National Open University of Nigeria

NOUN, a federal government – owned university, has emerged as the first dedicated University in Nigeria to introduce education through online learning mode. The vision statement of the University is that the NOUN is to be regarded as the foremost University providing highly accessible and enhanced quality education anchored by social justice, equity, equality and national cohesion through a comprehensive reach that transcends all barriers. While the Mission statement is that NOUN is to provide functional cost-effective, flexible learning, which adds life-long value to quality education for all who seek knowledge. In addition to the broad vision and mission statements, the university has eight major objectives which are listed below:

- i Provide wider access to education generally but specifically in University education in Nigeria.
- ii Ensure equity and equality of opportunities in education
- iii Enhance education for all and life-long learning
- iv Provide the entrenchment of global learning culture
- v Provide instructional resources via an intensive use of ICTs
- vi Provide flexible, but qualitative education
- vii Reduce the cost, inconveniences, hassles of and access to education and its delivery
- viii Enhance more access to education. (Ifeanyi, 2014)

In NOUN, Study Centres are the main contact place for students learning activities. These centres are thus the backbone of the distance learning methodology of the University. Presently, NOUN has 28 study centres spread across the length and breadth of the country as against the initial 18 temporary study centres approved by the Federal Government for take-off of the University in the year 2002. In addition, the university has special study centres which cater for specialized groups, such as the Prison inmates and Armed Forces personnel. Projection of the university is to have a study centre in every state capital and at every local government of the federation.

Mode of delivery of instruction is very important for open and distance learning. There are two major types of mode of instruction for open and distance learning:

i Mixed mode of instruction delivery system: this system uses several different media methods or deliveries such as video and e-mail.

ii Single mode of instruction delivery system: this method according to Hirschbuhl (1995) does not provide enough instructional power to ignite student's interest because they fail to provide student involvement.

As a distinct mode of imparting education, NOUN relies heavily on print materials, and face-to-face tutorial services. The use of these techniques helps NOUN to take its academic programmes to the door steps of her students far and wide. It makes room for in-house education. Considering the rapid expansion of ICT in the country, NOUN has commenced plan on the introduction of more electronic media like CD-ROM, e-mail, internet and interactive e-learning systems for its courses delivery. Indeed, NOUN has established its own radio station in its headquarters in Lagos. The radio station is also one of the strategies to disseminate NOUN programmes to its students in Lagos to start with. Efforts are being made by the institution management towards establishing more radio station across the country to further assist in transmitting their programmes to other students in the remaining states of the federation (Adu, et al, 2013).

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3.1 Research Methods

In this present study the survey research method was employed. The descriptive design utilised SPSS version 20 in the method of data analysis. The researchers used a self-administered questionnaire for the data collection. For the current study a reliable scale for the variables Educational advancement, effectiveness of on-line education, impact on student performance, learning outcomes and employment assessment were measured on a five point likert scale. The research instrument consists of two main sections. The first part, section A refers to the bio- data of the respondents which includes; age and gender characteristics, educational qualification, marital status and current level of the participants. The second aspect of the research instrument relates to the variables used to measure the impact of On-line education on educational advancement in Nigeria. These were factored into: educational advancement impact of National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), impact on the student performance, learning outcomes and employability of graduates of the on-line education. The population of the study includes all student, graduates and lecturers of the National Open University of Nigeria. In this design the researchers employed simple random sampling in selection the subjects. The study covered 15 departments of NOUN University. The questionnaires were self-administered to the University students in the Ikeja Campus located in Lagos Nigeria. Consorted efforts were made to supervise and guide the target audience on the filling of the questionnaire. A total of 116 questionnaires that were properly filled were retrieved and analyzed for this present study from a total of 150 administered. This however, represents 77% response rate which indicates a good response from the total sample observations though some of the respondents did not respond to all the questions raised in the instruments. The current study used descriptive and regression techniques to examine the characteristic of the respondents and the impact on on-line education in advancing education system in Nigeria.

3.1.2 Personal Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 Age of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Below 15 years	8	6.9	6.9	6.9
15-25 years	72	62.1	62.1	69.0
26-35 years	34	29.3	29.3	98.3
45 years and above	2	1.7	1.7	100.0
Total	116	100.0	100.0	

The analysis of table 1 shows the age statistics of the respondents who participated in the survey study. It further reveals that of the total respondents 8 which represents 6.9% of the total respondents were below 14 years, 72(62.1%) were between 15-25 years, 34(29.3%) were within the age bracket of 26-35 years while the remaining 2(1.7%) were 45 years and above.

Table 2 Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	60	51.7	51.7	51.7
Female	56	48.3	48.3	100.0
Total	116	100.0	100.0	

The result of the distribution the gender statistics in table 2 indicates that the male 60 (51.7%) constitute majority percentage of respondent compared with their females respondents 56 representing 48.3%.

Table 3 Education

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Undergraduate	91	78.4	78.4	78.4
Post graduate	25	21.6	21.6	100.0
Total	116	100.0	100.0	

The analysis of table 3 shows the educational statistics of the respondents who were involved in the survey study. It also reveals that of the total respondents 91 which represent 78% were undergraduates while 25(21.6%) were post graduate students of the sampled National Open University students.

Table 4 Marital Status

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Single	96	82.8	82.8	82.8
Married	20	17.2	17.2	100.0
Total	116	100.0	100.0	

The result of table 4 above reveal that 96(82.8%) of the total respondents were singles while the rest 20(17.2%) were married. This further implies that most of the respondents are among the single population.

Table 5 Current level

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
100level	28	24.1	24.1	24.1
200level	24	20.7	20.7	44.8
300level	34	29.3	29.3	74.1
400level	14	12.1	12.1	86.2
500level	2	1.7	1.7	87.9
600level and above	14	12.1	12.1	100.0
Total	116	100.0	100.0	

Table 5 shows that the 28(24.1%) of the total respondents were 100 level students, 24(20.7%) were 200 level students, 34(29.3%) were 300level students, 14(12.1%) were 400 level students, 14(12.1%) were 400 level students, 2(1.7%) were in 500level while 14(12.1%) were in 600level and above.

Table6 Is this a road map to your future ambition

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	96	82.8	82.8	82.8
No	20	17.2	17.2	100.0
Total	116	100.0	100.0	

In table 6 96(82.8%) showed that their current course of study is a road map to their future ambition while 20(17.2%) were of a contrary opinion.

Table 7: Mean, Standard Dev., Reliability and Correlation Co efficient

Variable	Cronbach Alpha	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean	SD	Min	Max
EADVM	0.805	1						25.55	3.689	16	30
SPERF	0.821	.332**	1					23.97	4.969	10	30
EMPLY	0.952	-.034	.020	1				16.53	6.144	5	25
LEO	0.807	.084	.515**	.362**	1			18.43	4.488	9	25
EFFOE	0.780	.223*	.566**	.232*	.460**	1		18.95	4.612	7	25

EDIMP	0.930	-.057	.020	.607**	.292**	.292**	1	18.95	6.568	6	29
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** Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels; * Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels.

Note: EADVM- Educational Advancement; SPERF-Student Performance; EMPLY- Employment Assessment; LEO –Learning Outcomes; EFOE-Effectiveness of On-line Education; EDIMP- Educational Impact.

Table 7 above shows the reliability test, correlation result and descriptive statistics for the variable mean, standard deviation and range values. The alpha coefficient suggests the degree of the reliability for the scale variables.

4.1 Result and Discussion

The result in table 7 suggests a significant relationship between students' performance, effectiveness of on-line education and educational advancement in Nigeria. This implies the effect of on-line educational advancement could be directly observed from students' performance and effective on-line education.

Table 8 Result

Model		Coefficients ^a			t	Sig.
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
	(Constant)	19.015	1.669		11.395	.000
	Student Performance Effectiveness of On-line Education	.270	.080	.364	3.360	.001
		.003	.087	.004	.039	.969
a. Dependent Variable: EADVM						
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
	(Constant)	1.753	2.713		.646	.519
1	EFOE	.434	.088	.402	4.930	.000
	EADVM	.336	.096	.249	3.502	.001
	LEO	.294	.089	.265	3.309	.001
a. Dependent Variable: SPERF						
1	(Constant)	7.915	2.285		3.464	.001
	LEO	.468	.120	.342	3.881	.000
a. Dependent Variable: EMPL						

Therefore, student's performance (SPERF) is directly related to effectiveness of the on-line education, educational advancement (EADVM) and learning outcome (LEO). This indicated that improvement in effectiveness of on-line education, advancement in education and learning outcomes will significantly enhance students' performance in on-line education in Nigeria.

The resulted of the estimated evidence from learning outcomes suggests a significant direct relationship between learning outcome and employability of on-line education graduates. This implies that the improvement in learning outcomes will bring about a corresponding increase in employability status of the on-line university graduates. This could be explained by the reason that improved learning outcome such as high quality of educational setting, expertise in human capital development and highly encouraging CGPA as well as high level of satisfaction as an elite after graduation will all help to boost the chances of the on-line graduates being employed in the labour market

5.1 Conclusion and Recommendations

The result from the study indicates that learning outcome significantly determine the employability of on-line education graduates after school. This therefore means that it has become highly imperative that on-line education management such the National open University of Nigeria devise a more systemic and coordinated strategies that will be to manage the consistent increases in the number of enrollment so as to continue to improve on its learning outcome. This will help the future graduates from the institution and others so as to stand a better chance of competing with other contemporaries from the conventional face to face contact or class room method of learning that most commonly practiced in countries like Nigeria. This will enable such institutions to maintain a good record over time which could also distinguish them and encourage more enrollments.

The study therefore recommends that a high standard of academic standard should continuously be maintained by the on-line education management authority in Nigeria.

The findings of this study show that online education as an innovation to education system in Nigeria had significant impact on student performance, learning outcomes and employability of graduating students from such platform. Thus it is recommended in this study that the management, administrators and facilitators of this learning process need to consider this relationship and focus on maintaining high effectiveness in the method of administration and learning.

The findings also suggests that NOUN management should know how their students and graduates perceive the learning outcome bearing in mind the employability of the graduates in Nigerian labour market today and consequently addressing any limitation identified through proper policy implementation strategy.

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