

Enhancing Access to Tertiary Education through Open and Distance Education

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Abstract

The paper examines the issue of access to tertiary institution which has become “a bone in the flesh” due to population explosion and the increasing understanding of the significance of university education in social, political and economic development of individual in particular and the nation in general. And the need to seek alternative avenue for tertiary education through open and distance education which can bridge the educational gap amongst Nigerians. The paper also identified problems militating against adequate access to tertiary institution which include problem of finance, equity and quality solutions such provision of adequate fund and facilities are proffered.

Keywords: *Enhancing, tertiary education, access, distance education.*

Introduction

Tertiary education is the education given after secondary education in universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, and monotechnics including those offering correspondence courses. The goals of tertiary education in Nigeria as spelt out by the policy are:

- a) To contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training.
- b) To develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society.
- c) To develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment.
- d) To acquire both physical and intellectual skills this will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society.
- e) To promote and encourage scholarship and community service.
- f) To fence and cement national unity and promote national and international understanding and interest (Mohammed & Gbenu (2007).

Higher education contributes to human resource development in many ways and this is correlated with economic development. Higher education in the country has been saddled with the main responsibility for training of the nation's professional personnel who participate in the development, adaption and diffusion of innovations in the country due to problem of access.

Rising Population

Understanding of the relevance and significance of education has led to the rise in the population of the citizenry to acquire tertiary education for self-development and upward mobility; hence a rise in the population, student enrolment has raised drastically both in federal and state universities.

National unities commission calculation on teacher/student ratio based on approved minim academic standards laments “the system requires about 21, 912 teachers this leaves a deficit of 5, 056 of teachers in federal universities in the country.

Okebukola, (2006), overcrowding at the institutions and inadequate funding are contributing factors to the decline in the quality of higher education because the system has far out grown the resource available to it to continue offering high level quality education Obanyan (1999).

Inadequate funding according to NUC has resulted in problem such as the breakdown and deterioration of overstretched facilities, shortages of new books and current journals in the libraries supplies of laboratories as well as limited finding research.

Need for Higher Education

Higher education is necessary for social, political and economic development and sustainability of a nation. However, there is a public outcry by most Nigerians expressing their dissatisfaction with the admission processes into the conventional universities, at a time access is becoming a privilege to only the well-to do in the society. There is a great demand for university education because people now realize the importance of university education as a means for social mobility, self-development and self-actualization.

Access to education implies making it possible for everyone who is entitled to education to receive it (FGN, 2003). This implies removing all obstacles that prevent realization of such opportunities. Access t tertiary education means ensuring equitable access to tertiary education based on merit, capacity, efforts and perseverance. This also includes issues in lifelong learning that can take place anytime, until recognition to previously acquired skills through opportunities for adults retraining for the work force.

A renter encompassing definition by Unesco (2003) puts “access in tertiary education as meaning: ensuring equitable access to tertiary education is based on merit, capacity, efforts and perseverance” the definition considers very central post-secondary opportunities for underrepresented groups such as indigenous people, cultural, ethical and linguistic minorities, immigrants, refugees, the disabled and women. It also considered issues in life-long education learning that can take place any time with due recognition of previously acquired skills through opportunities for adults, retraining for the workforce, school dropouts as well as see and chance learners.

Concept of Open/Distance Education

Open learning and distance education refer to approaches to learning that focus on freeing learners from constraints of time and place when offering flexible learning opportunities Col, 2000, Daniel, 2012.

Open/distance education is a form that has no universally agreed definition. To some, open will indicate open entry and access to learning opportunities and the removal of barriers to learning opportunities. To others it may include the aspect of methods and organization, with the consequence that open learning may sometimes be substituted with flexible learning.

Open education is any form of learning in which the provider enables individual learners to exercise choice over any one or more of a number of aspects of learning, which involves helping learners take responsibility for such aspects as what they learn, how they learn, where they learn, how quickly they learn, who to turn to for help and where, whether, when and where to have learning assessed.

Distance education in most cases shares the concern for openness and flexibility which focuses on the possibility of communities between participants in the learning process across and/or space. Distance education is described as an educational process in which a significant preparation of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner. It involves the use, both for presentation of information and for communication between participants of a range of media, such as print, written correspondence, audio, video and computer-based media and networks as well as multimedia facilities Noun (2014).

Open and distance education is often used when one wants to address a whole range of related forms of teaching and learning. It stresses openness concerning access, organization and methods as well as flexibility in delivery and communication patterns and the use of various technologies in support of learning (Noun 2014).

Open and distance learning represents approaches that focus on open access to education and training provision, free learners from the constraints of time and place and offering flexible learning opportunities to individuals and group of learners Unesco (2002).

Open/distance Education an Alternative to Conventional Education

One of the easiest ways of solving or enhancing access to tertiary education is to rely on open and distance learning system with the hope that the conventional system cannot absorb, the open university will map up; open distance education is established to complete the conventional public as well as private universities; it comes out the business of providing university education in a non-conventional manner, non-conventional, in the sense that, there will be no contacts face-to-face lectures as in conventional university. The students will be free to carry on their full-time employment and their academic load which will be in small bits as their capacity allows (Nouns 2014).

In conformity with the Jomtien declaration on education for all, Nigeria stoved to eliminate illiteracy by 2000 by the turn of the century; the then president of Nigeria, President Obasanjo made fresh comment to the following EFA by 2015 goals.

- i. Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
 - ii. Ensuring that by 2015 all children, with special emphasis on girls, children in different circumstances and from ethnic minorities have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.
 - iii. Ensuring that learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and like skills programmes.
 - iv. Achieving a 50 percent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.
 - v. Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2015 with a focus on ensuring girls full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality and improving all aspects of the quality of education
 - vi. Ensuring excellence for all, so that recognized and measurable learning outcome are achieved, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.
- Specifically the objectives of open and distance education as contained in the National Policy Education (NPE 2004) states that
- a. Provision of access to quality education and equity in educational opportunity for those who otherwise would have been denied.
 - b. Meeting the special needs of employees by mounting special certificates courses

- for their employees at their work place.
- c. Encouraging internationalization especially of tertiary education curricular and
 - d. Ameliorating the effect of internal and external brain-drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing experts as teachers regardless of their locations of place of work.

Equity in educational opportunities demand equal judgement, justice, fair play and fairness to all who have merited university education and the include quota system, funding by government in promoting access and equity towards university education, socio-economic background, poverty and gender discrimination.

Equity in education implies ensuring that all segments of the society get their fair share to whatever; educational appointments are provided (FAN 2003). The situation should therefore make it possible for everyone to have equal opportunity of been educated from primary to university level and access to tertiary institution based on merit, capacity, efforts and perseverance. The considers issues in life-long learning that can take place at any time, with due recognition on previously acquired skills.

Quality in education is a continuous process of improvement in the quality of teaching learning activities that will be achieved through employing mechanism that are internal and external to investor that is ensuring that the provision of the minimum academic standards are attend, monitored and enhanced Babalola (2000).

The high cost of education affects students in higher education, to which distances education may be an alternative in order to provide some relief. Distance education has been a more cost-effective form of learning and can sometimes save students a significant amount of money as opposed to traditional education. Distance education may be able to help save students a considerable amount financially by removing the cost of transportation. In addition, distance education may be able to save students from the economic burden of high-priced course textbooks. Many textbooks are now available as electronic textbooks known as e-textbooks, which can offer digital textbooks for a reduced price in comparison to traditional textbooks. Also, the increasing improvements in technology have resulted in many school libraries having a partnership with digital publishers that offer course materials for free, which can help students significantly with educational costs.

Distance learning may enable students who are unable to attend a traditional school setting, due to disability or illness such as decreased mobility and immune system suppression, to get a good education. Distance education may also provide equal access regardless of socio-economic status or income, area of residence, gender, race, age or cost per student. It may also offer final opportunity for adolescents that are no longer permitted in the general education population due to behaviour disorders. Instead of these students having no other academic opportunities, they may continue their education from their homes and earn their diplomas, offering them another chance to be an integral part of society. Ajuonuma and Oguguo (2015).

Factors Militating Against Access to Tertiary Institution

The issue of access to and equity in tertiary education are multifarious in nature, and these issues need to be closely looked at if meaningful access and equity to the ivory tower of learning is to be achieved.

Inadequate provision of human and material resources as well as infrastructural facilities due to poor funding resulted in the formulation of the principles of faculty carrying capacity which stipulates that admission of students should be based on available facilities such as classrooms, staff, equipment and materials. The affects both access and equity in university

education not all student can be offered admission because of inadequate facilities, and this has made admission to universities not only difficult but very competitive as a result of limited space (Ene (2007)).

According to Ochuha (2000), only about 21.9% of students who applied for university admission are admitted yearly. Poor funding of university education contributed to many programmes in the universities being denied accreditation and this will have a negative impact on access to and equity in university education.

Government attitudes towards education in the country in general demonstrate a non-challenging attitude towards university education. Both the state and federal universities are not accorded education the priority it deserves.

Any government that places educational expenditures second or third in her budget list regards education as ill-investment and will reap the dividends in all directions (Akume (2005)).

The issue of socio-economic background is another bone in the flesh. The aim of allowing private individuals, organizations and voluntary agencies to establish universities was to promote access and equity in university education; unfortunately, schools which are supposed to be service organizations have been turned into profit-making ventures by the proprietors. The students are made to pay exorbitant fees, as a result only parents of high socio-economic background can afford to send their children to private universities; thus private universities marginalize children and adults living in poverty and reduce the quality of public education. (Akinwumi, Isuku and Nze 2005).

Gender discrimination is another problem due to poverty which militates against meaningful access and equity in university education, many Nigerians are still living below the poverty line which hinders access to university education, and preference is given to the education of male children by some families. The enrolment of male children is higher than female children. In a country like Nigeria, there should be no inhibition to equal opportunity for males and females in education. The government should put up an educational opportunity policy that does not discriminate against any gender. (Ehametalor 2005).

Conclusion

Enhancing access to tertiary education is of paramount importance to individual's development. In general and the nation in particular and the issue of access to higher education no doubt, one of paramount importance to developing nations in Africa and beyond.

Open and distance education could bridge the educational gap between the privileged few and the disadvantaged majority, adequate funds should be provided by government towards efficient and effective administration of open/distance education. The government should as a matter of urgency take steps in eradicating the bottlenecks issues relating to access in tertiary education.

Recommendation

Open and distance education is relatively new in Nigeria and needs intensive sensitization of the populous especially in the rural part of the country where the educational gap is so wide.

Gender disparities should be discouraged by granting equal access opportunities to both sexes through the creation of opportunities for them.

The number of open and distance education centres in the country should be increased to include all the local governments in each state to widen and enhance access to tertiary education.

Of equal importance is the adequate provision of teaching and learning facilities

including structures for student use.

Competent and qualified facilitators only should be employed in the study centres to aid students in teaching learning process.

There should be constant supply of electricity to enable student with the teaching learning process since most of the delivery method is done online.

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