

# Re-Envisioning Pedagogical Support for Open and Distance Learning in Africa: National Open University of Nigeria in Curricular Perspective

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## Abstract

This study seeks to retake a contemporary look at the need to equip the students with more capacity to be learning while pursuing means of livelihood. Specifically, the study is oriented on taking a visionary look on open and distance learning in the African context of education, from a perspective developed through studying the National Open University of Nigeria, and with focus on how learners in this system can be given the pedagogical support they need to succeed in their studies. The study was piloted by two purposes. First purpose: to consider some challenges to open and distant learning in the African context of education. These are challenges which need to be addressed through a re-envisioning of pedagogical support matters, putting into perspective the National Open University of Nigeria. Second purpose: to cognize the positive effects of re-envisioning pedagogical support, on open and distant learning in the African context of education. The study is a product of documentary (qualitative) research methodology, which engaged the homogeneous sampling component of social research. The study concluded with two recommendations. First recommendation: there is a need for open and distance learning universities in Africa to consider the possibility of establishing "Research Retreat Centers" as special arms attached to various study centers or as branches standing on their own. Second recommendation: to sustain and consolidate the goodwill of students towards open learning, pedagogical support matters should always be addressed with maximum response in a very speedy manner, thereby preventing wrong information from circulating.

**Keywords:** Open Learning, Distance Learning, Open Learning, Curriculum, Overt Curriculum.

## Introduction

This study sought to retake a contemporary look at some pedagogical support components considered as being of relevance to the delivery of the formal or overt curriculum on the platform of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Africa, incorporating into perspective the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) as a case study item. While attention was paid in this study to learning, the area of "pedagogical content knowledge" was also not neglected. The description of pedagogical content knowledge to which this study subscribes, refers to "that special mix of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers" within which they understand knowledge, learners, educational ends, purposes, values, philosophy, and history as professionals (Ness, 2005:34).

When the contemporary Open University system is hinged on the idea of the university in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, it pictures a recognized community of scholars which functions without

being constraint by buildings (Denis Lawton and Peter Gordon, 2002:51-52), which is what the Open and Distance Learning system also represents. But in the African context, the Open University is at this point limited by several constraints, such as technological (examples: lack of adequate computer resources, and knowledge in basic computer applications by the learners), communicational (example: limited commercial and private Internet network coverage and strength), pedagogical constraints (example: challenge of addressing impediments to lack of regular online contact between facilitators and learners). Accordingly, learners in the Open and Distance Learning system need to be provided with the pedagogical support needed to sustain the interconnection between their studies and their means of livelihood. Sustaining this interconnection is a necessity that is also advantageous to ensuring that both teachers and learners share a common “pedagogical space” (Jacobs, 2012:258) as partners operating interdependently to ensure effectiveness of the teaching-learning process.

Some of the pedagogical support elements that are being re-envisioned towards achieving the desired level of effectiveness basically relate to the need to equip the student towards “becoming a master student” (D.B.Ellis, 2012: Cover Page), which in this case means having the capacity to be learning effectively while pursuing means of livelihood. To do this, ways of assisting students to be more effective in engaging technology for learning need to be explored, so that students can stay in their places of various vocations, learn offline without jeopardizing their means of livelihood, and without losing their competence to seamlessly engage online facilities to pursue their studies. The term “technology” is engaged in this study to refer not just to hardware (for example computers, modems, printers, photocopiers, and hand-held phones), but also to internet users, internet hosts, as well as secure internet servers and services (Andy Green and Angela W. Little, 2007:2-3).

When the pedagogical process of delivering the curriculum in the Open and Distance Learning system brings about “teaching for quality learning” (J.Biggs and Tang C., 2011: Cover Page), universities and other tertiary schools operating the Open and Distance Learning system in African can rest assured that they are releasing to the society competent graduates who do not need to be ashamed as they function in the public square, and who also correctly apply learning towards addressing real-world challenges. Accordingly, the topic for this study arose from the need to develop this assurance; hence, “Re-envisioning Pedagogical Support for Open and Distance Learning in Africa: National Open University of Nigeria in Curricular Perspective.”

### **Proposition of Study**

Consequent upon the details above, this study proposes that open and distance learners in Africa need pedagogical support that equips them to handle the non-formal process of acquiring knowledge, so that they do not need to feel any sense of inferiority for having gone through the Open and Distance Learning facility and curriculum, as a non-conventional system. Accordingly, the study is oriented on taking a visionary look on open and distance learning in the African context of education, from a perspective developed

through studying the National Open University of Nigeria, and with focus on how learners in this system anywhere in Africa can be given the pedagogical support they need to succeed in their studies.

## Scope of Study

Firstly, the scope of the study was limited to perspectives generated from data related to National Open University of Nigeria, which can be said to be the largest university in Africa. Accordingly, the concentration of the study was on online learning systems in universities either in Nigeria or other parts of Africa. These online systems are made up of electronic learning facilitation modes—such as e-teaching, e-learning, web-based learning, etc.—in which the Internet is engaged across distances to deliver the curriculum (K.Kelly, 2009:36). Secondly, the study uses the more popular term “pedagogy” to refer to education in its broadest sense or “holistic pedagogy” (Taguchi, 2010:xi), and also when referring to learning even by adults, not just children, instead of “andragogy” which some specialists prefer to attach exclusively or largely to adult learning. However, both terms can be attached to the maturity and experience of all kinds of learners at a given context (Brockett, 2008:13).

## Purpose of Study

Sequel to the details above, the study is piloted by a two-point purpose of study as considered from the African context of education. Locating the study in the African context of education is significant in view of the fact that “one cannot just lift ideas or pedagogical practices of the developed countries and apply it to different contexts” (Sinha, 2010: 125), such India, or Nigeria and other African contexts.

Firstly, the study is designed to consider some challenges to open and distant learning in the African context of education. These are challenges which need to be addressed through a re-envisioning of pedagogical support matters, putting into perspective the National Open University of Nigeria.

Secondly, the study is focused on cognizing the positive effects of re-envisioning pedagogical support, in addressing the pedagogical challenges of open and distant learning in the African context of education. This cognizance is made while putting into perspective the National Open University of Nigeria.

## Research Questions

In coherence with the two-point purpose of the study, two research questions are being addressed. These questions are clearly outlined as stated below:

1. What challenges to open and distant learning in the African context of education need to be addressed through a re-envisioning of pedagogical support matters, putting into perspective the National Open University of Nigeria?
2. What are the positive effects of re-envisioning pedagogical support components, in addressing the pedagogical challenges of open and distant learning in the African

context of education, putting into perspective the National Open University of Nigeria?

### Significance of the Study

Firstly, the study was developed with a view that it would be significant basically to open and distance learning in Africa, which is also a trend that is gaining momentum across the globe (Ruiz, 2010:48). But the study would be of particular significance to National Open University of Nigeria as a body, as well as to teachers and students of the university in their individual and collective capacities. Secondly, the study is meant to enrich the National Open University of Nigeria with more ideas on strategies they need towards “creating significant learning experiences” (Fink, 2013: Cover Page), consequent upon having more effective curricular support. For example, learners who need an electronic learning experience in a manner that gives them the feeling similar to that of being in a face-to-face classroom, will benefit from the ideas in this study, especially if the University commits itself to implementing the ideas, as member of a global “electronic community of internet” (Pazmino, 2009:24).

### Theoretical Framework

In the book, *Open and Distance Learning in the Developing World*, Hilary Perraton stated some constraints on non-formal education which reflected on the educational realities of some African countries, as at two decades ago but with lessons that are much relevant for the contemporary educational landscape. Basically, Perraton’s statement that non-formal schooling alternatives are being pressurized to metamorphose to formal schooling constitutes the theoretical framework through which this study is guided. It is a target of this study to generate ideas towards re-envisioning pedagogical support to open and distance learning programs in Africa so that they can resist the pressure of succumbing to the conventional schooling system.

Perraton referred to Zambia to exemplify one of the African countries whose open and distance educational realities came under pressure to function like a formal school. He used the open and distance schooling system of Zambia as an example to point to the said educational realities. This is the exemplar:

“In its heyday there was an expectation that non-formal education would respond to public demand for an alternative to the formal system. There were at least two different ideas here. One was curricular, that non-formal education, free from the irrelevant constraints of the school syllabus, could offer a curriculum that was more appropriate for adults, addressing their needs and interests as adult citizens. The other was that it would be impossible to expand formal schooling to keep pace with demand, or to reach the most remote children, and a non-formal route to education should be created. Over the years, however, it is formal education that has flourished, attracting support from developing-country learners and governments. Funding agencies and researchers have added their money and their weight. Non-formal alternatives have been under pressure to look and

become formal: “Zambian study-centre students asked for school uniforms” (Perraton, 2005:13-14).

Sequel to the issues raised by Perraton, the constraints on open and distance learning system in Africa, as a non-formal educational strategy, can be said to be pivoted on whether or not non-formal schools in the system, such as the National Open University of Nigeria, can assert and sustain their distinctiveness as credible and attractive alternatives to the conventional schooling format. Fortunately, as it were, the COVID 19 challenge has brought about a fresh look at the open and distance learning system as a possible fruitful alternative to the regular tertiary education arrangement. Hence the need to offer pedagogical support, that is multidimensional as opposed to the one-size-fits all United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization’s Education For All (Biraimah, 2008:190) for the purpose of consolidating this new look on open and distance learning in Africa, bearing in mind perspectives from the National Open University of Nigeria.

## Operational Definition of Terms

This study engages five terms that have been operationally defined for the purpose of providing a working guide to comprehending it. These are: Open Learning, Distance Learning, Open and Distance Learning, Curriculum, Overt Curriculum. The first three terms were defined while relying basically on Claudio Zaki Dib, contextualized from a Brazilian perspective (Dib, 1988:300-315).

**Distance Learning.** The basic element of this type of learning is that learners are separated by geographical distance. Teaching methods prior (pre-active stage), during (interactive stage), and after (post-active phase) to learning facilitation is done through print, mechanical, and electronic media. All through the process, or much of the time, there is distance between the teacher and the student. It engages individualized and self-instructional learning methodologies in the development of pedagogical processes; courses in the distance learning methodology are pre-produced and also deliverable through audio, video discs, radio and television programs, and other non-print means. It should be noted that open learning also shares some characteristics with distance learning; many open universities around the world also operate on the principle of distance learning.

**Open Learning.** The system is designed to allow students based on an arrangement that ensures there is no connection between learning and the real-world. This system allows the students who have high capacity (self-discipline, personal drive, ability to synthesis and interpret documents) for independent study, who can also establish a working control over their individual learning process; primarily students have the capacity to control and customize learning in a way that suits their challenges, pace, and circumstances. Students are granted autonomy and the power to manipulate their studies as to choice of programs, choice of course load, times of study, location of study, and the pace at which they want to study.

**Open and Distance Learning.** This system can be simply described as the combination of distance and open learning to constitute one system of educational delivery in which elements of both are present. It is on this basis that the term “Open and Distance Learning” is developed. An excellent example of an Open and Distance Learning system is the National Open University of Nigeria, with study centers spread all states in Nigeria.

**Curriculum.** The term “curriculum” can be generally and summarily described as whatever is considerable as constituting learning experience for the individual. However, to be more specific, the study concurs with Kelly (Kelly, 2004:3), that the learning experience should be justifiable in educational terms, based on particular educational criteria set for such justification.

**Overt Curriculum.** This curriculum is also known as the explicit or written curriculum. It includes all that educational activities that are formalized in schooling experiences. Specifically:

This is made up of the curriculum document, texts, films, and supporting teaching materials that are overtly chosen to support the *intentional instructional agenda* of a school. These resources for the intentional learning agenda are usually confined to written understandings and directions formally designated and often collectively reviewed by administrators, curriculum directors and teachers (Dogara, 2018:63).

## Methodology and Procedure of Study

**Methodology of Study.** This study is a product of documentary (qualitative) research methodology, which engages the homogeneous sampling component of social research. This methodology was chosen because of its suitability to the online documentary source for the study; this methodology allowed the researcher to apply multi-tasked strategies (functioning as a participant observer, as well as considering the group discussion as having panel-like qualities and status) in information gathering. The methodology (via Facebook) was also chosen because of its cost effectiveness since it could be accessed on a free-mode basis.

Basically, the documentary research method is a social research technique that investigates, identifies, categorizes, analyzes, and interprets data from documentary sources (written texts) that contain information about a phenomenon being studied. For this study, a homogeneous sampling technique was applied to facilitate the documentary method. Accordingly, a Facebook group (“NOUN News and Updates”) was the primary document platform of investigation considering the fact that it had direct texts, pictures, and videos on the issues being considered by this study. Accordingly, mediate access (or inference) was established in this study between the primary sources in the platform concerned, while keeping in view the pedagogical support matters being addressed from the perspective of the National Open University of Nigeria.

The Homogeneous Sampling Technique is a process of selecting people to constitute a sample group because they possess similar characteristics (Creswell, 2012:208). Individuals are purposefully selected as a representative sample, because of their membership in the group. For the purpose of this study, the Facebook group selected ("NOUN News and Updates") is made up of current, former, and potential students of National Open University of Nigeria, totaling 166'379 as at 18<sup>th</sup> June 2023:12.38pm. It is also made up of supporters of the University as well those who need information about the University. This group can also be said to constitute a sub-group of Nigeria's non-formal education community. Data was generated based on questions (and selected responses) in this group over a two-year period, starting from an initial three months, from 29<sup>th</sup> March 2021—09<sup>th</sup> June 2021, and cross-checked on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2023 (in the second instance), for the purpose of ascertaining whether or not new questions have arisen after a two-year gap, other than those encountered in 2021; in the absence of new questions, data generated in the first instance is still considered as applicable to this study.

**Procedure of Study.** This study was done in four steps. Firstly, a background was given to provide a general idea of the direction of the study. Secondly, the methodology and procedure of study was designed as a bridge to the main body of the study. Thirdly, the main body of the study was made up of presentation and analysis of data, guided by two research questions developed for the study. Fourthly, sequel to the afore-mentioned steps, the study was summarized through a concluding process that was also guided by all research questions concerned.

### **Presentation of Data and Analysis of Research Questions**

As early stated, the Homogeneous Sampling Technique was used for gathering data from the Facebook group "NOUN News and Updates." Twenty of the most relevant questions and comments in this group, mostly within the period studied, firstly 29<sup>th</sup> March 2021—09<sup>th</sup> June 2021, and then up to 18<sup>th</sup> June 2023, were selected for the purpose of generating data for the research. The appropriate data was processed in three steps: presentation, analysis, and connection to research questions. Questions and those asking the questions are identified as "Question" while responses (where available) are noted as "Reply"; the actual identity of persons concerned is hidden in these alphabets so as to protect the identity of the respondents, thereby also ensuring the integrity of the research.

Caveat. Items presented below are direct extractions from the Facebook group "NOUN News and Updates." This means, they are presented unedited, but as they are, so as to maintain the integrity of the study. Accordingly, there are obvious grammatical errors which the researcher takes no responsibility for, the reader should bear this in mind in perusing this research document.



## Presentation of Data

### Item 01: 29/3/2021:

Question 01: Can I use my noun result and apply for master in a conventional university?

Item 01-Reply 01: You can. It is NUC recognized.

Item 01-Reply 02: You are saying what you don't know, pls, I am presently a PHD student in University of Ibadan, I did my master's degree in noun.

Item 01-Reply 03: In response to Reply 05: I like you brother. Some of them don't read about noun. They do not know that any University recognized by NUC, the result can even be used to study in any school abroad. Some of them ask stupid questions. As far as I'm concern, noun' s standard is higher than any institution in Nigeria. No teacher to teach you, you can't influence your exams if you fail like they do in other universities. Noun is on the list of NUC.

Item 01-Reply 04: You can go to Nearest NOUN studying center for an inquiry

Item 01-Reply 05: NOUN programs are of higher standard and more strictly controlled than the so called conventional universities I dare say.

Item 01-Reply 06: Please be polite in answering questions no- matter how foolish. That is why you are educated.

Item 01-Reply 07: Yes, I have colleagues who have done their masters in a convectional university, with the BSc from NOUN.

Item 01-Reply 08: That means you don't even know what school you attended, you don't know the law establishing it. You don't even have confidence in what certificate you have obtained from the school. What is the essence of your University education? Why try to rubbish yourself before this public, why not go seek admission first and find out what you want to hear from the social media public?

Item 01-Reply 09: I graduated from noun and running an MSC program in a state University right now. So don't say what you don't know sir.

### Item 02: 29/5/2021:

Question 02: Share your experience about NOUN here and encourage people to join us.

Item 02-Reply 01: It being a wonderful school, u have to sturdy on your own, and sure you will pass well. A lot of corruption in conventional school, blocking everywhere. NOUN is good if you must sturdy hard.

Item 02-Reply 02: Noun is a best school ever (work and study)

Item 02-Reply 03: Is someone like me who attended another university before coming to NOUN that can give its accurate characteristics in summary, anyone who survive the storms of NOUN will remain seeing other universities' storms as a sweet breeze.

Item 02-Reply 04: I can't encourage anyone to join NOUN. NOUN is frustrating if you can't tolerate the menace in it. I made it in NOUN because am determined by working seriously as an independent student with a target! To be frank with you, the frustration I got at Noun wasnt easy at all. But thank Lord I came and conquered. And graduated with best result. Noun is for those that can endure and tolerate any set -back of the system.



Item 02-Reply 05: NOUN is not a school for unserious students, if you know you are not ready to study on your own, "Don't go near it" unless you want to spend a lifetime studying. My best school though, proudly 2.1 graduate of this prestigious school.

Item 02-Reply 06: NOUN is one of the best school in Nigeria, though there are areas the management need to improve, but the truth is that now is good for the poor and the rich. I am a living testimony of NOUN. In fact, the areas/reasons I like NOUN is as follows: You have access to course materials (either in store or online) to read thoroughly, on your own. (it can't be found in other schools. If you read well your result must be excellent, noting "see me in my office if not you can't pass my course" (that is a common practice in other university). No strike so it is time guarantee (your four year programme is confirmed I'd you work hard) etc

Item 02-Reply 07: Bnsc nursing from 2017 on now final year 2021. My practical experience in all wards in FMC umuahia too awesome and I learn more. Normally made good grades I can't regret being in Noun.

Item 02-Reply 08: My experience is so devastating that I can't encourage someone to join. Unnecessary missing of results which delayed my graduation and unnecessary introduction of new courses which I must carry them as long as not graduated.

### **Item 03: 1/6/2021:**

Question 03: Good Afternoon. Pls how much is NOUN school fees?

### **Item 04: 1/6/2021:**

Question 04: Pls, since we study at our own comfort, how about assignment, what if u don't understand what u read, and u need to ask questions, what's going to happen?

Item 04-Reply 01: Go to your councilor office in ur center .

Item 04-Reply 02: Read more and more. You would understand it.

### **Item 05: 5/6/2021:**

Question 05: Is there any NOUN graduate that was shortlisted in N Power batch C program? Nope but why? Is unfair???

Item 05-Reply 01: I've been shortlisted ooo, don't discourage others about the school because it's the best university.

Item 05-Reply 02: A lot of noun students are in the first batch.

Item 05-Reply 03: Hello poster, I and all my friends were shortlisted.

### **Item 06: 8/6/2021:**

Question 06: Any WhatsApp group for NOUN Peace and conflict resolution students?

Item 06-Reply 01: We have one that those of us doing masters created a while back.

### **Item 07: 10/6/2021:**

Question 07: Hello great people in the house. I have heard all great things about NOUN.

But please I want you all share your struggles studying in institution. Please state the challenges in NOUN that you think can be avoided in conventional schools.

Item 07-Reply 01: No challenge only if you can study extensively on your own.

Item 07-Reply 02: They should start lectures

Item 07-Reply 03: You cannot use NOUN template to navigate conventional University

Item 07-Reply 04: I am a fresh graduate and living witness. Please just study extensively and you will graduate without challenge. This is the only school that you don't need to bribe anybody before you pass your exams. 100-200 level, immediately you write your e-exam, you log out then log in back and you will see your score. 300-400 level, is pen on paper strictly theory. What you know is what know. When you write well you know it yourself. God will help all students of NOUN.

**Item 08: 12/6/2021:**

Question 08: Hello, house, I'm new here and this is my first post. Please I want to know more about the school cos I'm starting next year. 1, when are they starting their first semester for newcomers, (for next year)? 2, how is their payment? Is it semester by semester or you pay for the 3 semesters at once? And please tell me more.

Note: As at 2023 questions like this still arise. On 17<sup>th</sup> June 2023, someone asked: "hope school fees is once in a year?"

Item 08-Reply 01: Have they given you admission? If yes your semester starts when u begin registration and for the payment you pay per semester.

Item 08-Reply 02: Semester by semester and or as your "pocket" can afford...if in doubt, go online or visit the centres nearest to you.

**Item 09: 14/6/2021:**

Question 09: When can one apply for part-time studies in NOUN?

Note: As at 2023 questions like this still arise. On 7<sup>th</sup> June 2023, someone asked: "Can someone gain admission into NOUN with 2010 SSCE results?"

Item 09-Reply 01: No part-time study in NOUN. Any programme you apply for is a full time programme, but a distance and learning mode of studying.

Item 09-Reply 02: You can apply now, remember it is not part-time.

Item 09-Reply 03: It is not part time but online.

**Item 10: 16/6/2021:**

Question 10: Update for all recent graduands. This is to notify all the recent graduands that the convocation refund of N5,000 has duly commenced. If you haven't received yours, then it's either you didn't enter your bank details correctly or you are in the next batch. Good luck as you expect your immediate refunds.

**Item 11: 17/6/2021:**

Question 11: Will NOUN graduate go for service?

Note: As at 2023 questions like this still arise. On 7<sup>th</sup> June 2023, someone asked: "What advise will you give candidate that wish to apply for NOUN form. Advantage's & disadvantage of studying in NOUN."

Item 11-Reply 01: Same question every day, HABA

Item 11-Reply 02: Not yet, untill when government decide. Meanwhile, is going to service actually the priority?

**Item 12: 18/6/2021:**

Question 12: Pls what is convocation gown?

Item 12-Reply 01: Pls ask Google. Some questions are innocently too terrible to be asked in public. Ask a private investigator like Google.

Item 12-Reply 02: Simple question give simple answer, no one hold the Monopoly of knowledge no perfect human being on earth ok. Convocation gown is the gown you wear during graduation. Some call it graduation gown.

**Item 13: 18/6/2021:**

Question 13: Pls can u use noun for DE university of Ibadan? Please, quick response.

Item 13-Reply 01: Sincerely am a product of university of Ibadan and national open university. Bet it with me in terms of proper conduct of examination noun is the best. If you write exams at noun and had C, be sure to have A in UI.

Item 13-Reply 02: NOUN is a federal university like University of Ibadan etc

Item 13-Reply 03: You at the university of Ibadan do not study as student in noun, noun is the most serious institution in Nigeria, examination is superb no bribe for grade most university bribe, am a graduate of criminology from noun with 2.1 any graduate of criminology can never beat me anywhere in the world because I give it what it takes.

**Item 14: 19/6/2021:**

Question 14: Good evening, pls do is the school fees semester by semester or a session?

**Item 15: 21/6/2021:**

Question 15: I have been away for about six years now from noun program and I wish to come back, will they take me back? to continue from where i stopped. Please can anyone explain to me? I have been away from noun program for about six (6) now and i want to go back, will they take me back?

**Item 16: 23/6/2021:**

Question 16: I have B.A. in theology from Bethel University USA, will I be considered if I should apply for masters at noun?

Item 16-Reply 01: Go and be a pastor na, anyway which program do you intend to apply in noun.

Item 16-Reply 02: Yes, I asked from the right source and they said it is possible

**Item 17: 24/6/2021:**

Question 17: Pls I heard there will be three semesters this year. Like after this exam, there is another two more before the year ends. Pls is this true?

Item 17-Reply 01: Not true. Every NOUN plan must be in tandem to NUC guidelines. So u guys want us to use 3 months to Read 300 pages of materials for 6 courses and prepare for POP Exams, TMA and E Exams. Hmmm.

**Item 18: 20/6/2021:**

Question 18: Pls any news regarding new timetable amendment due to some omitted Courses like ENT329 Strategic Management and others?

**Item 19: 23/6/2021:**

Question 19: Portal crash 2017, will portal ever crash again?

**Item 20: 9/6/2021:**

Question 20: Pls guys don't be angry at the question I'm about to ask, is noun degrees accepted in any part of the world for employment issues? I'm a new student plz i just want to be sure.

Item 20-Reply 01: Don't discriminate against yourself. You are already having inferiority complex. You think Federal government will waste resources to establish a university across the country and will not be recognized? Use your head. I got a Lecturing job with my NOUN certificate.

Item 20-Reply 02: Dear poster, NOUN degrees are acceptable in all countries of the world where Nigeria degrees are accepted. Some countries even preferred NOUN degrees to conventional degrees in Nigeria.

Item 20-Reply 03: My NOUN friends, going to school beyond employment, acquired the knowledge, apply it you see better results.

**Re-Envisioning Pedagogical Support towards Addressing Challenges to Open and Distance Education in Africa**

**Research Question 1:** What challenges to open and distance learning in the African context of education need to be addressed through a re-envisioning of pedagogical support matters, putting into perspective the National Open University of Nigeria?

**Analysis of Data:** Based on the data presented, there are challenges in at least five areas of open and distance learning in the African context of education, which need to be address through a re-envisioning of pedagogical support matters. These areas are:

1. Challenge of Working and Learning. Although potential students may be already engaged in various employments, they still expressed the need to know the rate of money charged as school fees (Question 03). Knowing this ahead of enrolment, and the payment plan for school fees, is consequential to their overall plans for study (Question 08).

Connection to Research Question. National Open University of Nigeria was established for the purpose of extending educational opportunities to all Nigerians, especially with a view to making it possible for people to learn in a regular university (although non-conventional), while pursuing various means of earning livelihood. But, there are many instances in which this educational opportunity does not necessarily translate to educational access, by virtue of the fact that even those who are engaged in the pursuit of various means of livelihood still find themselves unable to pay, or pay on a regular basis, the fees required to benefit from this university; a significant reason for this inability is connected to the harsh economic realities in Nigeria. For this category of people, there is a need to devise more effective strategies to support them to access the educational opportunities inherent in an Open and Distance Learning system, such as the National Open University of Nigeria.

**2. Computer and Technology-Related Challenges.** National Open University of Nigeria is strictly an electronic university, and has some challenges which affect the participation of students in its system. Some of the challenges are internet-related, and concern whether or not the online system is dependable. This makes some of the students to wonder, "Portal crashed 2017, will portal ever crash again?" (Question 19).

Connection to Research Question. For learners to effectively access the services of National Open University of Nigeria, they need to have a working competence in computer applications and the basics of online education, since teaching-learning processes in the university are conducted almost entirely online. Preferably, the learners need to have their own personal computers and other computer-related technological tools, which also reflect on the financial capacities of many of them. Accordingly, more strategies need to be explored to assist learners in this category to acquire their own personal computer technological tools, and also achieve competence in online education.

**3. Challenges of Internet Access.** It is only when there is proper internet connectivity that students in an electronic university can function well. For example, students of National Open University of Nigeria see the importance of the Internet in operating various study groups (Question 06) that engage the WhatsApp application and other software products, so long as there is availability of Internet data.

Connection to Research Question. The saying "data is life" is more applicable to Open and Distance Learning when the challenges of learning in the context of National Open University of Nigeria is taken into consideration. Internet access in Nigeria costs a lot as data charges are high. Many learners under National Open University of Nigeria have the challenge of financing the cost of purchasing data to help them connect with fellow learners in other parts of the world, or benefit from National Open University of Nigeria's course facilitation system. These challenges have brought about an obligation to delve into researching more strategies for addressing them.

**4. Challenges of Developing an Independent Research Capacity.** Studying independently requires hard work (Item 02-Reply 01), seriousness (Item 02-Reply 05). It is possible to succeed on the independent path, even in the practical aspects of it (Item 02-Reply 07), since materials are available online and offline, and learning flows without interruption

(Item 02-Reply 06). Another challenge to overcome towards success in independent study is for the learner to understand the distinctiveness of National Open University of Nigeria as a basically online university; this means it is not a part-time university (Question 09), it is a full-time university that engages open and distance learning modes of study (Item 09-Reply 01).

Connection to Research Question. More strategies need to be discovered for the purpose of consolidating the capacity of learners in National Open University of Nigeria to function as independent learners, yet working as a team in an academically enriching environment. This is consequent upon the fact that once in a while, although not necessarily a long while, learners need to extricate themselves from their ever busy schedules and locate themselves outside their normal environment in order to concentrate more on achieving specific targets of their learning. For example, many learners attached to National Open University of Nigeria Kagoro Community Center reside outside Kagoro, such as in Kabene (Kauru Local Government Area of Kaduna State) about 100-150 kilometers away from Kagoro; this makes it mandatory for them to often look for accommodation in Kagoro, during exams and other facilitation periods, to achieve specific learning targets. Ideas could be explored towards upgrading National Open University of Nigeria Study Centers with the capacity they need for better delivery of Open and Distance Learning, taking cognizant of students who need to temporarily extricate themselves from their homes and physically locate themselves in a Center, for more concentrated learning.

**5. Challenges of Face-to-Face Interactive Teaching-Learning Process.** Although National Open University of Nigeria is an electronic university, some students still find studying online as challenging, consequent upon which they ask for lectures as in the traditional schooling system (Item 07-Reply 02). These students still see the face-to-face teaching alternative as suited to addressing immediate questions arising from the learning process (Question 04).

Connection to Research Question. While National Open University of Nigeria operates online almost entirely, there are still a great number of its learners whose most effective way of learning is through face-to-face interaction with the facilitator. To help learners in this category of the Open and Distance Learning system, it is imperative to look at more alternatives for supporting the process of "teaching at its best" (Nilson, 2010: Cover Page), so that it can lead to learning in the life of learners with this kind of need. It should be possible for National Open University of Nigeria to explore strategies for facilitating learning electronically and under a Face-to-Face situation that remediates lack of actual physical teacher-learner contact, without compromising on its distinctiveness as an electronic university.

### **Positive Effects of Re-Envisioning Pedagogical Support in Addressing Challenges to Open and Distance Education in Africa**

**Research Question 2:** What are the positive effects of re-envisioning pedagogical support components, in addressing the pedagogical challenges to open and distant learning in the

African context of education, putting into perspective the National Open University of Nigeria?

**Analysis of Data:** Based on the data presented, there are two positive effects on open and distance learning in the African context of education, which arise from a re-envisioning of pedagogical support matters. These areas are psychological, academic, and financial effects; details below are presented in general connection to the research questions.

**1. Psychological Effects.** There are many students in National Open University of Nigeria who need to be assured and reassured that the University's certificate is credible and comparatively equivalent or superior to what is obtainable in the conventional university system. Many students ask questions about whether certificates obtained from National Open University of Nigeria are acceptable for further studies in conventional universities (Question 01, Item 01-Reply 02, Item 01-Reply 03, Item 01-Reply 07, Item 01-Reply 09). There are also other students who wonder about whether certificates obtained from National Open University of Nigeria are acceptable in the job market (Question 05, Item 05-Reply 01). A re-envisioning of pedagogical support matters would help students of National Open University of Nigeria concerned to overcome any sense of inferiority they may have (20-Reply 01) and also develop confidence in the system.

**2. Academic Effects.** There are some students of National Open University of Nigeria who consider their experience at the university to be devastating for reasons that have to do with missing grades, unnecessary revision of curricular items, and other administrative issues (Item 02-Reply 08). Some also think their academic experience would be improved if face-to-face teaching method was introduced (Item 07-Reply 02). A re-envisioning of pedagogical support matters would help the university to consolidate the academic angle of National Open University of Nigeria, towards effectively addressing aforementioned challenges. This could be an acceptable idea to the students, since some of them already consider academic programs at National Open University of Nigeria to be of higher standard when compared to the conventional university system in Nigeria (Item 01-Reply 05).

### Conclusion

In concluding this study, a two-point recommendation is made, towards further consolidating the re-envisioning of pedagogical support matters for open and distance learning in Africa. This is in line with the two-point purpose of this study.

The first purpose of the study focused on considering some challenges to open and distant learning in the African context of education, which need to be addressed through a re-envisioning of pedagogical support matters, putting into perspective the National Open University of Nigeria. Majority of the challenges are encapsulated in the challenge of working (pursuing various means of livelihood) and learning at the same time. The first recommendation below is targeted at meeting this challenge.



The second purpose of the study focused on cognizing the positive effects of re-envisioning pedagogical support components, on open and distant learning in the African context of education, putting into perspective the National Open University of Nigeria. Using Nigeria as a case reflection, it can be said that open and distance learning systems in Africa enjoy the goodwill of their students. The second recommendation below is targeted at sustaining this goodwill. The recommendation is hinged on the reality that students in the data analyzed consider their open and distance learning experiences as intensive (Item 02-Reply 03), integrity-based (Item 13-Reply 03, Question 10), merit-based (Item 07-Reply 04), and globally recognized (Item 20-Reply 02).

### **Recommendations**

Two recommendations are given below. These are designed in line with the purpose of this study, to contribute towards addressing the pedagogical challenges of open and distance learning in Africa.

1. There is a need for open and distance learning universities in Africa to consider the possibility of establishing "Research Retreat Centers" as special arms attached to various study centers or as branches standing on their own. This would be places where students can extricate themselves from their busy schedules, (as is the case in view of the hard economic challenges of contemporary Africa), and be resident for a while in the Center, in order to prepare for exams or achieve any specific curricular goal that concerns their studies. Such Centers should be cafeteria-styled and equipped with standard accommodation facilities, online and offline libraries, good internet connection, functional utilities, recreational facilities, and other pedagogical support matters that bring about effective academic experience; a very minimum cost could be charge in order to finance minor maintenance services of the Centers.
2. In order to sustain and consolidate the goodwill of learners in the open and distance learning systems in Africa, all pedagogical support online-related matters need to be always addressed with maximum response. Specifically, the response should be immediate or in a few hours at most; otherwise, (and taking into cognizance the speed of communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century) slow response or non-response could make it possible for false information to circulate.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

The pedagogical challenges to open and distance education considered in this study, are also interconnected with education technological and administrative matters arising. Therefore, two possible areas for further research are suggested below, towards addressing this matter arising:

1. Re-envisioning Technological Support Strategies for Open and Distance Learning in Africa: National Open University of Nigeria in Curricular Perspective
2. Re-envisioning Administrative Support Approaches for Open and Distance Learning in Africa: National Open University of Nigeria in Curricular Perspective

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