

TECHNOLOGICAL RACE: Distance Education Can Enhance Gender Equity for Women Education in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper elaborates on how distance education can expand the scope and coverage of education for women in Nigeria, using ICTs. Every thing from traditional media to Web 2.0 to mobiles is the backbone of distance education. Developing the technology that is most appropriate for women in their own environment-community radio have a special place as to enhancing the quality of education of women. Aspiration for social and women education in Nigeria must be simultaneously built on the foundation of knowledge and skills through a system of delivery that reaches the women as appropriate for this present time. Distance education tends to be regarded as a second best option, open to those who, for whatever reasons cannot enrol in face-to-face institution. Domestic burden, childbirths, raising children, cultural boundaries and socio-cultural values places women behind and serves as factors hampering women education. Women usually invest a higher proportion of their earnings in their families and communities than the men. Against this background, with ICT, women can be at home and build up their productive skills, obtain a degree and even earn a living- all online, while they have enough time to look after their children and take good care of the home.

Keywords: Technology, distance education, gender equity, women, education.

INTRODUCTION

As has been aptly stated in (Sahed, Karasale, & Lifanda, 2005), the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women UN, 1995 in Beijing, the girl-child today is the woman of tomorrow. The skills, ideas, and energy of the girl-child are vital for full attainment of the goals of equality, development, and peace. For the girl-child to develop her full potential, she needs to be nurtured in an enabling environment, where her spiritual, intellectual, and material needs for survival, protection, and development are met and equal rights safeguarded (Randell, & Diana, 2009).

Girls' education on the African continent has reached a crossroads. The Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) was established in 1989 as the first internationally binding legal instrument to encompass the full range of human rights -civil, political, economic, and cultural and social- and codified the concept of human rights specifically applicable to children.

Article 12 proclaimed that children are entitled to express their views on all matters of concern to them, and this norm in turn applies to all aspects of childhood education. According to the UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring 2009 Report, the principle of participation was buttressed in the Convention, with parallel rights to freedom of expression, religion, and association. Article 28 of the Convention addresses education and specifies that all children have the right to primary education, which should be free for all (universal primary education).

The Beijing Conference in 1995, the Fourth World Conference for Women, set out a broad Platform of Action (BPFA) concerning the girl child. Drawing on baseline statistics from 1990, 130 million children worldwide had no access to primary education, of which 81 million were girls. A considerably higher number of girls had no access to secondary education.

According to the UN Division for the Advancement of Women, BPFA acknowledged the urgent need to:

- ✓ increase girls' access to primary and secondary education,
- ✓ alter representations of women and girls in the curriculum, and
- ✓ increase the number of female teachers worldwide.

Strategic Objective 4 stated the need to eliminate discrimination against girls in education, skills development and training. Without significant change to traditional curricular representations of women in roles of inferiority, girls would find it difficult to aspire to transcend these roles and work toward gender parity. Moreover, female teachers must be trained and placed in schools to serve as positive role models for young girls, both in primary and secondary schools. Through these threefold changes, Beijing set out a transformative path for the 21st century toward gender equality for the girl child. This path proved the foundation for the agenda of the Dakar World Educational Forum in 2000 and the formation of the MDGs to be accomplished by 2015 (UNESCO, 2009).

The World Educational Forum, held in Dakar, Senegal in 2000, equally established a Framework of Action to achieve Education for All (EFA) by 2015. EFA Goal II is to achieve universal primary education (UPE), and EFA Goal V is to remove gender disparities and inequalities in education. The Framework of Action was further divided into a two-part agenda:

- ✓ gender parity in school participation, and
- ✓ equality between girls and boys in opportunities and outcomes.

In Nigerian case, especially the limited education women receive could be detrimental to social development needs of women and girls, hence the focus of this paper, which add some important perspectives to the literature in the area looking out how distance education can enhance women education in Nigeria by the use of various technology. This paper is on how distance education can enhance gender equity in women education in Nigeria using ICTs.

THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY

At the second World Summit on the Information Society (Tunis, November 2005), Kofi Annan reminded that we are living in a world of rapid change where technologies play a multitude of roles. How we tap this technology's potential will shape our future together. We cannot remain indifferent to this enormous metamorphosis.

The participation of researchers and educators in the process of change that information and communication technologies bring to education is an opportunity to construct, shape and share development knowledge (Karsenti, 2010).

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are obviously of great significance for education. The integration of ICTs in general and women education in particular is the need of the hour. The use of ICTs can make substantial change for education and training. First, the rich representation of information changes, learners perception and understanding of the context and secondly the vast distribution and easy access to

information can change the relation between teacher educators and student - teachers. Moreover, ICTs provide parental support for educational innovations. The ICTs such as Compact Disc and CD-ROM, Video disc, Micro Computers, E-Mail, Voice Mail, Instructional software, Educational Television, VCR, Cable TV, etc. are involved in the list of ICTs . There is a question among the Educators "Can these technologies help the Education Strategist to face the above challenges?"

There is no doubt that the ICTs help to provide quality education to a large number of students. ICTs help to interact with students over a physical distance and access on libraries, journals and other resources. With the help of ICTs educators/teachers can have access to students, colleagues, universities and so on. ICTs provide feedback without biases and provide life long professional virtual situation, training on demand and so on. Further, ICTs facilitate sharing of ideas, experience as well as collaborating on projects through virtual communities. ICTs contribute to the whole system of knowledge dissemination and learning.

ICTs are dominating now in all our private spheres, social and working environment. Few studies conducted on ICTs, e-Learning had become popular amongst educationists because of their strengths and advantages they provide to the instructional process. Ability to serve a large number of students at a potentially reduced cost (Goldberg, Salari and Swoboda, 1996; Starr 1997; McCormack and Jones, 1998; Bates, 2001.)

The web today is used as instructional media in educational institutions. Web is used independently for teaching and learning as replacement for face-to-face teaching. Berge, Collins, & Doughaty, 2000; Bates, 2001 reported experience of Indian Institute of Management Banking (IIMB) in using e-learning. The IIMB has been using e-learning to supplement face-to-face teaching.

A web enhanced training package was recently completed by the University of Lagos, in the university library and the university Computer Institute of Technology (CITS). The project was for the development of learning management system which is scalable and can be implemented in a large scale for the university. Internet is considered as a facilitator for 'just in time' education.

CAN DISTANCE EDUCATION HELP TO EDUCATION STRATEGIST TO FACE THE ABOVE CHALLENGES?"

Concept of Distance Education

Distance education, or distance learning, is a field of education that focuses on the pedagogy and andragogy, technology, and instructional systems design that aim to deliver education to students who are not physically on site. Rather than attending courses in person, teachers and students may communicate at times of their own choosing by exchanging printed or electronic media, or through technology that allows them to communicate in real time and through other online ways (UNESCO, 2003). Within a context of rapid technological change and shifting market conditions, the Nigerian education system is challenged with providing increased educational opportunities without increased budgets. Many educational institutions are answering this challenge by developing distance education programmes.

These types of programmes can provide adults with a second chance at a college education, reach those disadvantaged by limited time, distance or physical disability, and update the knowledge base of workers at their places of employment.

Distance education has the potential to generate new patterns of teaching and learning. Strongly linked with developments in information and communication technologies, it is

close to the development of new learning needs and new patterns of information access and application and learning. There is evidence that it can lead to innovation in mainstream education, and may even have effects beyond the realm of education itself. Distance education therefore plays an especially decisive role in the creation of the global knowledge-based society which women education in Nigeria will not be an exception.

Gender and ICTS Integration in Nigeria

There is need to improve the quality of education and resolve the equity issue. Discrimination against girls, or sexual differentiation, is a serious concern and a barrier to the integration of ICTs in education.

The disparity between girls and boys in learning to use ICTs, at all education levels, underscores the gender-specific nature of Nigerian society, where women's and men's living conditions differ. Depending on the region, women enjoy less social access and are submitted to diverse forms of exclusion, which renders them more vulnerable. Socio cultural frameworks have confined African women to the role of housekeeper (Karsenti, 2010).

It is generally believed that the family name is preserved in the lineage of the male child, hence the male child should be better equipped than the female in order to get a good job and provide for the family. It is believed that women are mainly for the purpose of reproduction and domestic activity, hence (there is) no need to educate them, as this is a waste of resources (Obote, 2005).

The problem is exacerbated by the fact that girls appear to be alienated by ICTs, considering them as belonging to the masculine realm. An investigation of computer savvy by university students revealed that female students were less skilled in the use of information technologies than their male counterparts (Sayed & Karelse, 1997). This imbalance at all levels is undoubtedly attributable to a mixture of cultural norms, but also to historical, economic, sociological, legal and traditional factors.

However, a certain balance between boys and girls in ICTs training would be required for the successful long-term integration of ICTs into schools. Moreover, girls make up slightly more than half the student population in most African countries. One cannot contemplate integrating ICTs into the schools without giving due consideration to girls. ICTs integration should not be allowed to be a domain strictly reserved for males. By raising awareness among girls and facilitating their access to ICTs, in short, by advocating sexual equality, it could enable a better implementation of ICTs into education systems. Any efforts to correct gender imbalances would require schools to encourage girls to use ICTs.

According to many studies, several factors must take into account when developing ICTs integration policies so as to overcome the constraints that bar girls from using these technologies at school. For example, educators' (parents' and teachers') behaviours would have to change towards children, from a very young age.

Above all, special measures would have to be implemented in the schools to facilitate girls' access to the computer rooms. There should be no barriers to girls. Otherwise, there is a risk for lack of interest and awareness, exacerbated by the influence of the socio-cultural environment. Every person who can read and write can use ICTs.

The ICTs integration process should therefore consider the entire environment, scholastic and socio cultural, so as to correct the educational imbalance between

the sexes and produce a new generation of young girls and women who are knowledgeable and trained in day-to-day ICTs use. In other words, girls should be offered

the same educational opportunities as boys. Sexual discrimination, i.e. exclusion or marginalization, constitutes a serious hindrance to the effective integration of ICTs into the education system.

Let's look at the reality of the time.

ROLE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN ENHANCING WOMEN EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Open and distance learning can be used for girl's school-age children and adult women that are unable to attend ordinary schools, or to support teaching in schools, both at primary and secondary level. However, it is to be noted that in distance education most courses and programmes are targeted at the adult population. In Nigeria distance education for school equivalency can be an important way of expanding educational opportunities to the women population.

Hence, Open schools that use a variety of media such as audio-conference; video-conference; electronic-mail; telephone; fax; CD ROM, access to data base; radio or television; web conferencing among others will be of a particular interest to high-population country like Nigeria.

There are the capacity of distance education to support large-scale campaigns for disadvantaged women e.g. in the field of HIV/AIDS education; health and nutrition; child mortality, disabled; migrants; cultural and linguistic minorities; refugees; population in crises situations; who cannot be efficiently reached by traditional delivery systems is significant in the context of continuing education and training.

Basically, both private and public providers can make important contributions to the development of industry and trade through programmes for technical and vocational education for women. Core purposes include the ability to respond flexibly to women needs and to provide opportunities for those most disadvantaged by existing provision.

Female teachers' training is an important area where distance education can make a major contribution. This includes initial training for formal qualifications, in-service supplementary training for formal upgrading, and continuing in-service training in particular subjects and topics.

In Nigeria, distance learning can reach large groups of female teachers and will have a profound impact on the national development of women education systems. The use of distance learning for female teacher education is a crucial strategy in the expansion or quality improvement in the public education system.

Moreover, as there is the need to upgrade female teachers' knowledge and competence in using new ICTs, using the new rich instructional and information resources available on the Web is imperative. In such cases it is very appropriate to use the new technologies in the training programme for female teachers.

Non-formal education and community development represent other sectors where distance education can increasingly be used. Programmes at a distance can reach substantial numbers of women, in societies where women lack equal opportunities for participation in conventional forms of education and training.

The barriers that may be overcome by distance learning include not only geographical distance, but also other confining circumstances, (like the women in purdah), personal constraints, cultural and social barriers and lack of educational infrastructure; the

extension of literacy and numeracy skills among millions of adults through the use of radio, television and telematics, helping rural women to develop entrepreneurial skills, assisting agricultural extension workers to improve their capacity to educate farm workers, training of women legislators in legislative drafting, increasing the speed of in-service training of un- or under-trained female teachers, and delivering continuous professional development programmes for women in health, managers and administrators.

Distance education can increase women points of access to education. Learners tend to access distance teaching in four sites, namely, the home, the workplace, dedicated study centres and, like their counterparts in the conventional systems, traditional classrooms. For the women it is often a cheaper alternative to pursuing a course through conventional methods. Distance education may mean a more learner-centred approach, allowing greater flexibility and choice of content as well as more personal organization of the learning programme. Open and distance learning approaches lend themselves to the teaching of many of the complex issues of the modern world, in which input from a variety of disciplines is necessary.

Distance education at the tertiary level shows a two-fold development pattern. On the one hand, numerous single mode open universities have emerged and can absorb large numbers of female learners, while, on the other hand, increasing numbers of traditional universities have begun to offer their programmes also through distance education. The development of new ICTs can reinforce this trend.

Distance education with the use of ICTs can however enhance the delivery of education in many ways (Karsenti, 2010) such as in higher education and teacher training where women learners in communities or faculties can foster self-training and successful cyberspace that extend tutoring and interaction with mentors to new approaches to the concept of time units, independent of learning locations and learning activities. For instance, the contact encouraged using email or even mobile continued education content, or contact with a lecturer. In other words mobile learning decreases limitation of learning location with the mobility of general portable devices. M-learning is convenient in that it is accessible from virtually anywhere. M-Learning, like other forms of E-learning, is also collaborative; sharing is almost instantaneous among everyone using the same content, which leads to the reception of instant feedback and tips. M-Learning brings strong portability by replacing books and notes with small RAMS filled with tailored learning contents. In addition, it is simple to utilize mobile learning for a more effective and entertaining experience.

How Is Distance Education Serving The Education System?

Are there new ways of thinking about curriculum development? What are the impacts on female teacher training, in a context where there is a significant lack of trained and qualified teachers in Nigeria? Aside from all this, online learning allows international cooperative teacher training like the new World Bank initiative called IFADEM for the collaborative and cooperative training of teachers across Africa. It also promotes national and international exchanges between teachers and contributes to the fine-tuning of pedagogical practices.

For the women distance education means increased access and flexibility as well as the combination of work and education. It may also mean a more learner-centred approach, enrichment, higher quality and new ways of interaction. For employers it offers high quality and usually cost-effective professional development in the workplace. It allows upgrading of skills, increased productivity and development of a new learning culture. In addition, it means sharing of costs, of training time, and increased portability of training.

For governments the main potential is to increase the capacity and cost-effectiveness of education and training systems, to reach target groups with limited access to conventional education and training, to support and enhance the quality and relevance of existing educational structures, to ensure the connection of educational institutions and curricula to the emerging networks and information resources, and to promote innovation and opportunities for lifelong learning, The Web offers a worldwide forum in which to teach courses that can be dynamically updated in ways never before possible.

Each female student has an enormous range of resources available, free from limitations of time and space. There remains considerable work to be done concerning searching and sifting techniques within these resources for learners and teachers alike. These resources are reconfiguring the ways in which students learn, and new approaches to networked learning are evolving. The use of the Internet and the World Wide Web in open and distance learning is predominantly represented within higher education, it is also beginning to be used in schools.

Thus, great attention should be given to distance learning to meet the educational needs of the women population, with a view to providing new and alternative learning opportunities for those who were initially deprived of them, or who, for one reason or another, did not make use of them. Educate girls to empower the nations. If we educate a boy, we educate one person, if we educate a girl; we educate a family- and a whole nation.

How Programmes Are Used at a Distance in Nigeria

There are basic issues to be noted in the pedagogy of distance learning in Nigeria. In reality, different examples will be used to support different pedagogic approaches with value of mobile learning. For instance:

✓ The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), have the NOUN radio, also in University of Lagos, Akoka, Nigeria use the UNILAG Radio, and the Institute of Management and Technology, (IMT) Enugu are known for their (UNIAIR) programme. These radio stations are where students listen and receive their lectures. These are very popular and are being used by these institutions, to broadcast educational programs of variety on areas such as teacher education, rural development, programmes in agriculture for farmers, science education, creative writing, mass communication, in addition to traditional courses in liberal arts, science and business administration.

✓ Looking at the above provision, the Nigerian women are using that as an opportunity to enroll into distance education programmes. With about thirty six study centers situated all over the country and with a population of over thirty thousand students, the women are about twelve thousand. These women are engaged in the various degree programmes offered by these institutions. The courses offered by these women are: education viz; early childhood, teacher education, adult education, educational administration, guidance and counseling and vocational training. There are other professional programmes enrolled by the women such as: law, business administration, agriculture, nursing, human resources and among others. Women are found in almost all the registered programmes of the institutions. In Awka/Lagos study centre the researchers had facilitated over five hundred women from 2006-2010 academic sessions.

✓ National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) provides learning resource centres (LRC) with a school based training system for all the study centres in the six regions. Sets of equipment compliments the learning resource centres. E.g. printers, CD- players and writer, data storage items (hard disks and CD-ROM, television, satellite dish and receiving software, digital camera, video use in micro-teaching, set of an audio and video CDS, prints and guides. Students download their course materials on their institutions website.

- ✓ **NOUN, UNILAG, IMT, and amongst others engage in the configuration of equipment, this is by getting and storing current information on the new curriculum and teaching methods. It is also by observing and discussing lessons taught by other teachers via technology, either on CD-ROM or in real-time via satellite television, and learning to use computers;**
- ✓ **These institutions find and create educational resources to use in teaching, preparing lesson plan with colleagues, interacting with other teachers and trainers either online or in meetings and workshops. The teaching learning resources are adequately managed by efficient and effective planning, coordination, and monitoring;**
- ✓ **There are the technical and support trained staff to maintain equipment, solve technical problems, assist to use the equipment and manage the educational resources, and learning support teachers who provided pedagogical leadership and assistance;**
- ✓ **NOUN concentrated much on human resource development. Emphasis was on the soft technology of people's skill, knowledge and understanding rather than on the hard technology of equipment. As a practical response to the growing demand for training and research, Regional Training and Research Institute for Open and Distance Learning (RETRIDAL) was established in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) to ensure the success of ODL system and fully maximise the benefits of distance education in the West Africa sub-region, much of the project's success was due to this;**
- ✓ **NOUN and UNILAG, spent some percent of its budget on equipment and training of different kinds (e.g. new curriculum, teaching methods, training of trainers, materials development, preparation of computer-mediated, online (web-based) and CD-ROM based distance learning materials, management of learning resource centres and the use of e-learning and its integration into teaching and learning);**
- ✓ **In dedicated distance education institutions in Nigeria, there has been a drive to get students online to support teaching, learning and administration. The internet provides various means to remedy the lack of interpersonal communications that has been "the Achilles heel of distance education";**
- ✓ **E-learning is pedagogically integrated into the course design and adapted for the current environment, which enable and support enhanced forms of learning. NOUN, UNILAG and IMT students, and amongst others are made to work in small groups on a collaborative task, where they use the internet to find information resource. Conferencing or e-mail is used to communicate and construct a joint project which is assessed, then using e-learning as a clear pedagogic role;**
- ✓ **With the computer networks, learners are encouraged to take an active part in the learning process and construct their knowledge by interacting with learning materials and their peers. There is an online learning discussion forum as social interactive learning environments, for constructivist learning theories. The constructive principles provide a set of guidelines for creating learner-centred, collaborative environments that support reflective and experiential processes.**

MOBILE LEARNING

The mobile phone (through text SMS notices) is used with students whose course requires them to be highly mobile and in particular to communicate information regarding availability of assignment results, venue changes and cancellations, etc.

NOUN facilitators use mobile computers connected by wireless networks for students lectures and conferencing. In use also are learning with portable technologies such as handheld computers, PDAs, Pocket PC, smart phones, MP3 players, and by replacing books and notes with small RAMS, filled with tailored learning contents RAMS. This M-learning focuses on the mobility of the learner, interacting with portable technologies, and learning that reflects a focus on how society and its institutions can accommodate and support an increasingly mobile population.

The M-Learning adds as mobility to the instructor and includes creation of learning materials on-the-spot. Using these mobile tools for creating learning aides and materials in the classroom helps to enhance group collaboration among students and instructors.

THE VALUE OF MOBILE LEARNING

Mobile learning will be of value to bring new technology into the classroom. It is more light weight device compare to books, PCs, etc. Mobile learning could be utilized as part of a learning approach which uses different types of activities (or a blended learning approach). Also, mobile learning supports the learning process rather than being integral to it. It needs to be used appropriately, according to the groups of students involved. Mobile learning is useful tool for students with special needs. Good IT support is needed. Mobile learning can be used as a 'hook' to re-engage disaffected youth. Thus, it is very necessary to have enough devices for classroom use.

CONCLUSION

The following steps have been identified in mobile learning by practitioners, policymakers and researchers as essential to this process: Meeting the MDG and EFA goals for 2015; achieving universal and compulsory primary education; eliminating child labour; providing financial incentives for girls' education to help poorer families; improving sanitation and providing sanitary products to mature teenage girls; bringing women into the curriculum in positive, transformative and influential roles, bringing women teachers into the classroom – in primary and secondary schools, to serve as role models for young girls. A lot of development in women access to education using ODL; ODL is a way of providing learning to the space less; married women for ODL; ODL Create awareness to the disadvantaged; and ODL has come to reform/flush out some of these burdensome traditions.

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