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Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODeL): A Panacea for Human Capital Development

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ABSTRACT

The growth and prosperity of any nation especially developing countries depend upon the development and effective utilization of human resources because they are the manpower that powers the engine room of the nation. Human capacity development (HCD) is the process of training human expertise for self-reliance, performance improvement and contributions to national and global developments. The basic tool for human resources development is education. Education helps to build personnel who form the driving force of sustainable growth and development. The digital transformation and the shift to Open, distance and e-learning (ODeL) especially post-COVID-19 covid-19 can contribute to human resources efficiency, competency and improved productivity in the workforce. This paper, therefore, made efforts to highlight the concept of open, distance and e-learning (ODeL), the relationship between human capital development and ODeL as well as the transformation roles of ODeL in human capital development in both local and global contexts. This study adopted a qualitative study and a literature review in the interpretive research paradigm. Data was collected from secondary sources, arranged into themes, and analyzed for content by looking at issues historically and holistically. The findings of this study are that ODeL has overcome the barriers of geographical distance, logistical and personal constraints, infrastructural barriers, and social and cultural barriers. This study agrees that ODeL plays a crucial role in the development of human capital and by extension, national development. Suggestions are made on how ODeL will help to improve human capital development for personal, community, national and global development.

Keywords: Development, Education, Human capital, Open, Distance and e-Learning

1. INTRODUCTION

“Education is a right, not a privilege”. It is well recognized that education as an antidote against ignorance, diseases, injustice and poverty, has no substitute. Education is a tool for social emancipation, economic transformation, personal empowerment, community development and global sustainability.

Education as a weapon to boost competencies, skills, cultural awareness, religious tolerance, human rights, sustainable development, socio-economic growth, poverty reduction, ignorance, diseases and inequalities cannot be compromised. Quality Education positions individuals to lead healthy lifestyles, become active players in society (Locally and globally) and restore peace, hope and stability.

The digital Transformations and Innovations in Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODeL) without any doubt have continued to massively open up access to quality, affordable and flexible education for a large number of people in developing and developed countries who otherwise would not have been considered for access to higher education in the conventional institutions due to varied conditional factors of socio-economic, geography, equity, gender, population, human mobility, time and other strict guidelines.

Therefore, the focus of this paper is justified by the need to study the contributions of ODeL to human capacity development. Any effort to increase human knowledge, enhance skills, improve productivity, and stimulate resourcefulness and creativity that results in the empowerment, well-being, emancipation, and competency of individuals is an effort in human capital development.

Human capital development is about supporting and investing in people, using a variety of means, including education, training, coaching, and internships to enhance skills and competencies in the production of goods and provision of services. The philosophy of ODeL is a motivation for skills and competency development among workers, entrepreneurs and busy professionals. We can achieve peace, end extreme poverty, control diseases, disaster, war, insecurity, improve well-being, increase productivity, reduce illiteracy and create more inclusive relationships through the ODeL methods of education delivery

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Any effort to increase human knowledge, enhance skills, competencies, and productivity and stimulate the resourcefulness of individuals is an effort in human capacity development. This study focuses on the need to analyse how ODeL as an innovative study delivery alternative has contributed to the enhancement of human well-being, skills and competencies that empower the learners to use their new skills and knowledge for personal enhancements, community developments and global participation.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by the theory of digital transformation (Educational Transformation Theory). Professor Fullan Michael, a Canada-based educational researcher propounded the Theory of Education Transformation. Fullan (2013) pointed out that to achieve improvement

and positive changes in the education system, all components of the education system (leadership style, pedagogy, policy and curriculum) must interact together to achieve a transformation based on collaborations, shared vision, continuous learning and innovations. He emphasized the involvement of all education stakeholders (policymakers, decision-makers, students, administrators and teachers) using a holistic approach.

Digital transformation (DT) in ODeL is simply the application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the effective facilitation of teaching and learning. Digital transformation in education involves the 3Rs: having the Right people using the Right process in the Right system.

Digital innovation can promote access to educational opportunities, improve the globalization of educational administration, encourage inclusion, deliver quality teaching and learning, chart pathways for lifelong learning, strengthen learning management systems, promote internationalization and transnational education, monitor teaching-learning processes, and encourage collaborations and partnerships.

As illustrated in Figure 1, there are two perspectives of digital transformation within organizations (schools) known as technology-centric and actor-centric. Transformation can occur at the level of technology to become more flexible and improve the teacher-learner interface and the rate at which changes occur. The actors such as the students, teachers and school administrators can also transform areas such as leadership styles, school culture, technical capacities and the teaching-learning environment.

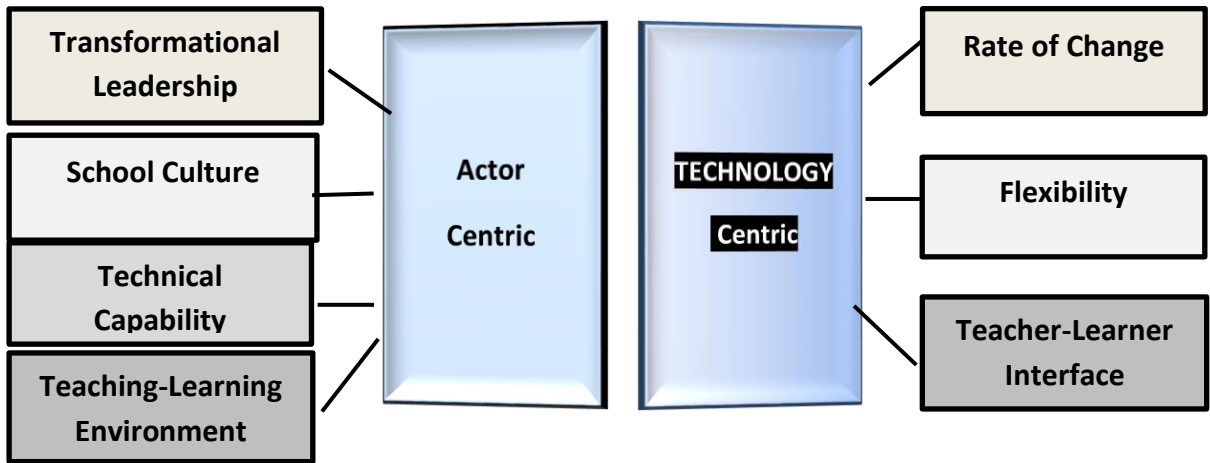


Figure 1. Model of Educational Transformation of ODeL
Source: Ayoko, Orifah, Ojo & Orifah (2024)

4. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative study and a literature review in the interpretive research paradigm. Data was collected from secondary sources, arranged into themes, and analyzed for content. This research approach looks at issues historically and holistically by addressing specific issues on the developments of ODeL, and how it contributes to human capital development (HCD), professional competencies, mass empowerment and poverty alleviation.

5. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

5. 1. Concept of Human Capacity Development

According to Adamu (2002), human capital formation transcends the mere acquisition of intellectual ability through the formal education system towards the transformation of the total man to enhance his productivity. He argued that human capital investment is an indispensable component of the development process and a force that can help in tackling inequalities and poverty in any nation. Human capacity development (HCD) is the human ability and competency acquired through knowledge, and skills received from education, training coaching, mentoring and experience; and facilitated by an enabling environment to boost the productivity and capability for personal, economic and community development. Anuwar (2008) noted that the role of universities in HCD is to supply the required skills for national economies and to encourage the drive within the national population for a process of "up-skilling" by providing massive access to higher education. According to Olakulehin (2008), open, distance learning through the National Open University of Nigeria has contributed massively to the human capital development of Nigeria based on the "work and learn" motto of the institution.

5. 2. Conceptual Issues in Open and Distance Learning

Open and distance learning was initially referred to as "Distance Learning. The concept "Distance Learning" emerged from the idea of "Distance Education" which emanated from "Correspondence Education" which itself originated from "Non-formal Education". Historically, Open and Distance Learning emerged as a result of the inability of numerous qualified candidates to access regular or conventional higher education institutions.

5. 2. 1. Non-Formal Education

Non-formal education is a structured educational programme that occurs outside the formal school system but its outcome may be similar to those produced by the formal school system. The education delivery process and the learning environment are different from those obtained within the formal school system. Non-formal education is flexible in the sense that learning is through discussions involving the learners and the facilitators.

Learners in Non-Formal School settings have the motivation to study so there is no need for punishment or praise. The first distance education program known as "Correspondence Education" was conceived from the concept of non-formal education

5. 2. 2. Correspondence Education

Isaac Pitman originated correspondence education in 1840 when he began to teach shorthand by post to dispersed learners in any part of the world (Rowntree, 1992). Pitman and his learners have communicated through posts for many years. The popularity of this initiative made different topics and subjects to be taught through correspondence education. This was the beginning of distance education

According to Jeffries (2011), correspondence education involves the use of a "pen and paper" to pass information between a facilitator and a learner or group of learners with the view to facilitate teaching and learning using post or surface transportation as its means of communication.

5. 2. 3. Distance Education

Distance education occurs when the teacher and the learners are geographically separated. It is a process whereby a qualified facilitator or institution presents information in a learnable way to teach an individual or group of individuals to learn at a distance using available and acceptable media, methods and information and communication technology to enable learners to access needed information at a distance.

5. 2. 4. Distance Learning

Distance learning is a model of education that emphasizes independent learning through a facilitator who is usually separated from the learner by spatial or mental distance using ICT as a medium. The facilitator presents instructions in a learnable form through an acceptable medium or platform to one or a group of learners who have shown readiness to learn. The main difference between Distance Education and Distance Learning is that the facilitator does the most in distance education while the learners take the responsibility to learn in distance learning mode. In distance learning, pedagogy is transformative learning that allows the learner to use his understanding and the information at his disposal to contribute constructively according to his ability without recourse to the course facilitator or institution that produced the learning materials. Distance learning applies the principles of distance education but with a high tolerance for interpretations and application of learning outcomes.

5. 2. 5. Open and Distance Learning

The prefix “Open” was added to “Distance Learning” to signify that apart from being learning managed from a distance it is also “Open Learning” wherein “Open Learning” is the educational delivery method that autonomously enables people to learn conveniently at the time, place and space which satisfy their comforts, and circumstances. The prefix "Open" was attached to Distance Learning as a result of three significant developments that occurred at the tail end of the 20th century. The first was the criticisms made against the formal school system that the cost to erect and maintain it is high and that the formal school system cannot meet the demand from the people that would need education due to the inelasticity of the wall-to-wall school system. In addition, a lot of wastage through a high percentage of failure of its products at private and public examinations was noted (Garg & Lesotho, 2009; Biao, 1992). Secondly, according to Preece & Biao (2011), the fallout of the 1947 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was that education should be enlisted as a saleable commodity in the international market (internationalization of education), This pronouncement facilitated the development of Open and Distance Learning. Thirdly, the phenomenon of globalization which turned the world into a global village resulted in educational interaction and collaboration among societies which eventually opened up learning opportunities to many people irrespective of their geographical location and spatial time. (Rowntree, 1992).

5. 3. The shift from Open and Distance Learning (ODL) to Open, Distance and e-Learning (ODeL)

The introduction of modern ICT software and hardware encourages e-learning, digital learning, or online learning from a distance, and ODeL students are expected to embrace this transformation and have regular access to and be able to make effective use of modern ICT facilities to interact with their peers and lecturers synchronously and asynchronously and

download their study materials without physical contacts or waiting for the study materials to be shipped to them. According to Carswell, Thomas, Petre & Price (2000) increased interaction in ODeL results in a reduction in distance barriers between the students and the lecturers. As shown in Figure 2 below, ODeL promotes the autonomy of learners to learn synchronously and asynchronously.

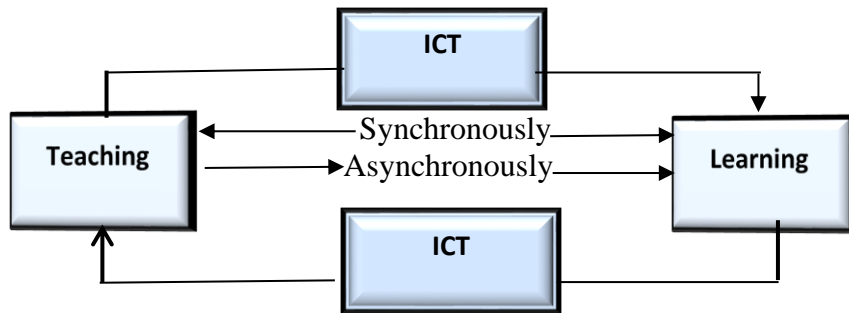


Figure 2. Teaching-Learning Model in ODeL
Source: Ayoko, Orifah Ojo & Orifah (2024)

The introduction of ODeL has widened the opportunities for a marginalized population like childbearing-aged women to access quality education and training because they can now study within their homes due to family commitments. They can study at their own pace and acquire skills and competencies for personal development while, at the same time, meeting up with family commitments and job responsibilities (Brunner, 1991).

The current waves of change across the world have impacted the way we live, work and learn due to technological, social, and cultural factors (Wheeler, 2000).

5. 4. The Roles of Open Distance and e-Learning (ODeL) in Human Capital Development

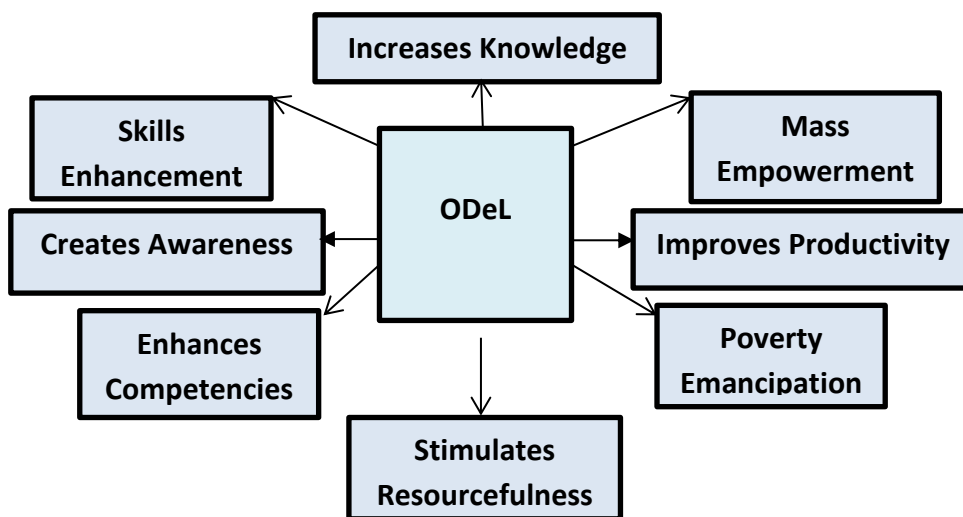


Figure 3. Model of ODeL Roles in Human Capital Development
Source: Author's Conceptualization

ODeL is a viable tool for equity and mass education for public awareness, political emancipation, economic transformations and social development as illustrated in Figure 3.

The following are some of the ways ODeL can contribute to human resources development.

5. 4. 1. Sustainable Development

For the global goals to become a reality, better education of the masses is inevitable and ODeL plays a vital role in mass education. Education for sustainable development (ESD) promotes the development of the competence, skills, knowledge, values, and expected actions required to create a sustainable world.

Schultz (1961) stated that “education not only improves individual choices available to mankind, but an educated population provides the type of skilled labour necessary for industrial development and economic growth”. Mass higher education makes access to higher education open not only to the elite segments of society but also to the representatives of other social groups that previously did not have such opportunities (Kurennoy, 2011).

5. 4. 2. Sustaining Life-Long Learning

Lifelong learning is an educational event in all ramifications in the entire life cycle. The concept of lifelong learning as expressed by Barrett & Garrett (2009) is to imbibe a permanent interest to reconvert and improve the competencies and skills of individuals throughout their lifetime. These scenarios have led individuals to be constantly updating and undergoing the reconversion of their skills, values, competencies, and habits, which will help to adjust to dynamic changes and keep abreast with global transformations through the ODeL educational process

5. 4. 3. Promotes Digital Literacy and Skills

Digital literacy skills are the ability to apply ICT in daily life through digital technologies like internet platforms, social media, and mobile devices to learn, interact, do business and pass across or receive information.

Digital literacy and skills help to streamline work processes in the workplace because less time is spent on repetitive tasks and staff can concentrate on higher-value work that contributes to productivity, increase general knowledge and make collaborations within departments more effective. Digital literacy helps to develop technological skills, understand how to access and disseminate online information, learn authorship rules, and promote social networking and interactions.

5. 4. 4. Cost Effectiveness

ODeL is often the most cost-effective means of acquiring quality and affordable education because of the logistical reduction of movement to and from the university location. Cost-effectiveness is the degree of effectiveness, productivity or performance of something or a program concerning the total cost or efforts expended. The cost-effectiveness makes it affordable and encouraging to acquire an education, this leads to greater opportunities for the majority of people to get the education that will improve their professionalism, chances of getting employed, job promotion and increase in income

5. 4. 5. Bridging Demand and Supply Gap

According to Nwaocha & Iyiama (2008), many stakeholders in the education sector are interested in ODeL because it allows greater access and affordability to quality educational opportunities. People who would have found it impossible to attend the traditional or wall-to-wall school system benefit from ODeL. The demand for higher education cannot be met by conventional universities due to the bottleneck involved in the admission process. The flexibility of ODL makes it possible to access quality education for those denied the opportunity due to an increase in demand. Distance education helps in extending the market opportunity for education to candidates who have not been previously considered. The digital transformation has bridged the gap between demand and supply for education and it has contributed to the acceptance, growth, and implementation of distance education programs in Nigeria (Aderinoye & Ojokheta, 2004).

5. 4. 6. In-Service Training

ODL can be embraced by those who did not complete their studies or education before they joined the workforce due to family commitments or financial constraints and are unable to combine their work with studies but have a strong desire for higher studies and could not do so because of the limited offer in the traditional institution of higher learning. ODeL offers a platform for organizing in-service training for the working-class staff without wasting long periods of productive time because the staff being trained can `work and learn`. Working-class citizens can also pursue higher degrees that will enhance their job performance and productivity easily due to the flexible nature of the ODL method. The training received through ODeL results in skills that lead to promotion and increased income

5. 4. 7. Economic Growth and Development

ODeL institutions also generate revenues that contribute to the gross domestic product of the country and for internal use. Graduates of ODeL become learned and contribute positively to the nation`s economic growth and development through their various endeavours. Students have access to acquire degrees up to whatever level they want, hence contributing to the economic growth of the nation through better performance, research and development and professional practices.

5. 4. 8. Balancing Inequalities and Marginalization

Educational marginalization is a process that encourages the systematic denial of individuals or groups of people their right to obtain quality education or social capacities through education. The tradition and religious belief of early marriage or domestication of women deprives the majority of the female population of acquiring higher education in Nigeria but the equality feature of ODeL makes it possible for marginalized citizens like the prisoners, child-bearing age mothers, the physically disabled and people staying in remote localities to enjoy distance learning programs to be useful to themselves, family and the nation by contributing their quota to the development and economic growth of the nation. This promotes inclusive education and education for all without discrimination. The massive education received through technology-based ODeL has a modernizing influence on the beliefs, values, behaviour and developmental orientation of the learners by bringing about change in the thinking and outlook of the learners.

5. 4. 9. Wealth Distribution

The vast majority of the population lives below the poverty level and is located in rural areas in Nigeria, as a result, they are unable to attend urban-located higher institutions and thus remain deprived of higher education despite their keen interest and merit. The ODeL initiative is a tool to reduce poverty levels among the citizenry through the awareness created by the curriculum and skills acquired through exposure to education, beneficiaries are better positioned to be gainfully employed by the government or corporate organizations and are better informed on ways they can become self-employed or become employers of labour. The education received through ODeL develops the manpower capacities of the beneficiaries as a result there is improvement in the economic situation of the nation

5. 4. 10. Social Enhancement

ODeL methodology has several potential benefits for various stakeholders in the education and development process by bringing about changes in the outlook and thinking of the individual and improvement in the social status of the individual which motivates optimum performance and productivity. The wider range of opportunities for academic qualifications and freedom of access and equality makes it possible for civil servants, Men of the armed forces and other security and paramilitary agencies to register in large numbers for distance learning to enhance their job promotions, capacities and social status.

5. 4. 11. Internationalization and Globalization of Education

The effects and increased application of ICT in our day-to-day activities and the collaborative synergies towards globalization have reduced the world into that of a small village (McLuhan & Powers, 1989). The ODeL through the use of appropriate ICTs as a medium have the potential to significantly contribute to local and global contents of educational instructions. ODeL provides a platform for developing countries to learn new ways of achieving desired results. According to Leask (2004), “The use of the Internet by all students to access information, communicate with teachers, and interact and collaborate with other scholars and learners all over the world means that distance and time are no longer barriers to international exposure and awareness for any student with access to a computer and a modem”. This international awareness and exposure results in skill and competence for human resources development”

5. 4. 12. Developing Competencies

ODeL provides flexibility through `openness` and extends opportunities to many learners across a wide geographical space to obtain higher institution degrees that enhance their social acceptance and contribute to their skills and professional competence. In a study conducted by Ofoha (2012), to investigate the comparability of the competencies of ODeL and conventional university final-year students.

The study confirmed that student teachers who enrolled in the Primary Education degree program of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) reported a high level of professional competence and enhanced self-esteem, and were also found comparable with those of the non-NOUN group pursuing similar programs through conventional university. It was concluded that the public should rest assured of the credibility of ODeL as an avenue for the development of human capacity.

5. 4. 13. Literacy and Self-Development Skills

The illiteracy level in society is reduced through the massive education human rights awareness, and orientation received in the ODeL institutions.

ODeL helps in developing skills, attitudes, motivation and knowledge for self-development and employment. The `no barrier` coverage of ODeL plays a vital role in the dissemination of required skills and knowledge that will help them to improve and sustain their livelihoods to a large population of people since it has the advantage of reaching out to learners who are geographically dispersed throughout the nation.

Nigeria is blessed with human resources that need to be adequately equipped with the literacy and skills needed to enhance personal development. Thus, it is crystal clear that ODeL promotes self-study and independent research skills in the learners.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study agrees that the mass education delivery methodology of ODeL plays a crucial role in the development of human capital and by extension, the national development.

The developmental force of any society is its human resources. However, despite the numerous contributions of ODeL towards the development of human capital, the study did not come across concrete national policy implementation geared towards the dedicated funding and infrastructural development of open-distance education in Nigeria.

- 1) Government should focus on the establishment and implementation of national policies that will address issues of funding, stable power (energy), ICT innovations and technical training for the efficient running of open and distance learning programs. It is suggested that: 1) To contribute to human resources development that will compete globally, institutions that operate open and distance and e-learning programs must not concentrate on access or quantity alone but must maintain a high standard of quality education.
- 2) Adequate information and communication facilities, internet connectivity and power (energy) should be provided by policymakers for effective learners-teacher interactions and facilitation.
- 3) The human resources need of the nation should be put into consideration when designing programs and curricula for learners through open distance mode

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