11 OL & DE as a Means of Increasing Access to Higher Learning in Kenya

Manyasi N. Beatrice

Lecturer KIM, Eldoret Branch, Kenya
Email: beatomanyasi @yahoo.com

1 Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate the utilisation of OL&DE. The objectives were: to find out the characteristics of learners in tertiary institutions, to find out whether OL&DE is used in the institutions to facilitate access to higher education, and to examine the challenges faced by the institutions in implementing OD&DE. A Case Study Research Design was used. The design enabled the researcher to have smaller samples that facilitated in-depth investigations. The findings revealed that the characteristics of learners are: young learners who have just completed form four, diploma holders who may want to enroll for a degree programme, graduates who may want to pursue a post-graduate diploma or degree programme, those in employment and want to further their studies and refugees, mainly Somalis and Sudanese. Open learning is practiced in the institution. They are flexible in the requirements for admission for various courses but distance education is not practiced due to lack of trained personnel, technology and support services. The researcher made the following recommendations: The Government of Kenya should come up with a comprehensive policy concerning OL&DE at all levels. In order for high quality distance education programmes to flourish, professional development opportunities for educational administrators related to leadership and support of distance education innovation should be provided. Training, information and on-going support regarding developing, managing, and evaluating distance education programmes should be provided for administrators of tertiary institutions and universities, deans, department chairs and peer review committees. Training and on-going support should be provided for classified staff members to provide support services for DE students after implementing the programme.

2 Introduction

Distance education, or distance learning, is a field of education that focuses on the pedagogy and 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. Distance education courses that require a physical on-site presence for any reason including the taking of examinations is considered to be a hybrid or blended course or programme (Moore and Kearsley, 2005).

As a force contributing to social and economic development, open and distance learning is fast becoming an accepted and indispensable part of the mainstream of educational systems in both developed and developing countries, with particular emphasis for the latter. This growth has been stimulated in part by the interest among educators and trainers in the use of new, Internet-based and multimedia technologies, and also by the recognition that traditional ways of organising education need to be reinforced by innovative methods, if the fundamental right of all people to learning is to be realised. The globalisation of distance education provides many opportunities for developing countries for the realisation of their education goals. Two main factors have led to an explosion of interest in distance learning: the growing need for continual skills upgrading and retraining; and the technological advances that have made it possible to teach more and more subjects at a distance. As

member states and their governments become more aware of the UNESCO initiatives in this area, including its role in capacity building and international co-operation (Holmberg, 2005).

3   Distance Education

Distance education is any educational process in which all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner, with the effect that all or most of the communication between teachers and learners is through an artificial medium, either electronic or print. By definition, in distance education the normal or principal means of communication is through technology. Obviously teachers in conventional classrooms may use technology as a supplement to their teaching, but since it is not their principal means of communication the classroom is not considered to be distance education (Moore and Kearsley, 2005).

The open nature of education that is mediated by electronic or printed technologies might be formally institutionalised in such policies as open admissions, freedom of selection of what, when and where to learn. Distance education organisations may indeed limit the extent of their openness, but traditionally they have shown a strong bias towards supporting the freedom of individual learners to exercise choice over one or more of the main processes of their learning. Typically this involves helping learners take responsibility for aspects such as what they learn, how they learn, where they learn, how quickly they learn, who to turn to for help and whether, when and where to have their learning assessed. The openness of distance education is also seen in relatively flexible organisational structures, delivery and communication patterns, and the use of various technologies in support of learning. Open and distance learning is usually contrasted with conventional or face-to-face education, which may be described as the form of education which takes place in a classroom or an auditorium (Holmberg, 2005). However, both distance and face-to-face education are labels covering a wide range of variations and methods. Face-to-face education may vary along a continuum from one-to-one tutorials, group activities, seminars and classroom teaching to lectures for large audiences. In each case, different educational philosophies may be applied and different methods may be used. Face-to-face education may be supported by a range of media, and may be combined with periods of independent study. In a similar way, distance education has a variety of forms, according to the underlying educational philosophy, organisational approach and choice of technology, and distance educators may incorporate into their programmes an element of face-to-face teaching.

4   Literature

4.1   *UNESCO's Initiatives in Open and Distance Learning*

UNESCO's initiatives in open and distance learning are based on its overall priority to ensure the *right to education for all*. While the use of distance education was given early support by the organisation, new developments in ICTs, in particular the Internet and the website have radically increased the demand for lifelong education but also provided new means to meet the demand (UNESCO, 2000b). Facing the educational challenges of the 21st century, UNESCO continues, through its support of open and distance learning, to contribute to the construction of knowledge societies in a lifelong learning context.Within its overall priority, UNESCO focuses on fostering basic education for all to meet the commitments of the Dakar World Education Forum, encouraging and supporting action in its member states with special emphasis on co-operative efforts to develop open and distance learning systems and programmes to the benefit of those deprived of basic learning skills. Great attention is given to open and distance learning to meet the educational needs of the adult 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 (UNESCO (2000c).

UNESCO continues to strengthen the role of open and distance learning in the diversification of educational delivery systems, notably, for technical and vocational education, encouraging

co-operation and partnership between enterprises, professional bodies and distance teaching institutions. Support is also given to open and distance learning to meet the special **needs of the disabled, migrants, cultural and linguistic minorities, refugees, populations in crisis situations, who cannot be efficiently reached by** traditional delivery systems.

UNESCO gives priority to national capacity-building, including activities to enhance policies, planning, administration, financing, personnel, production, technologies, and other capacities essential to the establishment and management of efficient ODL systems (UNESCO, 2000d).

4.2   Benefits of ODL

ODL means more freedom of access, and thereby a wider range of opportunities for learning and qualification. The barriers that may be overcome by distance learning include not only geographical distance, but also other confining circumstances, such as personal constraints, cultural and social barriers and lack of educational infrastructure.

For the student it is often a cheaper alternative to pursuing a course through conventional methods. Since many people cannot afford to leave their work in order to study, it is important that distance education and training may be combined with work. Distance and open learning may also mean a more learner-centred approach, allowing greater flexibility and choice of content as well as more personal organisation of the learning programme.

For employers, ODL offers the possibility of organising learning and professional development in the workplace itself, which is often more flexible and saves costs of travel, subsistence, and others. The use of distance learning often puts both the firm and employees in a position of co-investment (of money and time) in the pursuit of common goals, based on shared values and culture. It increases productivity and supports the development of communication and other work-related skills. With sufficient numbers of employees being trained, ODL is usually cost-effective. Other advantages for the employer include the increased availability of the employee during the training programmes, and the portability of training programmes and processes. These advantages to learners and employers are also important features from the perspective of governments.

Governments have introduced distance education provision in order to:

1. increase access to learning and training opportunity;
2. provide increased opportunities for updating, retraining and personal enrichment;
3. improve cost-effectiveness of educational resources;
4. support the quality and variety of existing educational structures;
5. enhance and consolidate capacity;
6. balancing inequalities between age groups;
7. extending geographical access to education;
8. delivering educational campaigns and other education for large audiences;
9. providing speedy and efficient training for key target groups;
10. expanding the capacity for education in new and multidisciplinary subject areas;
11. offering the combination of education with work and family life;
12. developing multiple competencies through recurrent and continuing education;
13. enhancing the international dimension of educational experience; and
14. Improving the quality of existing educational services.

The Ministry of Education Science and Technology in Kenya has come up with sessional papers on policy framework for education, training and research to meet the challenges of education, training and research in the country. Among the many goals and objectives of education in Kenya, the following are in full cognisance of the national and international goals meant to promote OD & DE.

1. To enhance access, equity and quality at all levels of education and training by 2010;
2. To promote and popularise ICT as well as science and technology education by 2008;

3.   To promote and popularise ODE at all levels of education and training by 2010; and

4.   To increase the proportion of women in teaching, administration and research at all levels of higher institutions by 2010.

The above objectives can only be achieved through ODE besides conventional methods of education (Sessional Paper No. 1. of 2005).

4.3   The use of OL & DE in Tertiary Institutions in Kenya

Distance education focuses on teaching and learning. Open learning is more concerned with the policies and practices that permit entry to learning with as few barriers as possible (Daniel, 2004).

Open learning usually describes courses flexibly designed to meet individual requirements. It tries to remove barriers to admission for education and suggest a learner-centred philosophy (Agalo, 2006). It calls for policies that empower learners through self directed learning. It takes into account the diversity of learner profiles and that learning process has to take place at both individual and organisational levels. Tertiary institutions are important because they enable students who may not have qualified to join the university to have access to education and training. They also act as a link to university education as those who excel in their diploma courses are allowed to join university. Most tertiary institutions offer certificate and Diploma courses. The qualifications are recognised by the Government and employers through the Federation of Kenya Employers (FKE), Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT), Public Service Commission (PSC), Directorate of Personnel Management (DPM) and other organisations in Kenya. The institutions offer:

1.   Bridging courses;
2.   Certificate courses;
3.   Advanced certificate courses;
4.   Diploma courses;
5.   A few do offer Degree and Masters courses.

5   Objectives

The specific objectives were:

1.   To find out the characteristics of learners in the tertiary institutions.
2.   To find out whether ODL is used in the institutions to facilitate access to higher education.
3.   To examine the challenges faced by the institutions in implementing ODL.

6   Methodology

A Case Study Research Design was used. The design enabled the researcher to have smaller samples that facilitated in-depth investigations. The case study research design generally entails intensive, descriptive and holistic analysis of a single entity. The design enabled the researcher to study a single entity in depth in order to gain insight into the other cases. (Oso and Onen, 2005). Most case studies are based on the premise that a case can be typical of many other cases in a location (Mugenda and Mugenda 2003). Data was collected using **interviews** with the tuition and examination officer and **document analysis.**

7   Findings

7.1   Characteristics of Learners

1.   Young learners who have just completed form four.
2.   Diploma holders who may want to enroll for a degree programme.
3.   Graduates who may want to study a post-graduate diploma or degree programme

4.   Those in employment and want to further their studies.
5.   Refugees, mainly Somalis and Sudanese.

7.2   Use of OL & DE

Given that open learning concerns practices that permit entry to learning with few barriers, it is practiced in the institution. They are flexible in the requirements for admission for various courses as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Requirements for Admission of Courses.

Courses Offered	Qualifications and Entry Requirements
Bridging Courses	KCSE mean grade D or equivalent
Certificate Courses	- KCSE mean grade C – - A Bridging course - O Level Division III
Advanced Certificate Courses	- A Certificate Course - CPA I or CPS I - A Level Certificate - KNEC Certificate from a recognised institution - KATC Final - Minimum one year Diploma from a recognised institution
Diploma Courses	- Degree from a recognised University - CPA II or CPS II - An Advanced Certificate Course from a recognised Institution - Minimum 2 years Diploma from a recognised Institution - Higher Diploma
Degree Courses	A Diploma or equivalent from a recognised institution
Masters courses	A Degree or equivalent from a recognised institution

Source: Data from Documents Analysed, 2009.

7.3   *Learning Time, Courses Taken and Exams*

It is very flexible. One can enroll for day, evening or Saturday classes. The openness is also in the courses enrolled. A student can learn different courses during the day, evening and on Saturday. Exams are done at learners' pace. Learners can defer the exams until they are ready to sit for them.

7.4   *Use of Distance Learning*

This mode of learning is hardly used in the institutions. The institutions lacks the necessary technology. They only have a few computers, which are used by lecturers to access material from the Internet. Distance learning is minimally used in the supervision of projects. Lecturers supervise students through e-mails from a distance.

8   Challenges

8.1   *Instructional Quality and Professional Development*

There are special instructional competencies and information design considerations for distance modes. Lecturers and administrators lack training in OL & DE.

8.2   *Administrators*

Administrators lack training about OL & DE. Strategic managers have no clear guide lines on the use of OL & DE.

8.3   *Training for DE Support Staff*

Training and ongoing support on the technologies and best practices associated with delivery of high quality services in a distance format may be needed. There is no training provided for classified staff to provide support services for DE in the institution.

8.4   *Technology*

The institution lacks the technology to be used in open and distance education. It only has a few computers, which are used by lecturers to access the Internet for teaching materials and for project supervision.

The technologies used in distance education are divided into two groups: synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous technology is used in distance education lessons in which learning is occurring in different places but at the same time. Asynchronous technology is used in lessons in which learning is occurring in different places but also at different times (UNESCO, 2000b).

Synchronous technologies include:
1. Telephone
2. Broadcast video
3. Internet chat
4. Videoconferencing
5. Net meeting.

Asynchronous technologies include:
1. Voice mail/fax
2. Videocassette
3. Audiocassette
4. E-mail
5. Print materials

8.5   Finance

This is a major challenge faced by the institution. Initial ODL programmes need a lot of funds to train the staff, establish study centres and other learner support services. Student Support Services in e-learning are classified as: learner support and learning support.

The learner support grid comprises:

1. Information Phase
2. Guidance Phase
3. Registration Phase
4. Integration Phase
5. Final Results Phase
6. Accreditation Assistance Phase
7. Guidance on Further Study Phase

8.6   Learning Support

They support both student to student and student to tutor interaction. Included might be:

1. Dispatch of printed and other physical learning materials
2. Instruction on Online Learning techniques
3. Bulletin Boards. Online discussion rooms for all users to post comments, questions, learning support documents, and others.
4. Email. The facility to contact tutors and/or peers.
5. Online tutorials. Online tutorials to support students in meeting their learning objectives.
6. Face to face tutorials. The facility to arrange online, face-to-face tutorials that support the students in meeting their learning objectives.
7. Resources/Library. Online access to additional material to support student learning.
8. Student-Self Assessment. The online facility to check learning progress during the course. The results of these tests are not usually recorded towards the final result.
9. Automated Assessment. Typically occurs at the end of a course, produces a result which may count towards certification.
10. Tutor Assessment. The facility to send work to a tutor / teacher for correction and evaluation.
11. Assessment Feedback – electronic
12. Assessment Feedback – manual
13. Student Portfolios. A personal home page per student to allow them to introduce themselves to online colleagues, provide alternative sources of course information to colleagues.

9   Conclusion

To achieve the philosophy of "Education and training for social cohesion as well as human and economic development," there is need for the Government of Kenya to come up with more comprehensive strategic and tactical planning. To embrace equity issues such as education for all, the way forward is to facilitate OL and DE programmes. The advantages of distance learning are:

1. One can complete most of the classes at his or her convenience. Most of the classes are asynchronous, which means you do not have to attend a lecture at a particular time and place. You can review the assignments and do your homework during off-hours or from home.
2. You can live anywhere, study from anywhere while pursuing the education of your choice. You do not have to live in the same city or the same country to attend the learning

institution of your choice. You can study wherever you have access to a computer and Internet connection.

3.   Gain extra knowledge. You can transfer the computer and Internet skills that you will gain in the process of your distance learning experience to other facets of your life.

4.   Self-paced learning. For slow and quick learners. This reduces stress and increases satisfaction.

5.   Accessibility. Online classes address physical accessibility issues that some people with limited mobility encounter when taking traditional classes. You do not have to worry about gaining access to a classroom or sitting on uncomfortable desks. Instead, you can use your comfortable furniture in your home while enjoying free movement and a chance to further your education.

10   Recommendations

1.   The Government of Kenya should come up with a comprehensive policy concerning OL & DE at all levels.

2.   In order for high quality distance education programmes to flourish, professional development opportunities for educational administrators related to leadership and support of distance education innovation should be provided.

3.   Training, information and on-going support regarding developing, managing, and evaluating distance education programmes should be provided for administrators of tertiary institutions and universities, deans, department chairs and peer review committees.

4.   Training and on-going support should be provided for classified staff members to   provide support services for DE students after implementing the programme.

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