
Managing Open and Distance Learning as a Tool for Enhanced Access and Balanced Development in Cameroon

Dr. Joseph Besong Besong¹

Abstract

The study sought to determine the relationship between open and Distance learning as a tool for enhanced access and balanced development in Cameroon ODL educational programmes constitute different programmes access to qualitative education for manpower development. Productivity and job enrichment. Three hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The sample consisted of 252 respondents from a population of 580. Data for the study were collected using open and distance learning enhanced access and balanced development questionnaire (ODLABDQ). Data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment correlation and population t - test statistics. The hypotheses were tested.05 level of significance. The results of the study revealed that open and distance learning' as a tool for enhanced access significantly correlated with balanced development. The study further revealed that open and distance learning serves as an instrument or tool of mass instruction geared towards balancing development in terms of manpower development, productivity and job enrichment of the beneficiaries and also the society in terms of education for all (EFA). The study also profiled some recommendations.

Key words: open and distant learning, enhanced and access and balanced development



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INTRODUCTION

Every achievement man has made so far can be attributed to education of one type or another. Similarly, whatsoever has not been achieved can also be attributed to lack of education.

Definition of terminology used in the study

It is pertinent in an academic work of this nature to attempt to define the key words or phrases in order, not only to demarcate subject boundaries but also to clarify semantic ambiguities. The key words or phrases include:

- Open and distance learning
- Enhanced and access balanced and development

Open and distance learning (ODL) is a formatory education strategy which is used to solve the problems of over - growing number of candidates which need higher education. It serves as a bridge for the educationally disadvantaged members of the society. Open and distance learning refers to educational patterns, approaches and strategies that permit people to learn with no barriers in respect of time and space, age, and previous educational qualification - no entry qualification, no age limit, no regard to sex, race, tribe and state of origin (Alaezi, 2005). It means an irreplaceable key to understanding our world ourselves, to anticipate the future and to husband our national environment for the development benefits of all human beings. Perinban (2005) opines that it is an ethic that adhors the present imbalance in the basic human development or conditions, as imbalance in access to health care, nutrition diet, shelter, and education. Keegan (1998) and Otto - Peters (1993) sees open and distance learning as an independent studies as a way of liberating the students from the fetters of school and college routine ODL is a special form of education in which.

- Teacher and students work apart from each other i.e. at a distance
- Teachers and students do no communicate eye - ball - to - eye ball with each other.
- Printed materials are exchanged with aid of a mailing system.
- Learning usually takes place in the students' home.
- Teaching and learning process assumes the form of self study but guided by the teacher.

¹ Department of Sciences of Education, Higher Teachers' Training College, University of Maroua,
Email: besongjoseph@yahoo.com

- Learning and teaching process allows a degree of openness with regards to access, age, goals, methods, duration, location etc.
- The student does not cease to work for living as it is a study alongside work (Otto – Peters, 1995).
- ODL accommodates diverse learning styles. It meets the specific and special educational need of variety of learners.

That is, it also dwells and thrives on economies of scale.

Enhanced (Access): according to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1995; 451), enhanced is in the past tense of enhance which means to improve something. In this context, it means to improve the means of having the right way (the access) to attain qualitative education through the ODL. Enhanced denotes those characteristics of accessibility to qualitative education for balanced development. ODL education has modern means of imparting knowledge and skills to students. For example, multi – media, internet, and televisions etc enhanced access to qualitative education. This method allows the student enough time to cater for his SOCIO economic demands – without interrupting his studies.

Access (or characteristic): Features of ODL for enhanced access and balanced development. Access is defined as away or right approach or entry (Chamber Universal Learners Dictionary, 2004) ODL has many characteristics which have given it the value for increased educational access or right approach required for balanced developments. Dodds (2005) states these access or characteristics:

- ODL accommodates
- Openness of entry, time and space
- Massification of education
- Quality in teaching and learning
- Flexibility in the use of multi – media
- Innovation of curricular
- Technology for learning and research
- Keeping the human face and opportunities for many

There are other enhanced accesses to qualitative education through ODL for balanced development. Alaezi (2005) list included:

- Allowance for open and flexible entry requirements to increased access and equity.
- Degrees, diplomas and certificates are awarded by cumulative credits to give learners time to attend to their personal – social commitments.
- Courses are organized and prepared by specially designated course coordinators and programmes leaders including a variety of local and international experts to provide up – to date and latest information of easy access, group, retention and retrieval.
- Programmes are made available to learners at their chosen places, homes, school or work places – to be completed at the students own time and pace and at affordable costs.

Balanced development: Balanced development according to state acro – economy based on effective and efficient production. In other words, manpower is developed for effective and efficient production in his work place.

- Alleviation of capacity for constraints for economic, human resources and rural development.
- Capacity building for human resources development especially in the areas of acute deficiencies such as vocational and technical education science and technology.
- Education for all, especially to reduce or totally eliminate illiteracy and poverty.
- Life – long and life – wide education in order to build a learning and knowledge – based society.
- Access to and capitalization on emerging market and opportunities both within the state, nation and globally.
- Avenue for transforming our higher education sectors to make our institutions respond to contemporary changes, development and needs of Cameroon in general.
- Providing solution to the perennial problems of teacher education.
- Appreciating, educating the citizens about, and using information communication (ICT) to technology and accelerate national, state and community development and provide an organized entry into the global information super highway.

- Generating spin - off effects on other sectors of national development such as raising development in telecommunications, information industry, technology broadcasting, postal and information and the development of many educationally related small scale industries.
- Alleviating budgetary constraints as expenditure on open and distance education has been shown in other countries to be as low as 30% of the total cost of the conventional form of education beyond the take - off.
- Massive teacher training for all levels of education, especially the universal basic education.
- Planning for and educating all sectors of the / community on HIV/AIDs. In a nutshell, ODL is a tool that can enhance education, as a form of human resource development and satisfy the exceptionally large demand for education because of the huge and rapidly expanding population which is still mainly rural, remote under represented and marginalized. ODL education may be the only way for Cameroonians in general to provide access for all and achieve equitable representation and balanced by taking the distance out of education.

The Cameroon experience

In a bid to stimulate growth in education, the state has established universities. This is a welcome development in terms of enhanced access to qualitative education for balanced development. But on realization that the establishment of these universities meant adding to the State Polytechnic, Higher Teachers Training Colleges (ENS) of education and professional schools, one begins to wonder how possible these universities can provide access to the optimum population (i.e. workforce) of about 27,000 people who may need access to higher institutions, (Ministry of Economic & Planning, 2005). This is more so when one examines the manpower development in the under developed and State with a population of 14 million people, educationally disadvantaged. This may be due to the inadequate number of higher institutions in the country.

ODL should be a welcome tool for educational programme in the state, ODL seems is providing enhanced access to qualitative education in some fields that requires manpower development for job enrichment.

Statement of the problem

The growing need enhanced access to qualitative education as a tool for balanced development in Cameroon general cannot be over emphasized. The problem (s) envisaged may be due to the poor educational attainment of the members of the society and perhaps due to the backwardness of the state educationally in Africa and in the face of advanced contemporary society in global economy. This may be due to the inadequate number of higher institutions. Enhanced access to qualitative education may bring a balanced development and job enrichment. This may be the concern of ODL and contemporary higher institutions for manpower development as to increase the number of professionals in all facets of economic development. Teachers, Nurses, Accountants, Bankers, Economists, Engineers, Politicians and Businessmen to mention but a few need access to qualitative education for balanced development. Self employment individuals and staff in offices need development so as to be professionals increase productivity. The few higher institutions in the state cannot absorb those qualified or yearning for qualitative education including the teeming population of secondary leavers who are qualified for admission but do not have access for qualitative education for one reason or another. Qualitative education means producing, professionals, staff development for professionalism, technicians and lawyers to fit in the current call for science and technology in a competitive global economy. The pertinent question hitherto is "can ODL as a tool for education programmes fulfill the needs of the Cameroonians for enhanced access to qualitative education for balanced development"? This study seeks to provide answer to this question.

Purpose of the study

Specifically the purpose of the study is to find out the extent to which:

1. Qualitative education relate with enhanced access for balanced development.
2. Qualitative education relate with balanced development.
3. ODL relate with levels qualitative education.

Research questions

This research work seeks to provide answers to the following questions.

1. Does qualitative education significantly relate with enhanced access for balanced development?
2. Does qualitative education significantly relate with balanced development?
3. Does ODL significantly relate qualitative education for balanced development?

Research hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

1. Qualitative education does not significantly relate with enhanced access for balanced development.
2. Qualitative education does not significantly relate with balanced development.
3. Does ODL significantly relate with qualitative education for balanced development?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this study was the survey design because the study involved the use of a representative sample of 252 drawn from a population consisted of 580 students. Conclusions were drawn based on the analysis of the available data. The stratified simple random sampling, techniques were used to select a representative sample of the students for the study.

Instrumentation

The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire constructed by the researcher and titled, "Open and distance learning Access and balanced development questionnaire" (ODLABDQ) for students. It comprised two sections. Section one sought personal data such as sex, age, years of experience and qualification of the respondents, while section two consisted of questions based on the other variables such as educational qualification, manpower development and productivity. A4 - point likert type scale was used from Strongly Agree (SA) to Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SA). The respondents were required to express their degree of agreement or disagreement with the items by marking one of the four options.

The instrument was given to experts on test and measurement and colleagues who verted the instrument and it was found correct for both face and content validity.

The researcher conducted a reliability study in three centres with 30 students who were not included in the selected sample to ascertain its reliability. The reliability coefficient of 0.55 to 0.86 was obtained. This was high enough to consider the instrument reliable. The instrument was administered to the respondents questionnaire were filled and collected on the spot to avoid attrition. Out of 252 copies of instrument administered, 250 copies were correctly filled and returned. Thus, giving 99.2% return rate. Administration of the instrument took two weeks.

All positively worded items in the instrument were scored 4 points for Strongly Agree (SA), 3 points for Agree (A), 2 points for Disagree (SD) and 1 point for Strongly Disagree (SD). The scoring method was reserved for all negatively worded items. The data collected were analyzed using Pearson product and population t - test statistics.

RESULTS

H01: Qualitative education does not significantly relate with enhanced?

Table 1: Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the relationship with enhanced access for balanced development (n = 250)

Variable	$\sum y$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum xy$	r
	$\sum y$	$\sum y^2$		
Qualitative education	(X) 3205	42475		
			50635	0.50*
Enhanced access	(y) 3890	62250		
For balanced development				

*p<05; df=248, critical - r= 0.1946.

Table 1 shows that the observed - r vale of 0.1946 needed for significance at 05 level of significance and 248 degrees of freedom. Given this result, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is upheld. This finding suggests that enhanced access to qualitative education is needed for balanced development i.e. increases capacity building of human industry in different fields of economic development.

H₀₂: Qualitative education does not significantly relate with balanced development. The data for this hypothesis was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics. The result is presented in table 2.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the Relationship between Qualitative Education and Balanced Development (n = 250)

Variable	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$		
	$\sum y$	$\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	r
Qualitative education (x)	3415	47955		
			53700	0.38*
Balanced development (y)	3890	62250		

*p<05; df=248 critical - r = 0.1946.

Table 2 shows that the calculated r - value of 0.38 is greater than the critical r - value of 0.1946 required significance and 248 degrees of null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis upheld.

This means that there is a significant positive correlation between qualitative education and balanced development. The finding depicts that balanced development is associated with qualitative education. This is so because educated society is made or consisted of trained manpower in different fields of economic development.

H₀₃: ODL educational programmes significantly relate with qualitative education for balanced development.

The data for this hypothesis was analyzed using population t - test statistical. The result is presented in table 3.

Table3: Population t - test Analysis of the level of ODL educational programme for balanced development (n = 250).

Variable	N0.f				
	Items	Xe	Xo	SD	t
Expected level of ODL educational programmes	6	15.00			
					2.33*
Observed level of ODL educational programmes	6		15.56	3.75	

*p<.05; df = 249; critical - r = 1.960.

The data in table 3 reveal that the calculated t - value of 2.33 is greater than the critical t - value of 1.960 at 05 level of significance and 249 degrees of freedom. Given these results, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is upheld. This means that ODL educational programmes for balanced development are significantly high. That is, when the recipients have access to qualitative education there is bound to be improvements and balanced development.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

One of the findings of this study reveals a significant positive correlation between qualitative education and enhanced access to qualitative education for balanced development. This means that when people in Cameroon have access to qualitative education deprived them in conventional higher institutions through ODL educational programmes, they will improve and perform their duties efficiently. This finding is in consonant with Fabunmi (2004 p.258). he argues that the emergence of the ODL in'

Cameroon as Nigeria will help to create the required change in skills, values, attitudes, knowledge and so on that are relevant to the development of the people and the nation. This implies that when people are developed intellectually, their skills or methods of doing things is improved or modified.

Furthermore, the finding is supported by Imhabekhai (2004:212). He believes that a well – organized ODL can assist in training adult persons who have sufficient and responsive knowledge, skills, attitudes and values as would help them lead truly functional lives.

Therefore, ODL is a tool both theory – based and immediate practical applications. In other words, ODL is technologically mediated learning strategy in order to provide increased and equitable access to education and training and in order to have balanced development for productively for all the citizens in the country at large (Perinbam, 2005).

The third finding of the study reveals that ODL educational programmes in relationship with qualitative education for balanced development are significantly high.

This finding could be attributed to the fact that both enhanced access to qualitative education for balanced development is significantly high. This could be attributed to the fact that both the enhanced access to qualitative education for balanced development or manpower development and productivity seems to be adequately catered for by ODL educational programmes. This tool (i.e. ODL) is recognized as the central point for good education especially higher education for national development. It is a source for sustainable development and panacea for mass illiteracy, obscurantism, poverty, squalor, disease; de – industrialization and low – productivity. Hence, the Government has adopted education as an instrument par excellence for national development of human and material resources.

CONCLUSION

From the findings of the study, it could be concluded that:

- ODL should be a necessary tool for boosting enhanced access to qualitative education in Cameroon. This should be through massification hence its mission and vision is more or less a matured education. Hence it is supplementary to conventional higher institutions in the state, with only 8 higher institutions.
- It is a tool that will help to eradicate poverty, superstition, HIV/AIDS, squalor and diseases.
- It is a tool that will increase the number of professionals in all facets of development. Teachers, Nurses, Accountants, Bankers, lawyers, Clerks and Engineers need to be professionalized so as to boost efficiency and productivity in the state. That is, it is an instrument geared towards balancing development in terms of manpower development, productivity and job enrichment. This will reduce de-industrialization and low productivity.
- ODL is a tool that will increase the number of Businessmen and Businesswomen, self – employment for freedom, act as employers and for socio- economic development.
- It is a tool or an instrument as well as a means for training of specialized manpower appropriate for different vocational purpose. It is one area where the links between higher education (i.e. ODL) and manpower development as a means of productivity. This has far – reaching benefits for mankind in manufacturing. This is particularly evident in view of the profound skills and creativity provided by the linkage of ODL – education and industrial manufacturing and which frequently find expression in scientific, technological and socio – economic development. This is supported in the words of Babaloda (2007). He points out that African should reinvent her educational programmes for youth employment so as to enable them participate effectively in the race of a competitive global economy. This should be the focus and philosophy guiding ODL enhanced access to qualitative education to recipients in Cameroon.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Base on the conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- Effective and management of ODL programmes in the state is paramount to ensure planning and organization of the programme so as to achieve the laudable mission of ODL in terms of manpower development, productivity and job enrichment (i.e. capacity building) in the state.

- It will increase the levels of qualitative education so as to reduce incompetence and unemployment in the state.
 - It is a means of capacity building of human resources through knowledge, skills, values and attitudes acquired.
 - It is a process of increasing productivity through qualitative education. This reduces poverty, diseases, HIV/AIDS and superstition.
 - To achieve the vision of ODL as a tool in the state,
- i.) studies centres should be created equipped and conducive for learning.
 - ii.) course facilitators should diversify and pace course activities and also avoid long lectures. They should develop strategies for students', reinforcement, repetition, review and remediation.
 - iii.) make sure facilitators are men and women who are capable in imparting their goods effectively well.
 - iv.) motivate the facilitators by paying them regularly and when due.
 - v.) the programmes should be affordable, cost effective and flexible education for all. that is, the cost should be low to the cost of conventional higher institutions.

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