

Contribution 1

**OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING IN
ANGLOPHONE COUNTRIES OF THE
SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

**An update of the WGDEOL study- Open and distance learning in sub-Saharan
Africa – A literature survey on policy and practice (2002a)**

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Introduction

This paper is grounded in the findings of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa/Working Group on Distance Education (ADEA/WGDEOL) which were published in February 2002 in a book entitled *Open and Distance Learning in sub-Saharan Africa- A Literature Survey on Policy and Practice*. The focus of this project was essentially on the status of distance education policy and practice in Anglophone sub-Saharan Africa. It has been almost five years since this project was first completed and published, and since there must have been tremendous changes in the Open and Distance Learning scenario. As I searched for information to update this paper, I must admit that information is still as scant as the authors of the project had found at the time they were undertaking the project.

The major obstacle in the undertaking of this project remained throughout the lack of available information. Only the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and UNESCO websites gave some meaningful data. Generally the data available sometimes point to headcounts or to policy issues, but do not follow a sustained or systematic approach. The picture remains very blurred. This immediately flagged the need to have country representatives who would engage in documenting progress of distance education in their respective countries.

I must confess that it is with some trepidation that I approach the task of making an expose of a situation over which I have little statistical mastery. This activity only demonstrates the crucial need for more such research to be carried out on a more regular basis and regular validation exercises. Under discussion here, will be the ADEA/WGDEOL study as well as the update I have tried to make on it.

Background

In April 2001, ADEA/WGDEOL carried out a literature survey on distance education in Anglophone and Francophone countries of sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). This desk-based study on the various aspects of distance education and open learning (DEOL) (design, delivery including student support services and use of ICT) highlights some of the major challenges faced by countries, agencies and institutions involved in DEOL (quality, relevance, limited ICT capacity) and makes some recommendations on the way

forward (policy development, capacity-building, partnership) to promote distance education approaches in the sub-Saharan context. Subsequently several other studies have been commissioned by the WGDEOL concerning ICT and distance education; quality of distance learning initiatives for teachers in selected Anglophone countries and critical success factors among others. However the specific projects regarding the status of distance education and open learning in Anglophone Africa and its Francophone equivalent can be seen as touchstones for action. The focus of this exposé is on the study regarding the Anglophone countries of the SSA.

Towards a contextualised definition of Distance Education and Open Learning

The study discusses the definitional confusion surrounding the concept ‘distance education’ and attempts to develop a common understanding by examining what DEOL means from a sub-Saharan perspective. While it must be noted that its operational definition is not specific to SSA only, for the purposes of this study, distance education (DE) is best defined as a method of instruction whereby the learning and teaching transaction is carried out in an environment characterised by physical, temporal, technological, economical and spatial separation. While OL emphasizes flexibility of access and freedom in the choice of the learning material, study method, pace and purpose of learning, the degree to which this is translated into reality is another matter really.

Distance education as we understand it today refers to a spectrum that includes correspondence education, technology enhanced forms of education especially incorporating audio-visual elements to virtual and/or online learning. This spectrum accommodates DE methodologies to formal and non-formal approaches to education and training including emerging concepts such as “recognition of prior learning” and “competency-based education and training”. The levels of educational intervention using DEOL span from primary education to higher education. However despite the growing interest for DEOL in SSA, the concept suffers from ambiguity and lack of clarity because many policy-makers believe in the superiority of traditional contact-based education and apparently lack the necessary confidence to invest in DEOL.

Rationale of Distance Education and Open Learning in SSA

Given the greater accessibility of DEOL courses/programmes, their educational potential and their flexible approaches to teaching and learning, it is increasingly recognised that more diversified learner groups and larger student populations can be accommodated more cost-effectively than by traditional face to face education.

The economic growth and social development of sub-Saharan countries has long stagnated because of the lack of educational opportunities. Access to primary, secondary and tertiary education has been constrained by limited financial resources, poor infrastructure and low indigenous capacity. For instance, as at 2003, the tertiary enrolment ratio of 3.6% compares very unfavourably with that of 14% in Arab States and 18% in Latin America. Despite heavy investment, the conventional education system continues to fail large masses of the school population and is not set to educate the entire society. In the face of the growing rural-urban divide and gender inequality, strategies are increasingly aimed at addressing the Millennium Development Goals such that there has been some measurable progress in the past five years.

Distance education development has not been linear and sustained in SSA. From reading the 6th Volume of the World Review of DEOL (COL, 2006), it would appear that most SSA Anglophone countries including Ghana, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Kenya report the more massive thrust of DEOL during the 70s to the 90s, than currently. It would seem that interventions during those decades have had a more significant impact and that at present. There is now a considerable redefinition of the niche market. Moreover, it would seem that DE interventions in some SSA countries would have coincided with the setting up of the UKOU and that subsequently DEOL in other Anglophone SSA countries has been sporadic and an *ad hoc* response to specific problems.

Teacher training through ODL in the SSA – some early interventions

Teacher training through Open and Distance Learning has a very long history in the sub-Saharan African region. This is the natural response to the generally recognized need for trained teachers to achieve UPE, EFA goals as well as MDGs. The following are a few such examples.

Table 1. Some DEOL programs in select countries (COL, 2006)

Country	Program Objective	Program Name	Timeline
Tanzania	UPE	Distance Teacher Training Program (DTT)	In the 1980s
Zimbabwe	Reduce shortage of teachers	Zimbabwe Integrated Teacher Education Course (ZINTEC)	1981
Kenya	Upgrade academic and professional competencies of experienced non-graduate secondary school teachers	B.Ed by Distance Education	1986

Basic teacher education projects reviewed to pre-service and in-service programs for teachers have been found in Botswana, Kenya, Nigeria, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. The high enrolment rate of some of these projects augurs well for the future of DE for primary school teacher development. The Kenya Program enrolled almost 8 500 unqualified primary school teachers. Among several others, given their scope, two noteworthy initiatives are Mubende Integrated Teacher Education Project (MITEP) and Northern Integrated Teacher Education Project (NITEP). The MITEP was established in 1992 to provide training for 1,000 underqualified teachers in two districts. MITEP used a combination of self-study materials, residential courses, and supervision to upgrade teachers' skills. Completed in 1995, MITEP offered a rare opportunity to examine the methods, outcomes, and costs of a DE program and to compare them with those of the conventional teachers' colleges in the same districts. The National Teachers' Institute of Nigeria enrolled more than 186 700; the NITEP of Uganda, more than 3000 in a single cohort.

In 1994, 21 000 trainees graduated through the distance-run National Certificate in Education (Nigeria), a figure comparable to the total admissions of 58 colleges of

education. In Botswana where annual intake of unqualified teachers is between 600 and 1000, it is argued that it would take 200 years to train the whole teacher population through the conventional system. Upgrading of academic and professional qualifications of holders of Primary Teacher Certificate to the diploma level in Botswana is implemented through DE because teachers cannot be released to attend traditional courses “without undermining the educational system”. The increasingly high teacher attrition rate due to change of jobs and HIV/AIDS (more than 15% in Malawi) is prompting for quick and cost-effective solutions to shortage of qualified and trained teaching staff. The Domasi College (Malawi) with an annual intake of more than 900 distance teacher-learners caters for more than all conventional colleges in the country where continuing professional development of teachers can only be ensured through the distance mode. In South Africa, the Open Learning Systems Education Trust uses interactive radio to improve in-service training of teachers in order to implement the policy shift in language teaching from a content-based to outcome-based curriculum and reduce disparities between schools for different ethnic groups.

Against this background, many countries of the SSA are considering DEOL as a priority choice. This delivery mode is seen not only as an efficient and effective means to increase access but also as a viable strategy to compensate past and present educational deprivation, remove gender barriers, accelerate and diversify knowledge-generation for capacity-building and promote life long learning, particularly among the underprivileged and marginalized groups.

Despite the fact that DEOL improves access to education and learning from a gamut of places including the home, the work place, dedicated study centres and conventional classrooms with some adaptations, it is argued that it can prove to be cost-effective by fostering optimum use of available physical, human and financial resources. However it is cautioned that cost-effectiveness studies are carried out before DE is adopted because the factors for diseconomies of scale should also be considered. With the perceived superiority of traditional education over distance education, much precaution is taken with DE delivery. As a result, the quality of DE provision is constantly under revision and being improved. The systems approach to DE initiatives using the Analyse-Design-Develop-Implement – Evaluate (ADDIE) template has facilitated the inclusion of

quality assurance mechanisms to a greater extent than available for traditional face to face education. Good practices of DE in SSA point to the high potential of DEOL for increasing access and providing quality services to multi-level and multi-sectoral education. For instance, the use of DEOL approaches by Kenya Institute of Education to upgrade teacher qualifications and effectiveness is considered as a success story that augurs well for future educational development in the sub-region.

The current status of ODL in Anglophone countries in SSA

DEOL is growing and taking root in Anglophone countries of SSA, particularly in Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Uganda, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The four basic modes of delivery are: the single mode institutions, the dual mode institutions, the mixed mode institutions and the consortia model.

Table 2. Selected Tertiary Institutions in SSA and modes of education delivery as at 2003 (ADEA/WGDEOL, 2003, b)

Institution	Mode of education delivery	Characterization
University South Africa	Single mode	It offers distance education only
University of Fort Hare West Cape (South Africa) University of Botswana University of Nairobi University of Zambia	Dual mode	They run conventional face-to-face education and distance education using separate and independent teaching staff
University of the Witwatersrand University of Pretoria (South Africa) University of Mauritius	Mixed mode	Their DE programmes are designed, delivered and administered by the same staff who provide conventional face-to-face education. The University of Mauritius has vested one particular department (VCILT) with the mission of online educational provision.
African Virtual University COLISA in South Africa.	Consortia	Their DE programmes are based on the efforts of a group of autonomous institutions.

In addition to publicly funded institutions, several national, regional and continental DE associations have emerged in the Anglophone countries and play a very significant role in

the promotion and/or the provision of DEOL nationally and regionally. There are several organizations/ institutions that are keen on supporting policy development in many African countries. Among them are the Research and Training Institute in Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDOL - the West African Centre to support ODL in the region and is attached to Nigeria Open University) and Southern African Regional Distance Education Centre (SARDEC - the Southern African Centre to support ODL in the region and is attached to Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning [BOCODOL]). These institutions/organizations benefit from the full or part support in terms of funding or expertise from the following: ADEA (Working Group on Distance Education and Open Learning; Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA); COL and UNESCO (either through ADEA or in their own right) and many others including the International Research Foundation for Research (UK).

SARDEC and other similar institutions like RETRIDOL have been set up to reach out to relevant target groups within their specific regional operation. RETRIDOL, for instance is set up within the Nigeria Open University and its mandate is to carry out research and training for the Nigerian cadres in the first instance and from any other interested party especially in Western Africa. Interestingly, RETRIDOL benefits from the full support of UNESCO/BREDA with which Mauritius shares the leadership of the ADEA/Working Group on Distance Education and Open Learning.

SARDEC is housed within the Botswana College of Distance and Opening Learning (BOCODOL) has been earmarked to host the regional ODL hub. It benefits from support from the COL, several other countries including Botswana, Namibia, Malawi, Zambia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lesotho, Nigeria, Tanzania, Angola, Canada, Nigeria, Mozambique, Swaziland, Kenya, India as well as the United Nations Education and Scientific Committee (UNESCO) and International Research Foundation for Open Learning (IRFOL) UK among others. COL has pledged to provide support to the ODL in Botswana in its first three years of operations during the 2003 to 2006 plan period. The host of ODL - BOCODOL - is a parastatal under the Ministry of Education. It was established by an Act of Parliament in 1998 to fill the void in the

provision of knowledge and skills to out of school youths and adults. SARDEC fits within that niche and aims for the Southern African regions.

Some Issues and Challenges

Curriculum design and course development

Regarding curriculum design and course development, it must be reported that there was little documented evidence of the processes available. From available scarce data, the survey findings suggest that most sub-Saharan African organisations that are engaged in some form of DE operate in some type of collaboration that involves a cross border exchange of course materials.

This gives rise to quality assurance concerns especially regarding accreditation, recognition and equivalence. From the desk-based study it is impossible to really measure the extent to which such course material is delivered as is, or undergoes some form of adaptation. There is no single approach to course development in Anglophone SSA. While in some institutions (e.g. the University of Nairobi, Makerere University) it involves a team of specialists, including writers, reviewers, editors and graphic designers, in others (University of Zambia) it rests mainly with the course writer. For most countries of SSA the team approach is hampered by lack of funds and short deadlines, and remains an ideal for ensuring quality course production rather than the norm. In Mauritius, there is a growing tendency for inter-institutional collaborative efforts involving a systems approach to material production.

In yet other countries, quality production, especially of multi-media packages in SSA also suffers from shortages of experienced and appropriately trained specialists, absence of production facilities and technical support as well as collaborative approaches. With the exceptions of Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, Tanzania, Mauritius and Zambia where non-formal education programmes, including literacy teaching in the local languages are produced locally, most of the DEOL programmes implemented in Anglophone SSA are designed and developed by overseas institutions. Another noteworthy example of internally developed programs at higher education level is South Africa and even Mauritius for some specific programs. In this regard the need for contextualisation and even participative program development is well recognised. A matter of concern

regarding the development of DEOL in Anglophone SSA remains the lack of trained staff, lack of appropriate incentives to faculty and the unwillingness of many staff members to devote some of their time to DEOL initiatives– this problem is still current.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance refers to a set of processes that regulate the provision of any service. In the case of DEOL, the systems approach facilitates the breaking down of the related activities into a series of components. The articulation between these components from inputs to outputs, can thus be documented appropriately, studied and weaknesses repaired.

In general the need for the development and recognition of quality assurance mechanisms specifically for the DE initiative is well recognized. There is still a perceived resistance to accepting the distinction between distance education and traditional face to face education and all related specificities. Globally, there is an increasing influence of the market forces on the DE provision. The resulting effect on organizations is, in my view, the ambivalence between serving the customer and staying in business. For effective and efficient delivery, it is crucial for organizations to develop quality assurance frameworks. Such frameworks should enable regular checks of the health of measurable factors like the quality of applications, enrolments, student achievement, quality of course materials, course development processes as well as learner and teacher satisfaction. The quality assurance processes are meant to focus on improving the learner-centered approach to the DEOL clientele. Reviewing student support services to make the system less cumbersome and to improve learner self directedness would make for consolidated and efficient systems of DEOL. This would also relieve an organization of heavy costs.

The acceptance of DEOL and the recognition of quality assurance and quality control as central issues do not suggest that good practice is widespread in SSA. Quite often, quality assurance is viewed as a once-off event or is based on and inspired by practices of evaluation of contact programmes. However, many institutions in SSA strive to ascertain that quality of both inputs (learning materials, lecturers/tutors, library facilities, student support mechanisms) and outputs (completion and graduation rates) is maintained. At Makerere University, course materials developed by tutors are reviewed

by senior staff members. The University of Zambia has set up specific mechanisms for curricula review to ensure the relevancy of programmes to the needs of the students and the country. The University of Nairobi, Kenya measures quality from two perspectives inputs and outputs and this is seen as an initiative in the correct direction since it is comprehensive. Other institutions operate within a national policy framework for quality assurance such as the South African National Qualification Framework. National policies for the clarification of institutional roles and responsibilities as well as for the establishment of communication lines among stakeholders are crucial for quality assurance. In Mauritius, the recent introduction of a Regulatory Framework at the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) is currently witnessing the development of a series of measures aimed at quality assurance. It has even evolved guidelines to provide an overview of a quality assurance system responsive to the needs of stakeholders. While these are meant for general educational provision, quality assurance measures for the provision of DEOL are also being developed. A collaborative survey between the TEC and the University of Mauritius to that effect is due to start.

Learner support

Student support services remain central to quality ODL provision as characterized by sound personal and academic counselling, engaging instructional design and appropriate constructive pedagogies/andragogies. Since learner retention is identified as one of the major aims of quality ODL, learner attrition is widely recognized as one of its major problems.

The issue of student support services lies at the heart of DEOL – be it in the pre-Internet era and in the post-Internet era. It is fitting to contextualize the renewed view of student support services in the wake of developments that have actually redefined the very meaning of ODL. The past decade has witnessed dramatic changes in the ODL landscape with the ushering in of the Information and Communication Technologies and the World Wide Web. It is recognized that the talk around technologies is usually very enthusiastic. Indeed the immediacy of computer mediated communications (CMC) has rendered DE an almost synchronous enterprise and considerably given an added dimension to ‘distance’ in DE. Once the talk around the technologies has started abating, the issue of student support using technologies has become vibrant again and is in fact the

crux of research projects ranging across a wide spectrum of distance learning initiatives involving university students and nursing students (Fahy, 2003; Dearnley, 2003; Ludwig Hardman & Dunlap, 2003).

The WGDEOL (2002a) study uncovered that a higher proportion (83%) of Anglophone tertiary education institutions provide some forms of student support services compared to Francophone and Lusophone institutions (61% and 50 % respectively). Experiences from Ghana, Namibia, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia, particularly, point to the centrality of learner support in providing quality DEOL and ensuring students' success. They highlight the need for such support to be properly planned and budgeted to cover both academic services (tutoring, counselling, induction sessions) and administrative services (registrations, record keeping, administration of assignments) given the constraints of the learning context (lack of facilities, inadequate tutoring/counselling). Face to face group or individual sessions organised by 24% of Anglophone institutions remain the most popular form of support compared to residential courses (14%), on-site visit (6%) and tutoring at Resource Centres (2%). For greater effectiveness and responsiveness, it is considered that learner support services need to be decentralized in order to focus on learners' psychological, pedagogical and social needs.

The heavy emphasis on the popularity of face to face sessions even in DEOL contexts is noted. It is a matter of debate whether still maintaining a hefty dose of contact sessions will promote learner self-directedness, a concept that is gaining a central place in the development of DEOL as a discipline.

The use of ICT in DEOL in SSA

The 2001 Human Development Report was entitled "Making Use of Technology for Human Development". Another WGDEOL report states that "the potential advantages of the information revolution have prompted efforts by governments, the private sector, corporate entities, and non-governmental organizations across the globe to support changes in the nature and reach of information delivery infrastructure (WGDEOL, 2003). The ICTs involved in the provision of DEOL in SSA are largely those belonging to the 2nd and 3rd generations of DE methodologies. The developments regarding ICTs have been faster in the developed world than those in the developing world. The reasons that account for this slow development are among others an

unsupportive global economic environment, poverty, lack of resources in poor countries as well as different priorities. In some instances, there is also resistance to the transparency of information that ICTs make possible. This has given rise to the phenomenon called the “Digital Divide”. However interestingly it must be noted that in response to this phenomenon, the developed world has come up with one solution – the creation and development of Open Educational Resources. It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss this issue further.

The emergence of new ICTs is set to lend DEOL in SSA an unprecedented outreach capacity. But this is not necessarily matched by practical requirements. Indeed, access to technologies remains limited due the high cost of establishing, using and maintaining the necessary infrastructure; the lack of expertise required and the generally low computer literacy rate among the user groups. In order to embrace the use of internet-based DEOL with conviction, caution and vision, SSA needs to take policy initiatives, among others, to increase its télé-density which is the lowest the world (0,5 line per 100 inhabitants in 1999). This is crucial in facilitating access to, and success in DEOL as well as improving its competitive edge in a market-led globalising economy.

So far, print which is used by 96% of Anglophone tertiary education institutions/programmes remains the most predominant medium followed by audio and video cassettes. Advanced technologies such as Satellite or Internet/CD-ROM are more widely utilised in Francophone institutions/programmes. 34% of these use the Internet/CD-ROM and 18% the Satellite compared to 2% and 5% respectively for Anglophone institutions/programmes (WGDEOL, 2003).

Even five years after the study on Anglophone countries, technological constraints regarding 4th and 5th generation DE methodologies remain a major challenge to effective DE provision in SSA. State control over telecommunication operations in SSA has stifled private sector investment in this crucial area of economic development and is the primary cause of the state of telecommunications in SSA countries. Despite the slight inroads that have been made into the development of technological infrastructure for SSA, there is still a lack of a clear policy framework regarding the integration of ICTs in DE.

Policy issues

The planning of distance learning usually involves policy issues at international, national and institutional level. The international issues arise in part because the forces of globalization are affecting the content and practices of education, in part because new policy issues arise when education is no longer confined within national barriers. Policy development is highly important when making judgments about the desirability, feasibility and acceptability of internationalized ideas within individual countries (Perraton, 1998)

Policy is the overarching umbrella under which organizations and their approaches to DE evolve. These influence the organizational mission statements that are meant to be aligned with national and increasingly international development objectives. The main policy issues address the question of access through the development of ICTs to an increasingly large number of people. The underlying danger in such an approach is the fact that the numbers who may be reached may be receiving inappropriate education that may not enhance personal development. The quality of such provision then becomes questionable.

Market principles are also the guiding principles in policy-making. The deregulations in financial markets, trade barriers and implementations of multinational companies everywhere in the world are causing a proportional deregulation regarding the educational provision in SSA. Compounded by a lack of distance education-related policy, this has created enormous problems in terms of recognition of qualifications or universities and credit transfer.

Research carried out by the WGDEOL points to the fact that in spite of a long history of using ICTs (mainly radio and television) to provide DE, Africa has not fully benefited from their potential (WGDEOL 2002, 2003). We observe that this is mainly due to lack of sound policy initiatives, adequate indigenous expertise and infrastructure and the negative past experiences in the design and implementation of programs and projects using these technologies. In higher education, for instance, apart from South Africa, Mauritius, Madagascar and Tanzania, DE represents less than 10% of the Gross Enrolment Rate at the tertiary education level. The potential of DE for fostering lifelong learning opportunities including personal and professional development for national

development needs to be thoroughly tapped into for optimal and effective implementation. This should be premised on democratic traditions entrenched in equity and inclusiveness.

A policy-less situation so far has caused the mushrooming of DE providers with dubious educational provisions. In Mauritius there are efforts to regulate the private providers by the TEC. In fact, an enabling policy framework would allow the emergence of effective, efficient and sensible management systems focusing on organising, directing, coordinating, planning, budgeting and optimum use of resources. The policy framework should also cater for the personal development of the learners engaged in DE initiatives as well as national development of a country. So far, a few countries in the sub-region, including Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Uganda, Zambia are making significant efforts to create an enabling policy environment for DEOL. But even five years after the conduct of the initial survey on policy and practice in open and distance learning in Anglophone SSA these efforts remain fragmented and incoherent.

Conclusion

The above discussion has demonstrated the status of DEOL in the sub-Saharan African region. It has indicated how the lack of a policy framework can impact directly on all decisions that need to be taken with regard to DE and can also affect the data collected. These include the type of organisations that need to be set up; the quality assurance mechanisms included in all aspects ranging from inputs to outputs, student support issues; the cost-effectiveness of provision as well as decisions regarding the use of appropriate technologies to improve the outreach capacity of DE with a view to meeting the Millennium Development and Education for All goals in an operational framework that would effectively harness all resources for an efficient and effective provision of education to diverse audiences.

The following should be desirable:

- Through ODL policy frameworks, the adoption and implementation of open and distance learning policies within the broader educational and human development strategies;

- ODL systems development - to assist in the development of open and distance learning systems that build on existing capacity or assist in creating new capacity appropriate for the contexts developing nations;
- ODL applications, with the objective of demonstrating how open and distance learning applications can benefit individual learners, institutions and nations
- ODL-related program sharing through networks and partnerships
- ODL-related capacity-building and knowledge management
- ODL-based collaborative research

Such a sharing approach will allow significant cross-fertilisation of ideas and experiences that will consolidate the provision of DEOL in Southern Africa. In addition, we should build on more partnerships with organizations like the DEASA, COL, BREDIA, RETRIDOL and SARDEC. This, it is hoped, will become a concerted effort that will move political will in the right direction. The potential of DE for fostering lifelong learning opportunities including personal and professional development for national development needs to be thoroughly tapped into for optimal and effective implementation. This should be premised on democratic traditions entrenched in equity and inclusiveness.

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