# EXPLORING CAPACITY BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE OPERATIONS OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING FOR GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS IN NIGERIA

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**Abstract**
*The changing trend from face-to-face teaching and learning to Open and Distance Learning (ODL) modes in public universities has made it necessary to provide lecturers with capacity building opportunities to garner basic skills for ODL course designs, pedagogy, e-tutoring, examining students in line with the global best practices. The paper explored capacity building opportunities in the operations of ODL for global competitiveness in Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The sample of the study comprised 120 lecturers drawn by proportionate stratified sampling technique from five out of the 12 dual-mode universities in Nigeria. The instrument for data collection was a 15 item researcher developed questionnaire structured on a 4-point scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree weighted 4 to 1 respectively. The instrument was pilot tested in one of the dual mode universities and validated through peer review by the researchers. Cronbach Alpha test for internal consistency was used for the reliability of the instrument. SPSS was used to compute and a coefficient index of 0.73 was obtained, thus the instrument was considered reliable. Data collected were analyzed using statistical mean. The findings of the study revealed that there exist knowledge and skill gaps in the operation of ODL programme among lecturers in the dual-mode universities. It is observed that there is limited access to capacity building opportunities in the operations of ODL in the dual-mode universities in Nigeria. Based on the findings, it was recommended that deliberate efforts should be made by university administrators to facilitate continuous capacity building of lecturers in the key areas of ODL operation; providing specific budgetary allocation for training, retraining and exploring capacity building opportunities in local, regional and international workshops.*
**Keywords:** Capacity building opportunities, Open and Distance-Learning

**Introduction**

The philosophy of education in Nigeria recognizes Open and Distance Learning (ODL) as a third route to higher education and for achieving life-long education. According to Federal Republic of Nigeria (FGN), (2013), at any stage of the educational process after the secondary education, an individual has the options of continuing full-time studies, combining work with study, or embarking on full time employment without excluding the prospect of resuming studies later. The goals of open and distance education are to: provide more access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities;

i. encourage life-long learning opportunities;
ii. meet special needs of employers and employees by mounting special courses for employees at the workplace;
iii. encourage internationalization especially of tertiary education curricula; and
iv. ameliorate the effect of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing Nigerian experts as teachers regardless of their locations or places of work(FRN, 2013.p. 33).

In pursuance of the goals of ODL, the national policy on education identified capacity strengthening of the existing coordinating agencies and other stakeholders as a key factor to achieving the goals of ODL, This among others include to; advise the government on the development and practice of ODL, ensure the maintenance of standards for programmes offered in various institutions; liaise with media houses, information technology providers and other relevant bodies in enhancing ODL education Federal Ministry of Education (FME), (2015).

ODL is a mode of teaching in which learners are removed in time and space from the teacher, and where teachers rely heavily on media and technologies to provide and/or improve access to good quality education for large numbers of learners wherever they may be (FRN, 2004). ODL means removing barriers to learning such as restriction on time or place of study while Distance means that the learner and the tutor are physically separated from each other and teaching takes place via print, electronics and/or telecommunications media (Okebukola, 2009). It is system of learning and teaching that is grounded in the principles of open and resource-based learning and takes place in different contexts at a multiplicity of sites, through a variety of mechanisms and learning and teaching approaches (FME, 2015). It is a mode distinct from the face-to-face teaching method, where there is physical separation between the teacher and the learner (Jegede, 2016).The method depends largely on utilizing learning resources electronically, rather than attending classroom sessions, is the central feature of the learning experience in ODL (Kegulu & Oranusi, 2014).

Jegede (2016) asserts that ODL methods, when applied to tertiary level instruction and properly staffed and implemented, can increase enrolments at less marginal cost than by expanding residential campuses; expand access to under-served populations; lay the foundation for a culture of life-long learning; and improve the structure and pedagogy of university curricula.

There are 171 universities in Nigeria comprising 44 Federal, 48 States and 79 privately owned universities (NUC, 2020). The universities have practically not met the ever-increasing demand for university education through the formal classroom-bound, face-to-face learning mode. this may not be unconnected with limited carrying capacity to match and cope with the tremendous demand for university education. The data available indicates that institutions of higher learning have only been able to cope, on the average, with about 17 per cent of admission demands implying that over 80 per cent of candidates who apply to universities cannot be accommodated, not necessarily because they are not qualified but due to gross inadequacies in resources and facilities. (Jegede, (2016) The challenge of the limited spaces for admission in the conventional university is further exacerbated with renewed vision of the federal government in the Ministerial Strategic Plan (MSP) 2016 -19 (FME, 2016), that is aimed at increasing equitable access to basic education for out-of-school children among others. This development implies that in the very near future, the inadequate facilities would be further stretched arising from the demand for university education. This significantly underpins the need to strategically develop institutional and academic staff capacity of ODL mode of university education delivery to increase access without compromising quality in the advent of increase in demand arising from democratization of educational opportunities at the lower levels.

In the 1990s efforts were made to increase access in response to tremendous evident demand of university education which led to the establishment of part time progammes by the various tertiary institutions (Olayiwola, Reju & Alaneme, 2009). This was aimed at addressing the deficits in the admissions in the face-to-face conventional universities. Following this, were reported irregularities in the operations of the programmes, when business people hijacked the establishment of satellite and off campuses without any regard for standards. This led the National Universities Commission (NUC), the regulatory body of the Nigeria Universities System (NUS) in cognizance of the need to streamline the operation of the progammes, in 2012 placed a moratorium on admission into such programmes and provided guidelines for the operation of part time programmes.

Following this development, in 2002, the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) was established to provide access to quality university education through, ODL mode.In 2002/2003 the awareness of the possibility of running a dual-mode delivery system by the various universities in the country was conceived. Currently, there 12 universities regarded as dual- mode universities with the mandate to concurrently run face-to-face and ODL mode programmes in

the universities. The universities have been viewed with limited capacity to deliver degree programmes by ODL mode alongside the conventional face-to-face mode (NUC, 2019). The arguments among scholars NUC, (2009) and FME (2015), is that the practice of ODL by dual-mode universities is fraught with problems of standards as the universities are in transition from the running of part-time/ sandwich courses to distance learning. Therefore, to ensure quality assurance, and global competitiveness of the ODL outputs by dual mode universities, capacity building for lecturers becomes essential.

Capacity building requires continuous improvement in attitude, knowledge and skills of lectures through continuous learning in the dual mode universities. Perraton and Creed (1999), Olayiwola and Reju (2010)recommended that capacity building in ODL be directed towards important areas like course design, development, editing, media integration, pedagogy, development of self-learning material and good lesson writing practices and Information Communication Technology (ICT) among others. Where such expertise is not readily available locally due to the relative newness of the mode, the opportunities could be sought in other countries where ODL operates successfully.

There are concerns among stakeholders that the practice of ODL by the dual-mode universities is far below acceptable best practice and that at best, they are in transition from the running of part-time/ sandwich courses to distance learning (NUC,2009) Currently, there is a general perception that a significant number of Nigerian lecturers in the dual-mode universities may not be adequately equipped for ODL, they appear to have limited capacity to deliver degree programmes by the ODL for a number of interconnected reasons chief among them being training-related issues (pedagogy, material development, assessment mode, structural and curricular) and infrastructural deficit limitation in addition to the conventional face-to face mode. Also, there are arguments that the products of the Nigerian university system of the face-to-face mode barely meet employers' requirements and admission for further studies elsewhere in the world.

There is no contention, ODL has opened access for university education in Nigeria. Not to compromise quality for quantity, inputs must justify outputs. Lecturers' capacity in ODL is a significant input for quality learning outcomes in ODL. Therefore, the problem of this study, is what are the capacity building opportunities in the operation ODL in in the dual-mode universities in Nigeria for global competitiveness?

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the capacity of the academic staff in the dual-mode universities for the operation of ODL programmes in Nigeria?
2. What are capacity building opportunities accessible to academic staff in the operation of ODL in Nigeria?

## Methods

The design for the study was a descriptive research design was adopted. The population of the study was made up of the 12 universities who have the mandate of operating the dual-modes; face-to- face and ODL in Nigeria. Five universities were purposively sampled from the 12 dual mode universities with a wide spread across the nation and consideration of the year of establishment of the ODL programme. A sample size of 120 academic staff was drawn from the approved ODL programmes in the five sampled universities.

An instrument called 'Open Distance Learning University Academic Staff Capacity Building Requirement Questionnaire' ODL-ASCBREQ) developed by the researchers was used to gather data for the study. The questionnaire contained 15 items; covering the research questions of the study. The items were structured on a 4-point scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree, weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The instrument was pilot tested in one of the dual mode universities. To ensure the instrument accurately measured what it intends to measure, it was subjected validation, contracting and reconstructing of the items by the researchers to eliminate ambiguity in the items. Data collected from the pilot test were analyzed using Cronbach Alpha method for the internal consistency of the instrument, SPSS was used to compute same and a coefficient index of 0.73 was obtained. Hamed (2016), recommended that coefficient index of $\alpha = 0.70$ to 0.90 was adequate, hence the instrument was considered reliable for the study.

In this study, the descriptive statistics of the latent constructs were explained in the form of mean and standard deviation for better understanding of the descriptive analysis of the study phenomenon. In order to achieve this, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to determine the mean and standard deviation (SD) of the constructs. The items of the instrument were measured via a four-point scale thus, a mean score 2.50 above was adjudged to positively explain the phenomenon and mean score below 2.49 was seen as weak in explaining same. SD explained how measurements for a group are spread out from the average (mean). Therefore, low SD showed that most of the numbers were close to the average (mean). While high standard deviation means that the numbers were more dispersed from the central mean.

## Results

### Research Question One

What is the capacity of the academic staff in the dual-mode universities for the operation of ODL programmes in Nigeria?

Table 1. Capacity of the Academic Staff in the Dual-mode Universities for the Operation in ODL

**N=120**

| S/N | Items | Mean | SD | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Determining acceptable content in various subjects and disciplines | 2.33 | 0.91 | Disagree |
| 2 | Restructuring content to suit ODL modes (course design) | 2.41 | 0.48 | Disagree |
| 3 | Course writing techniques | 2.71 | 0.66 | Agree |
| 4 | Course facilitation and Instructional Design | 2.56 | 0.72 | Agree |
| 5 | Reviewing and editing existing ODL materials | 2.63 | 0.71 | Agree |
| 6 | Assessment and Evaluation in ODL courses | 2.61 | 0.45 | Agree |
| 7 | Developing e-tutoring skills in ODL | 2.22 | 0.78 | Disagree |
| 8 | Construction of tutor mark assignments | 2.45 | 0.82 | Disagree |
| 9 | Video and Audio scripting for ODL | 2. 18 | 0.79 | Disagree |
| | **Average Mean** | **2.44** | **0.70** | **Disagree** |

Table 1 presents the capacity of the academic staff in the dual-mode universities for the operation in ODL in Nigeria. The analysis of the result reveals an aggregate sectional mean rating of 2.44 and a SD of 0.70. The results further revealed that the capacity of the academic staff in course writing techniques had aggregate mean rating of 2.71 and a standard deviation of 0.66; reviewing and editing existing ODL, course facilitation, assessment and evaluation in ODL courses and Instructional design had mean ratings of 2.63, 2.61, 2.56 respectively with the respective SD being 0.71, 0.45 and 0.72. The capacity of academic staff in other key areas in the operation of ODL; construction of tutor mark assignments, restructuring content to suit ODL modes (course design), determining acceptable content in various subjects and disciplines, e-tutoring skills in ODL and Video and Audio scripting for ODL had mean rating which fell between the mean ratings of 2. 18 and 2.42. Generally, these values indicate a weak capacity of the academic staff in the dual-mode universities in the operation of ODL programme.

**Research Question Two**

What are capacity building opportunities accessible to staff in the operation of ODL in Nigeria?

Table 2: Capacity Building Opportunities Accessible to Staff in the Operation of ODL

**N = 120**

| S/N | Item | Mean | SD | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Specialized Training Programmes in ODL | 2.37 | 0.26 | Disagree |
| 2 | Refresher Programme in ODL | 2.33 | 0.47 | Disagree |
| 3 | Attendance of local Seminars, Workshops and Conferences in ODL | 2.73 | 0.74 | Agree |
| 4 | Attendance of international Seminars, Workshops and Conferences in ODL | 2.13 | 0.65 | Disagree |
| 5 | Mentorship/Coaching by experience colleagues in ODL | 2.69 | 0.77 | Agree |
| 6 | Workshop organized by Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDAL) | 2.15 | 0.96 | Disagree |
| | **Sectional Mean** | **2.40** | **0.64** | **Disagree** |

Results on table two present the accessible capacity building opportunities available for academic staff in the operation of ODL in Nigeria. The result analysis revealed an aggregate mean rating of 2.40 and SD of 0.64. Detailed analysis show that attendance of local seminars, workshops and conferences in ODL and mentorship/coaching by experienced colleagues in ODL were rated 2.73 and 2.69 respectively. Also, the opportunities for specialized training programmes in ODL, refresher courses in ODL; workshops organized by Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDAL) and attendance of international seminars, workshops and conferences in ODL showed aggregate mean ratings between 2.13 and 2.37 which are all below 2..50. Largely, from the result of the analysis, the academic staff from the dual-mode universities have limited access to capacity building opportunities in the operations of ODL in Nigeria.

**Discussion**

The study established that the academic staff in the sampled dual universities have a weak capacity and that knowledge and skill gaps exist among lecturers in the operation of ODL programme; although, a cursory look at the result suggested a considerable academic staff capacity in the few areas of in ODL course writing techniques, reviewing and editing existing ODL, course facilitation, assessment and evaluation in ODL courses and instructional design. However, their capacity was found to be at the lower ebb in ODL operations. This tallies with Egbo (2011)

who opined that there is a general perception that a significant number of Nigerian teachers are not adequately equipped to deliver quality education for a number of interconnected reasons chief among them being training-related issues. National Universities Commission (NUC (2009) appraised the scope of operation of ODL practice revealed a glaring mismatch between policy and practice even in the face of obvious and widely acknowledged perennial inadequacies of the conventional face-to-face mode practice of distance learning by these dual-mode universities. The NUC lamented that this was below acceptable best practice. This might not be unconnected with the weak capacity of the academic staff in the dual-mode universities already faced with related challenges of the face-to-face mode of delivery of university education.

Jepketer, Kombo and Kyalo, (2015), proposed the need for capacity building of the academics to be competent in meeting the requirements of changing classroom practice. ODL as a mode of delivering tertiary education is relatively new particularly in the universities in Nigeria and the West African sub-region in general (Amini & Oluyide, 2016). Capacity building makes difference in teacher teaching skills, increases learning quality in the classroom assisting students who could otherwise be at risk hence enhancing students' learning (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), (2009). Academics are the learning catalyst in universities, equipping them with necessary teaching competencies will not only improve learning but also contribute to effective implementation of ODL programme. Jepketer, Kombo and Kyalo, (2015), posited that teachers remain essential actors and catalyst for change in all efforts aimed at promoting quality education in schools. In order to develop a responsive and effective teacher capable of undertaking the foregoing, he argued that teachers require opportunities for continuous self-improvement; both career-long and career-wide opportunities that will enable them to acquire skills, knowledge and techniques needed for quality on the job performance.

The findings of the study suggest that there is limited access to capacity building opportunities in the operations of ODL in the universities in Nigeria. Available evidence from the literature reviewed, it appears that Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDAL) is the only institution tasked with providing training services for capacity building opportunities in the ODL operations. As part of its operations, it builds regional network of ODL trainers and researchers among others. It is observed that conferences organized by RETRIDAL are most times institutional based, this situation further limits the capacity building opportunities in ODL operations in the universities. This is possibly explaining the basis for the university's reliance on the attendance of local Seminars, Workshops, Conferences, Mentorship and coaching by experience colleagues, this does not support global competitiveness in the ODL.

## Conclusion

The finding of the study has established that a number of knowledge and skill gaps still exist among the academics in the operation of ODL in dual-mode universities in Nigeria. literature have substantiated considerable dependent on few experts in providing some vital services in the dual-mode universities. This may not to be unconnected with the limited access to the capacity building opportunities in ODL. While acknowledging the efforts of RETRIDAL in providing capacity building opportunities in Nigeria, this appears inadequate, given the number of the proliferation of dual-mode universities. Without capacity building to address the identified inadequacies among the Lecturers, ODL programme would continue to be perceived as a second-best option in contrast to face-to-face mode of universities education. This does not support and guarantee quality outputs of ODL programme. The need to expose academic staffin the Nigerian University System to a wider range of educational principles and practices of ODL is essential for a smooth transition of the lecturers from a traditional face-to-face teaching learning to ODL mode. This is imperative to reposition the dual-mode universities in the delivery of cost effective ODL programme not only for the economic development of the nation but also for global competitiveness.

## Recommendations

From the finding of the study the following recommendations are made:

1. University's administrators in the dual-mode universities should make deliberate efforts for a continuous capacity building of lecturers in the key areas of ODL mode operations by providing specific budgetary allocations.
2. University's administrators in the dual-mode universities should sponsor lecturers to local, regional and international workshops where the lecturers would be trained in the global best principles, practices and skills in the operation of ODL.
3. The university management should provide incentives to lecturers/experts within their institutions to encourage knowledge and skill sharing through Train of Trainers (ToT) for a periodic in-house workshop and thus inspire lecturers for personal development in the operation of ODL.

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