

Harnessing Campus Radio Resources for ODL in Nigeria: Case Studies from Universities of Lagos and Ibadan.

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Abstract

This article explores issues which arise from the use of campus radio stations as a tool for Open and Distance Learning in Nigeria. As population and demand for education continued to increase, Nigeria turned to ODL which in turn adopted the use of radio broadcasting. Using two university campuses as case studies, the study analyses issues such as packaging/delivery strategies of ODL programmes on the radio stations, the status of human resource availability, funding mechanisms, the additional and complementary use of new media technologies and the challenges that confront programme delivery and reception. The work makes recommendations to various stakeholders.

Keywords: Open and Distance Learning, Campus Radio, Access to Education, Technology.

INTRODUCTION

The demand for access to education continues to increase in Nigeria. The population of about 54 million at independence in 1960 has today risen to about 160 million (Jegade, 2002) which incorporates a large school-going proportion. Jegede (2002) noted that in 1960, there were less than 3000 primary schools which enrolled about 3 million pupils while 534 secondary schools enrolled 24,640 pupils. At the tertiary level, there was only one University College. Now, according World-statistics.org, as at 2010, primary school enrolment stood at 20,681,805 pupils, while secondary schools had 9,036,768 pupils. Another international data organization, Nationmaster.com reported a total of 947,538 students in tertiary level institutions.

Despite this expansion in school and enrolment figures, large numbers of citizens cannot gain access. In recent times for example, more than one million candidates have applied into universities and other tertiary-level institutions annually, but only about 20 per cent have been able to secure admission.

The denial of access to a huge proportion of the population presented the government with a challenge which has implication for the country's overall development. Open and distance learning (ODL) was embraced as one major response to this challenge. Once incorporated into policy and implementation, ODL itself had to explore beyond traditional learning delivery tools to adopt new ones such as radio broadcasting. This study focuses on important issues arising in the interaction of ODL and the radio medium in some Nigerian tertiary institutions.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Open and distance education in Nigeria had its beginning in the pre-1960 period when initiatives from abroad, mainly Britain, provided correspondence courses to Nigerians. These prepared students for the Ordinary and Advanced levels of the General Certificate of Education (GCE) as well as higher level training of teachers, lawyers, commercial and secretarial staff, among other professionals (Akpan, 2008).

Proper planning for ODL started in the 1960s and continued to develop thereafter. According to Osuji (2005), several significant events took place:

- a. A government body, the Ashby Commission, in its 1960 report, recommended that the University of Lagos should, in addition to offering day and evening courses, have a Correspondence Department
- b. The newly established universities (University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Ahmadu Bello University, etc) joined the University of Ibadan in offering extra-mural programmes
- c. The Correspondence Studies Unit (COSU) of the University of Lagos took off with the admission of the first set of students in January 1976, into courses in Education, Accounting and Business Administration.
- d. The External Degree Programme of the University of Ibadan, after several attempts in the 1960s and 1970s, took off in 1989.

Aderinoye and Ojokheta (2004) also noted the emergence and growth of ODL in various other centres such as:

- a. Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria – which established a Correspondence and Teachers' In-Service Programme in 1976, to prepare middle-level teachers for primary schools;
- b. The National Teachers Institute (NTI) – established in 1978 to upgrade unqualified teachers and accelerate the preparation of qualified ones required for implementing the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme (initiated in 1976) and the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme started in 1999
- c. The Centre for Distance Learning and Continuing Education established at the University of Abuja in 1992.
- d. The re-opening of the National Open University in 2001, after a 16-year closure

Many other tertiary institutions now also run ODL programmes in the country.

The need for a media tool, particularly radio, to strengthen ODL, was recognised early by policy makers and practitioners. Immediately after the attainment of political independence in 1960, an English by Radio programme was introduced by the Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation (NBC). Jegede (2002) observed that the programmes “were a National Broadcast for both primary and secondary schools relayed during school hours... were integral to school activities and school time tables provided for students to listen and follow instructions with their work under the guidance of their teachers”. In the 1970s, these services were extended to higher institutions where, for example, the NBC “provided facilities also to the University of Lagos for broadcasts to its students registered under the Correspondence and Open Studies scheme” (Ladele, Adefela & Lasokan, 1979:112).

With time, these services were no longer available. The response of the tertiary education community was to embark on advocacy for acquisition of licences to own and operate radio stations which would mainly cater to educational services. One of the major fronts of this advocacy was the University of Lagos which wrote to the government for permission to operate a radio facility, on its campus. According to Prof Alfred Opubor, the Head of the university's Department of Mass Communication, the Federal Government turned down the request (Opubor, 2005).

The advocacy persisted but the advocates had to endure a long wait. The reason is that government delayed the liberalization of the broadcasting sector till 1992 and even when licensing started, it was clear that campus radio was not on priority consideration. A breakthrough of sorts was achieved in 2002, ten years in to the liberalization policy, when the third edition of the Nigeria Broadcasting Code, released that year, provided for the licensing of campus broadcasting in a framework of such conditions as that:

- a) its transmission shall be within the confines of the campus area;
- b) it shall be basically to promote learning
- c) it shall not broadcast for more than six hours daily (NBC Code, 2002)

Subsequent editions of the code provided elaborations and refinement to the foregoing framework. For example, the 2012 edition of the code is now silent on duration of daily transmission and has made such specifications as that:

- a) the principal mandate of a campus broadcaster is to train students in broadcasting and other related fields and to provide opportunities for practical experience as well as promoting the social well-being of the campus community. Pursuant to this, it shall devote at least 70 per cent of its airtime to education/instructional programmes.
- b) a major consideration for the grant of a campus radio licence would be that the institution offers Mass Communication and such other courses as Theatre Arts, ICT, Electrical/Electronics Engineering and Humanities (NBC Code, 2012).

This was the background on which a licence was granted to the University of Lagos in 2002, among a group of sixteen commercial radio licences but sub-classified as “Specialised licence” for “Academic” purposes. Subsequent campus licences followed in batches in 2006 and 2009. As at 2009, 27 such licences have been approved.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Radio is regarded as an important modern medium because of its characteristics. It is cheap and affordable for large sections of populations everywhere. Its content is inexpensive to create and transmit. It is accessible

because it does not require literacy. Listening to it is convenient while its programming is flexible. It can reach far and remote places where there is no access to other mass media.

These characteristics have helped radio to perform important developmental roles, especially in the area of education. Dagrón (2001) compiled fifty case studies which gave vivid accounts of people and communities in various parts of the world who appropriated media (including radio) as a means of empowerment and mobilization for development and social change. Among his radio case studies were:

- a) Radio Sutatenza which was used for educational purposes, especially in the education of rural adults. It became a major tool in the battle against illiteracy in Colombia,
- b) In the Republic of Kiribati, a radio station by name Radio Kirimatiti provided, for the first time, health education to the local population.
- c) Radio Kwizera, a station which served the refugee population in Western Tanzania, near the borders of Burundi and Rwanda.

In Nigeria, a series of studies (cited in Ojebode and Adegbola, 2007) have also reported the use and effectiveness of radio as a development medium in the area of education. Among the studies were:

- a) Brieger (1990) which found (in two rural Nigerian towns) that “radio listeners consistently gain more health information than those who receive other major mass media”.
- b) El Nafaty (1999) in which about 83 per cent of respondents (nomads in their homesteads) said that it was a particular radio programme that encouraged them to enrol their children in nomadic schools.

Conclusions gathered from several studies by Chandar and Sharma (2003) also testify to the usefulness of radio in education. Among these conclusions were that: radio is capable of delivering high quality educational programming to highly diversified audiences located across broad geographical expanses – all at a low per unit production cost; radio benefits weaker learners when used as a supplementary learning tool; and it could be more cost-effective and capable of exerting greater learning effects than textbooks or teacher education. Little wonder that Dagrón (2001, p.14) concluded that radio “is without doubt the communication tool most widely spread throughout the world and has always been the ideal medium for change”.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study seeks to answer the following five questions:

- i. What are the programme packaging/delivery strategies used in support of ODL by the campus radio stations?
- ii. What are the funding mechanisms in place for packaging and airing the ODL programmes?
- iii. What is the status of human resource availability for packaging and broadcasting the programmes?
- iv. How are new media technologies used to support/accompany campus radio broadcasting?
- v. What challenges confront the campus stations in engaging ODL?

METHODOLOGY

Two main data-gathering methods were employed in the study. These were the In-depth Interview and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The in-depth interview puts the researcher in a face-to-face or mediated (through phone or electronic means) relationship with respondents or sources. The FGD brings together and interviews several people simultaneously, with a moderator controlling discussion among the respondents in a structured manner. Both methods have characteristics which give them uniqueness and recommend them as suitable for this kind of study.

The data gathering has a distinct population which consists of managers/administrators, operators and students within the campus radio and ODL establishments in the two universities. The study used purposive sampling which means that respondents possess such characteristics as that they should be part of the operations, management or beneficiaries of the campus radio-ODL programme broadcasting relationship. Data was then analysed.

RESULTS

Analyses of data are here presented to provide answers to each of the research questions.

Programme Packaging/Delivery Strategies of the Stations

Programming for ODL is a year-round activity on the schedule of Diamond FM. The materials broadcast are taken from course materials which curricula have been approved by the university Senate. The materials are packaged in classroom lecture format and recorded by the Distance Learning Centre (DLC). They are then aired each day of the week, except Sunday. On the average, four lectures are broadcast daily and more than 16 hours are devoted to the programme weekly. One of the weekly programmes is devoted to feedback. Students phone into the programme, ask questions and receive responses from resource persons from the DLC.

At Unilag Radio, the ODL programmes are broadcast during a residency period for the students of the Distance Learning Institute (DLI) which holds once in a year. The educational materials are packaged by the staff of the DLI but presentation in the radio station, which also takes a lecture format, is live. After a lecture is presented, the studio telephone lines are opened to students/listeners to phone in and interact with the lecturer, which is an opportunity for immediate feedback. This programme holds four days each week, from Monday to Thursday.

Human Resource Availability

The packaging and delivery of the ODL materials on radio is done on both campuses by the same group of professionals: lecturers from the institutions who teach both regular and ODL courses. The main difference is that: while the DLI at the University of Lagos sources its personnel beyond its campus to other universities and similar institutions, DLC recruits from within the University of Ibadan. They are planning to develop the in-house core staff in future.

At their own end, the two radio stations ensure that the programmes are anchored by their in-house presenters. At Diamond FM, these presenters could sometimes be student volunteers.

Funding Mechanisms

The ODL programmes pay for the radio stations' services in both institutions. Dedicated funding for the broadcast of those programmes is not available from the owner-universities or government. Periodic invoices for broadcast airtime move from the radio stations to the respective ODL institutions, which verify and make payment.

But some payment concessions are granted in both institutions. Unilag Radio gives DLI "a slight discount" while Diamond FM charges "minimal running costs... rates that have wide disparity from what obtains on other radio stations".

However, funding sources for these programmes differ. The DLC programmes aired by Diamond FM get funding support from international donor agencies such as the MacArthur Foundation and Partnership for Higher Education in Africa. At the University of Lagos, they are not as lucky; it is the students that pay, that is, the charges of Unilag Radio are settled from students' fees

The Use of New Media to Complement Radio Broadcasting

The use of new media is popular in both stations to support and expand the reach of traditional broadcasting. During interactive programmes, students/listeners send reactions to the studios using social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Beyond this, students and lecturers are linked through various online platforms which enable them to continue discussion on issues which are raised in the broadcast lectures. These happen in both campuses.

Challenges That Confront Optimal Engagement of ODL

Diverse challenges are confronted by stakeholders in the radio-ODL interaction process. At Diamond FM, management and operators rank power supply and internet access as top challenges. Erratic electricity supply disturbs the smooth running of the station's operations. Poor internet infrastructure limits students' access to educational materials and the use of new media to engage and enjoy the resources of radio broadcasting. For the students/listeners the major concerns are:

- a) Inappropriate timing of some programmes: they miss out on some programmes which are broadcast in the afternoon when many of them are still at work. They would prefer late evening schedules

- b) Change of schedule: the broadcast times of some programmes are arbitrarily changed. As a result, students also miss them. They want fixed, consistent programme schedules.
- c) Reception on radio still has limitations: the content is fleeting and listeners may miss them. The students suggest that content broadcast should also be made available through such formats/platforms as CDs

But at University of Lagos, two key challenges are dominant:

Students complain that awareness of the broadcast of ODL programmes is low; for those who are aware, the programmes are broadcast during the day when many of them are at work. They want vigorous awareness-creation on the programmes done by the DLI authorities, and re-scheduling of broadcast hours by Radio Unilag.

There is also the concern at DLI that the limited coverage of Radio Unilag means that their students who are in relative distant locations cannot receive the broadcast programmes. They would want internet radio platform created for the station so as to extend its reach.

CONCLUSIONS

The study set out to examine issues arising from the use of campus radio broadcasting to support ODL in two Nigerian tertiary-level institutions: the Universities of Lagos and Ibadan. The study found mainly that

- a) Programmes broadcast for ODL is a year-round activity in one radio station (Diamond FM) while it is for a short campus residency period in the other (Unilag Radio); the materials are broadcast in lecture format in both stations although it is delivered live in Lagos while it is mainly recorded before being broadcast in Ibadan.
- b) The human resources for packaging and broadcasting the ODL materials are sourced from the university system within the country. These are lecturers.
- c) There are two dominant funding sources for packaging and broadcasting the programmes. These are students' fees and donor support.
- d) New media platforms are being actively used to support broadcasting in both institutions.
- e) Some critical challenges confront the stakeholders: epileptic power supply and internet access – for the broadcasters; inappropriate/arbitrary programme scheduling and non-introduction of some new media technologies – for students.

The following recommendations are made for various stakeholders:

- a) For ODL institutions that provide year-round instructions for their students, the radio programming and broadcast should cover the entire period
- b) Innovations should be introduced into the packaging of ODL content such that it would not be restricted to the lecture format
- c) Vigorous human resource capacity building should be done by ODL institutions to produce modern programme packaging specialist teams which will comprise lecturers and other education professionals.
- d) Government and international organizations should get involved in the funding of delivery of ODL through radio broadcasting
- e) Campus stations should invest further in the use of new and social media to support programme delivery
- f) Campus stations should do participatory audience research to determine the tastes/needs of their audiences
- g) Government and institutional authorities should prioritise the provision of utilities/facilities such as power and internet access for radio stations on their campuses.

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