

Higher Education for All (EFA) in Nigeria: The Promise of Open and Distance Learning (ODL)

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Abstract: *The social implication for development of educating all citizens of a country cannot be easily quantified. Education is however, seen as an instrument per excellence by many governments the world over, for social and technological development. This paper discusses the Nigeria Government promise of Education for All (EFA), by the year 2015, following the Dakar Declaration of Education for All in the World Education Summit in Dakar, Senegal in the year 2000. It noted the yawning gap between demand for higher education in Nigeria and the average intake per year using the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board statistics for 2005 to 2009 - a five-year period. It further observed that the conventional universities, with restriction on age of entrants, and the limitations of time, infrastructure and space will not enable Nigeria to meet the target of education for all in 2015. And looking at the advantages and successes of mega universities in other and similar regions of the world, the paper draws the attention of the Nigerian Government to the problem above and suggests the use of Open and Distance Learning as an educational delivery system to reach this lofty goal of Education for All in 2015. It concludes that in doing so, Nigeria will be able to meet that aspect of the Millennial Development Goal (MDG).*

Key words: Education for all, higher education, access, open and distance learning, mega universities.

INTRODUCTION

The hype or slogan “Education for All has taken the world stage and not limited to any country or region. This is especially, so after the World Conference on Education held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990. In Jomtien, representatives of the international communities (155 countries, and representatives from 150 organizations), agreed to “universalize primary education, and massively reduce illiteracy by the end of the decade.”(Wikipedia, 2006). That means by the year 2000, all children of school age would have access to primary schooling. The Jomtien Conference also led to the adoption of the World Declaration on Education

for All by the international community. Here education was stressed as a fundamental human right of all citizens of the world, and world governments who adopt the declaration were to adopt strategies that would make them provide primary and adult literacy to their citizens. One can therefore suggest that Education For All (EFA) means the International initiative to bring the benefits of education to every citizen in every society. In order to realize this aim, a broad coalition of national governments, civil society groups, and development agencies such as UNESCO and the World Bank are committed to achieving the EFA goals.

These goals include:

- (i) Expand and improve comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
- (ii) Ensure that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, those in difficult circumstances, and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete, free, and compulsory primary education of good quality.
- (iii) Ensure that learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes.
- (iv) Achieve a 50% improvement in adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.
- (v) Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieve gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access and achievement in basic education of good quality.
- (vi) Improve all aspects of the quality of education and ensure the excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved and all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

The decade (1990 - 2000) following the Jomtien World Education summit, witnessed very slow progress towards EFA (UNESCO, 2011). This necessitated a review of the strategies adopted for implementation, at the Dakar Summit of April and September 2000. The Dakar (Senegal) Summit led to what is generally now known as the Dakar Declaration or the Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000). The Framework for Action re-affirmed the commitment of the participating nations to achieving Education for all by the year 2015. Also the Framework for Action also identifies six key measurable education goals which aim to meet the learning needs of children, youths and adults by 2015. Also, the Framework for Action re-affirmed UNECO's role as the leading organization with the overall responsibility of co-ordinating other agencies and organizations in the attempt to achieve these six goals. The Dakar Framework for Action established the following six goals:

- (i) Expand early childhood care and education.
- (ii) Provide free and compulsory primary education for all.
- (iii) Promote learning and life skills for young people and adults.
- (iv) Increase in adult literacy by 50 percent.
- (v) Achieve gender parity by 2005, and gender equality by 2015.
- (vi) Improve quality of education.

Apart from the UNESCO, there are four cooperating partners at the Dakar forum. These are UNFPA, UNDP, UNICEF and the World Bank. The World Bank in particular recognizes that the achievement of these goals requires supporting the full EFA commitment. Accordingly, the World Bank supports the education for all Fast Track Initiative (FTI) as the primary vehicle for accelerating progress toward quality, universal primary education, and other EFA goals (UNESCO, 2006). In particular, the Bank supports EFA through specific operations in almost 90 countries world wide through multidimensional efforts to:

- (i) Improve primary school access and quality as well as educational quality and learning outcomes.
 - (ii) Improve the dropout and retention rates of girls, as well as their learning outcomes.
 - (iii) Help education systems cope with HIV/AIDS.
 - (iv) Promote early childhood development.
 - (v) Protect EFA prospects in fragile states.
- (UNESCO, 2006)

The bank has also established a children and youth unit to strengthen support for nonformal education, which helps young people develop the necessary skills to improve their opportunities and transition to the labour market.

It must be noted that the decade of 1900 to 2000 had witnessed significant progress toward the achievement of many EFA goals. However, challenges are still there from one region of the world to the other and especially in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. This paper is focused on Nigeria, but with emphasis on higher education. It is necessary to reiterate that there has been tremendous progress in the provision of basic education, and for Nigeria this refers to the first 9 years of schooling, including early childhood care and education. For example all universities and colleges of education are mandated to establish and equip the department of early childhood care and education (ECCE). Basic education in Nigeria is free, but the compulsory element need reinforcing. Nigeria is also innovating in nomadic education, and almajiri school to enable migrating nomadic children of school age to be in school anywhere they are in the country. If the progress made in the almajiri schools are sustained, then the over 9,500,000 almajiri children in the north of the country will be provided basic education. It must be noted that the Nigerian basic education programme is financed by the state, and covers the 6 years of primary schooling and the first three years of secondary education. In most states of the Federation, secondary education is free up to senior secondary including external examination fees. As mentioned earlier, the focus of this paper however is on higher education provision and access in Nigeria. This is important because if education for all is successful in Nigeria, and with its large population, the success will have grave implications on higher education in Nigeria.

RATIONALE FOR EDUCATION FOR ALL

The Education for All movement has its impetus on the universal declaration of Human rights of December 10, 1948, which also included the right for education as

one of its components (ICDE, 2009; Moti, 2010). Tomasevski (2003), had argued that the right to education implies that everyone has the right to education. For this to be implemented, it means that education should be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Similarly technical and professional education should be made generally available, and higher (university) education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. The implication of this to governments is that they are obliged to make education available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable. The General Assembly of the United Nation also called on member countries to make public the text of the declaration, and “to cause it to be disseminated, displayed, read and expounded principally in schools and other educational institutions, without distinction based on the political status of countries or territories.” The ICDE (2009) noted that the right to primary and secondary education has long been accepted, but the belief that higher education is also a human right has also become widely accepted around the globe; including Nigeria. This is expected because there is a cross-cultural and increasingly universal belief that education offers hope for employment and a better way of life for one’s self and one’s children, and the fulfilment of one’s personal aspirations.

Implicit in the rationale for High educational as a right is the belief that access to knowledge and learning is a universal right too. Knowledge is also increasingly regarded as the solution to individual and collective social and economic problems. To be fitted into the new world community or global “village”, one need to be equipped with the right education, which cuts across culture and border so that it enhance one’s ability to complete favourably in the global knowledge economy. Thus, the strength of nations may be judged by the participation of its citizens in the new economy driven by knowledge and learning. Higher education plays a key role in global competitions. In relation to higher education therefore, ICDE (2009) defined globalization in terms of the economic, technological, political and societal forms opening access to twenty-first century higher education to all and not just the upper, and the middle classes of the developed world. The rationale for making higher education accessible to all on the basis of merit has gained further impetus in the words of Thabo Mbeki, former South African President who said

“if the next century is going to be characterised as an African century, for social and economic progress of African people, the century of durable peace and sustained development of Africa, then the success of this project is dependent on the success of our educational systems. For nowhere in the world has sustained development been attained without a well-functioning system of education, without effective higher primary education and research sector, without equality of educational opportunity.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA AND THE CHALLENGES OF ACCESS

Higher education is obviously the basic instrument for economic growth and technological advancement in any society. To this end, government, all over the world commits huge resources to ensure the provision of higher education for their citizens, and also tailor their policies towards ensuring that it is made accessible to the citizenry.

The Nigerian higher education system is made up of universities, polytechnics and colleges of education, offering programmes in almost all spheres of learning – arts, social sciences, the sciences, engineering, medicine etc. As described by Moti (2006), and NUC (2008), it is the largest and most complex higher education system on the African continent. It is estimated that there are well over 140 national, state and private (including those owned by religious organization) universities in Nigeria. The other higher education institutions (polytechnics, monotronics, and colleges of education) are estimated to be over 139 (Obasi, 2008). The Federal Ministry of Education has responsibility to ensure that these institutions are running according to the policies in place. In addition, there are specific commissions under the ministry of education that is saddled with the oversight functions of these institutions. For example, the National Universities Commission (NUC), oversees the universities in terms of standards, accreditation of courses, general supervisions etc. The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), and the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) perform similar functions for the colleges of education and the polytechnics in the country. The Federal Government is responsible for funding federal universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. The state universities, polytechnics and colleges of education are funded by the states agencies like Education Task Fund (ETF), and Tertiary Education Fund (TEF) provide funding assistance and interventions in federal, state and private higher educational institutions in Nigeria. This paper had restricted itself to issues of access as they affect the universities. It is assumed that the trends observed in the universities (state and federal) are similar to those found in other higher institutions.

The issue of access to higher education in Nigeria is very old. It is as old as the university system itself. The issue of access to university education (higher education) was first raised by the Ash commission in 1959. The commission report indicated that there was an imbalance in educational opportunities between the Southern and Northern parts of Nigeria, and that there were limited admission opportunities for primary school leavers (Fagbunmi, 2005). Access to higher education and the lack of capacity of the system to absorb the number of students seeking admission to higher education institutions continues to pose problem to this day. The problems of access seem to be exacerbated by increase in population which has led to an expansion in the primary and secondary school systems.

The Nigerian National Policy on Education (2004) defines access as making it possible for everyone who is entitled to education to receive it. And to this end, every Nigerian child, and adult citizens are entitled to education as per Nigeria's commitment to the universal declaration of Human Right (UN, 1948), which includes education. Tonwe (2005), Dada (2004) defined access as the right to received formal education as distinct from informal education. UNESCO (2003) puts 'access' in tertiary education as meaning "ensuring equitable access" to tertiary education institutions based on merit, capacity, efforts and perseverance. Closely related to access is the issue of equity in education, which according to Ene (2005), it implies ensuring that all the segments of society (minority or otherwise) get their fair share of access to whatever educational opportunities are provided. Access is seen here as the right or opportunity of the citizens to use the higher educational

institutions to advance themselves on merit without being hindered by any kind of state law or without being discriminated against on the bases of natural disability. The National Policy on Education provided for equal opportunities for all Nigerian citizens at all levels of education without discrimination.

In Nigeria, problem of access to higher education is well documented. Statistics from the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), and the National Universities Commission (NUC) show that on the average Nigerian universities admit only 13% of ‘qualified’ students. Table 1 below shows the number of students who apply for admission, and the number admitted between 1978 and 2008, for a total of twenty-eight (28).

Table 1: Total applications and admission into universities in Nigeria 1978-2008

| Academic Year | Total Applications | Total Admission | % Admitted | % Not Admitted |
|----------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 1978/79 | 114,801 | 14,417 | 12.6 | 87.4 |
| 1979/80 | 144,939 | 28,213 | 19.3 | 80.7 |
| 1980/81 | 180,673 | 26,808 | 14.8 | 85.2 |
| 1981/82 | 205,112 | 29,800 | 14.5 | 85.5 |
| 1982/83 | 191,583 | 27,373 | 14.3 | 85.7 |
| 1983/84 | | | | |
| 1984/85 | 201,140 | 27,482 | 13.7 | 86.3 |
| 1985/86 | 212,114 | 30,996 | 14.6 | 85.4 |
| 1986/87 | 193,774 | 39,915 | 20.6 | 79.4 |
| 1987/88 | 210,525 | 36,456 | 17.3 | 82.7 |
| 1988/89 | 190,353 | 41,700 | 21.9 | 78.1 |
| 1989/90 | 255,638 | 38,431 | 15.0 | 85.0 |
| 1990/91 | 287,572 | 48,504 | 16.9 | 83.1 |
| 1991/92 | 398,270 | 61,479 | 15.4 | 84.6 |
| 1992/93 | 357,950 | 57,685 | 16.1 | 83.9 |
| 1993/94 | 420,681 | 65,783 | 16.0 | 84.0 |
| 1994/95 | | | | |
| 1995/96 | 512,797 | 37,498 | 7.3 | 92.7 |
| 1996/97 | 475,923 | 79,904 | 16.8 | 83.2 |
| 1997/98 | 419,807 | 72,791 | 17.3 | 82.7 |
| 1998/99 | 340,117 | 78,550 | 23.1 | 76.9 |
| 1999/00 | 417,773 | 78,550 | 18.8 | 81.2 |
| 2000/01 | 416,381 | 45,766 | 11.0 | 89.0 |
| 2001/02 | 749,417 | 90,769 | 12.1 | 87.9 |
| 2002/03 | 994,381 | 51,845 | 5.2 | 94.8 |
| 2003/04 | 146,103 | 104,991 | 10.0 | 90.0 |
| 2004/05 | 841,878 | 122,492 | 14.6 | 85.4 |
| 2005/06 | 916,371 | 76,984 | 8.4 | 91.6 |
| 2006/07 | 803,472 | 88,524 | 11.0 | 89.0 |
| 2007/08 | 911, 653 | 107,320 | 11.8 | 88.2 |
| | | | | 87% |
| Totals | 12,411,200 | 1, 610, 026 | 13% | |

Source: JAMB Applications and Admission Statistics, 2005.

Table 1 above shows that contrary to the NPE (2009) postulation that there will be unfettered access to education at all level by Nigerian citizens, the problem and challenges of access to higher education has continued to beset the Nigerian Higher Education System. The National Policy on Education (2004) clearly enunciated government's plans to ensure that everyone was afforded an opportunity within and outside the formal school system to acquire as much education as he/she can at the primary, secondary and higher education level. This will enable each person to be able to contribute meaningfully to national development. Section 5 of the NPE (2004) clearly articulated how it intends to widen access to higher education especially in the universities, such that everyone that demands university education would have a fair chance of being selected.

FACTORS RESTRICTING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Many factors, most of which are government policies are thought to be responsible for the problem of access to higher education in Nigeria. One of such factors is the upwardly mobile population and the needs of a globalized economy. According to Okebukola (2006), the major contributory factors in the expansion of demand for university education, which has impeded access, is the expansion in basic and secondary education and the number and rate of growth of students that want university education. The entire university system from 1978-2008 could only accommodate about 13% of those seeking admission. This situation is predicted to worsen when graduates of the Universal Basic Education Scheme (UBES) come knocking on the doors of the universities(Okebukola, 2006).

Ilosanya (2008) views the issues of access to higher education as politics. He observed that variations in educational development between the southern and northern parts of Nigeria had necessitated the introduction of certain policies that had worked against access to university education. This had occasioned the creation of the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) in order to centralize admission into Nigerian universities. Akpotie (2005), agreeing with Ilosanya, averred that the major obstacles to increased access to higher education in Nigeria are the reform policies of quota system, catchments area admission policy, which are JAMB admission indices, and poor and inadequate facilities, including limited absorptive capacity of Nigerian universities. The declared objectives of JAMB at inception were to develop a system for streamlining university admissions on a uniform and fair basis. JAMB was also aimed at evolving a uniform standard for university admissions and to ensure that merit serves as the basis of selection. Unfortunately JAMB had been amortised by policies which sacrifices merit in favour of quota system, catchments area, educationally disadvantaged states, discretion etc. which are non-academic considerations., Instead of standardizing admissions on merit, JAMB has in recent years turned into a political tool to effect equalization of educational advancement between the north and the south of Nigeria. JAMB pattern of admission requires merit 45%, catchments area 35%, disadvantage area 20% and discretion 10% (Obilade, 1992).

The factor of carrying capacity, as pursued by the National universities commission is another very serious restrictive index of access to university education in Nigeria. The NUC has in recent time allowed universities to admit students based on their

carrying capacity, in other words, admissions are based on available space, (hostels and classrooms), laboratory and equipment for practicals etc. This becomes necessary because infrastructural decays are witnessed in all universities as a result of low budgetary allocation to the education sector in Nigeria which caused fluctuations in carrying capacity. NUC statistics shows differences between total admissions and NUC carrying capacity of some selected years.

Table 2: Total Admissions and NUC carrying capacity 2000-2008

| Academic Year | Total Admissions | NUC Carrying Capacity | Difference |
|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| 2000/2001 | 45,766 | 74,929 | - 29,163 |
| 2001/2002 | 90,769 | 82,295 | + 8,474 |
| 2002/2003 | 51,845 | 70,625 | - 18,780 |
| 2003/2004 | 104,991 | 82,655 | + 22,336 |
| 2004/2005 | 122,492 | 82,655 | + 39,837 |
| 2005/2006 | 76,984 | 86,755 | - 10,229 |
| 2006/2007 | 88,524 | 86,755 | + 1,769 |
| 2007/2008 | 107,320 | 90,656 | + 16,764 |

Source: NUC Admission bulletin, 2000 – 2008.

Government had in recent time initiated some programmes and actions that have changed the landscape of widening access to university education. For example, Nigeria has urged the universities to ensure that everyone who can afford the opportunity of university education equitably develops his or her potentials to be able to understand and appreciate their environments whether it is internal or external. Government has also established the national Open University of Nigeria since 1983 and between 2011 and 2012 had established twelve more conventional universities, including the licensing of a number of private universities to help increase access to higher education. However, these initiatives are like a drop of water in the ocean.

HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS: THE PROMISE OF ODL

The Open and Distance Learning mode of education delivery seems to be catching up with the world, and Nigeria must of necessity look in this direction to increase access to higher education in Nigeria.

Having established a number of higher education institutions in recent time (from 3 universities in 1960, the Nigerian University System has expanded to over 114 universities by 2013). The system is however, still facing acute shortage of space to accommodate the teeming population of youths from the secondary education system seeking university education. It is high time Nigeria started looking in. It is important to note that in 2012, about 1.5 million candidates sat for the University Matriculation Examination (UME), and only about 500,000 were admitted.

According to the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), open and distance learning is a way of providing learning opportunities that is characterised by the separation of teacher and learner in time and place or both time and place. It is the kind of

learning that is certified in some way by an institution or agency, and uses a variety of media, including print and electronic, two-way communication that allows learners and tutors to interact. It can provide the possibility of occasional face-to-face meetings, and a specialized division of labour in the production and delivery of courses. It is not intended here to give a detailed historical development of open and distance learning universities in the world. However, it is worthy to note that the success of the University of South Africa (UNISA); the world oldest distance university, stimulated the growth of open universities in the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Asia and lately, Nigeria.

The International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) had listed the following features of the open universities around the world:

- Providing educational opportunity to a broader segment of the population, thereby encouraging the movement from elitist to mass higher education
- Formalizing independent and lifelong opportunities for adults
- Promoting the use of multimedia and new information and technology in distance and conventional higher education
- Achieving cost effectiveness through large scale operations as seen in mega universities.
- Providing internationalization in higher education through cross-border delivery of courses and programmes.

More importantly Peters (2008), had observed that open universities endeavour to

- Produce more graduates at a lower per student cost
- Provide for greater equality of educational opportunities
- Provide access to adult students
- Provide professional qualifications
- Assist in the development and democratization of their respective countries.

Statistics have shown that the Open and Distance Learning System has played significant roles in Asia, especially in providing access to higher education. Table 3 below shows some selected 30 mega universities and their enrolment.

Table 3: Total students Enrolment in Selected Mega Universities

| Rank | Institution | Location | Founded | Enrolment |
|-------------|--|---------------------|----------------|------------------|
| 1 | Indira Gandhi National Open University | New Delhi, India | 1985 | 3,500,000 |
| 2. | Islamic Azad University | Tehran, Iran | 1982 | 1,900,000 |
| 3. | Allama Iqbal Open University | Islamabad, Pakistan | 1974 | 1,121,038 |
| 4. | Anadolu University | Eskisehir Turkey | 1958 | 1,141,180 |
| 5. | Bangladesh National University | Gazipur, Bangladesh | 1972 | 850,000 |
| 6. | Payame Noor University | Tehran, Iran | 1987 | 818,150 |
| 7. | Bangladesh Open Universities | Bangladesh | 1992 | 650,000 |

| | | | | |
|-----|---|----------------------------|------|---------|
| 8. | Universitas Terbuka | Jukartun Indonesia | 1984 | 646,467 |
| 9. | Ramkhamhueng University | Bangkook, Thailand | 1971 | 525,000 |
| 10. | Tribhuran University | Kirtipur, Nepal | 1959 | 500,000 |
| 11. | University of Pune | Pune, India | 1948 | 496,531 |
| 12. | University System of Ohia | Ohia, USA | 2007 | 478,000 |
| 13. | State University of New York | NY, USA | 1948 | 467,845 |
| 14. | Andhra Pradesh Open University | Andhra Pradesh, India | 1982 | 450,000 |
| 15. | University of Punjab | Lahore, Pakistan | 1882 | 450,000 |
| 16. | California State University | California, USA | 1857 | 417,000 |
| 17. | University of Delhi | New Delhi, India | 1922 | 400,000 |
| 18. | Sikkim Manipal University | Sikkim, India | 1995 | 390,000 |
| 19. | University of Buenos Aires | Buenos Aires Argentina | 1821 | 316,000 |
| 20. | National Autonomous University of Mexico | Mexico City, Mexico | 1910 | 324,413 |
| 21. | Spiru Haret University | Bucharest, Romania | 1991 | 311,928 |
| 22. | University System of Georgia | Georgia, USA | 1930 | 311,442 |
| 23. | University System of Florida | Florida, USA | 1954 | 302,513 |
| 24. | Osmania University | Hyderabad, India | 1918 | 300,000 |
| 25. | National University of Distance Education | Spain | 1972 | 260,000 |
| 26. | Rajiv Gandhi Technical University | Bhopal, India | 1998 | 260,000 |
| 27. | Open University | Milton Keynes, England, UK | 1969 | 253,075 |
| 28. | University of South Africa | Pretoria, Gauteng, SA | 1873 | 250,000 |
| 29. | National Polytechnic | Mexico City, Mexico | 1936 | 229,070 |
| 30. | Estácio de Sá University | Rio de Janeiro, Brazil | 1970 | 215,000 |

Source: Ofolue C. I. (2013) An Overview of Open and Distance learning. Workshop Material

For purposes of comparison and analysis, the admissions for 2003/2004 -2012/2013 for the University of Lagos and the National Open University of Nigeria is presented in table 4.

Table 4: Total Admissions for University of Lagos and NOUN, 2003/2004 - 2011/2012

| Year | Unilag | NOUN |
|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| 2003/2004 | 2,451 | 7,345 |
| 2004/2005 | 2,502 | n/a |
| 2005/2006 | 3,102 | 17,141 |
| 2006/2007 | 3,301 | n/a |
| 2007/2008 | 3,615 | 19,160 |
| 2008/2009 | 2,860 | 13,505 |
| 2009/2010 | 3,642 | 8,114 |
| 2010/2011 | 3,113 | 29,682 |
| 2011/2012 | 3,309 | 24,934 |
| 2012/2013 | 3,659 | n/a |

Source: University of Lagos and NOUN

DISCUSSIONS

Table 1, 3, 4 and 5 throw up very important observations which are relevant to the present discussion:

1. A total of 12,411,200 students applied for admission for the period, 1978/79 though 2007/2008.
2. Out of the over 12m applicants above, only 1, 610,026 representing 13% were admitted within the period.
3. About 10,801,174 representing 87% were denied access within the period under review.
4. In 2012/2013, 83,865 applicants chose the University of Lagos. Only 3, 659 students were admitted. Over 80, 000 were denied access. Similar situations may play out in other universities across the country.
5. The total students admission in the University of Lagos in previous years may not differ markedly from that of 2011/2012, 2012/2013 shown in table 4. Extrapolating for a ten years period, the University of Lagos may be able to admit 37,000 students. To date, the University of Lagos has the highest number of UTME applicants on yearly bases in Nigeria.

6. The National Open University of Nigeria the only single mode Distance Learning University in Nigeria, had a total students admission of 119,881 in seven years period as shown on table 5.
7. Compared with the University of Lagos in 2011/2012, NOUN had a total students' enrolment of 24,934, as against Unilag 3,309.
8. Table 3 shows that a single mega university, most of which are Open and Distance Learning Universities could address the access demands more easily for all Nigerian applicants in a year than a number of face-to-face institutions combined. For example, the total students' enrolment at Indira Ghandi National Open University (IGNOU) – India is put at 3,500,000.
9. The obvious inference from the statistics shown on the tables is that the Open and Distance Learning System (ODLS) holds the promise for access to higher education in the world, and in particular Nigeria. Table 3 shows that the Asian region is reaping an access bumper harvest in this regard, Nigeria can copy from their success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The failure of the conventional universities to meet the challenges of access to higher education, which the National Policy on Education (2004) had enunciated, and which many Nigerian youths and adult are yearning for is well documented. The success of the Open University System in meeting demand for access in Asia, UK, and the US are also shown in the statistics. On the strength of the above assertions, the following recommendations are made:

- Nigeria should encourage the use of the Open and Distance Learning System of education delivery.
- Higher Education for All who need it may continue to be a mirage if the present challenges of access are not tackled using the Open and Distance Learning approach.
- The ODL indeed holds the key to the promise of access to higher education.

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