

ANALYSIS OF FACE - TO - FACE TUTORIAL SERVICES

FOR DISTANCE LEARNERS: The CASE

Of SMUC, CODL, ADDIS ABEBA CENTER

(Action Research)

**Submitted to : St. Mary's University College
(SMUC)**

Prepared by: Denisew Liramu & Mikiyas Sileshi

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CHAPTER ONE

1. The Problem and Its Approach

This chapter deals with the background, statement of the problem, significance of the study, delimitation of the study, the research design, organization of the study and definition of the terms used.

1.1 Background

In most developing countries such as ours, since the majority of adult population is out of formal school system, non-formal education is an effective strategy in providing access to education in various delivery modes based on the learners' need. One of the delivery modes of non-formal education is distance education.(knowles,1980:25)

In the context of education system of Ethiopia, the program of distance education is being conducted in various institutions at different levels of which St. Mary's University College is one.

Therefore, this paper focuses on pointing out certain problem areas in the approach of tutorial program in St. Mary's University College (SMUC) at Addis Ababa Center and suggesting some possible solutions to problems observed.

1.2 Objectives (Purpose) of the Study

The purpose of this study is to assess and analyze the existing approaches of the tutorial services of distance education in SMUC especially at Addis Ababa Center and thereby forward recommendations for further improvement.

In this attempt, the study will seek to answer the following basic questions.

1. Are tutors and distance learners interested in the tutorial program?
2. What are the main problems of distance learners and tutors in the tutorial program?
3. Is there a two-way communication between the tutors and the distance learners?

1.3 Significance of the Study

The research team believes that St.Mary's University College, especially, the College of Open and Distance Learning (CODL) can be benefited from the findings of this study to conduct the tutorial program in more effective way. Even though the focus of the study is on Addis Ababa Center, since it is based on the general methodology and principles of Andragogy, its findings can be useful to other centers, too. In addition, it also may be used as a base for further comprehensive study in the all dimensions of the distance education program of the University College.

1.4 Delimitation of the Study

Even though the tutorial program is being carried out in various centers of the University College, due to time and financial constraint, the study is restricted only to Addis Abeba tutorial center.

1.5 The Research Design and Methodology

The study employs a descriptive survey type, where documentary information, questionnaires and interview were used as tools of data collection.

The study sample constituted a total of 150 respondents, i.e. 124 learners, 24 tutors and 2 coordinators. The selection of the center for the study including the coordinators was made on the basis of availability sampling technique, whereas the learners and tutors were taken by simple random sampling technique.

In order to collect relevant data, the two sets of questionnaires and an interview were prepared in Amharic. After the distribution, completion and collection of the questionnaires, the responses obtained were organized, tabulated and analyzed in terms of percentage. Finally, summary of the findings and conclusions were made and recommendations were forwarded on the basis of the data analyzed.

1.6 Organization of the Study

The study is composed of four chapters. Chapter One consists of introductory information concerning the problems to be researched and ways of approaching. The second chapter deals with the review of related literature, while the third chapter consists of the analysis on the interpretation of the data gathered. The last chapter presents the summary of the findings, the conclusions and the recommendations.

1.7 Abbreviations of the Key Terms Used

For the purpose of clarity and consistency in the study, the following abbreviations of terms are used..

- CODL = College of Open and Distance Learning (within St.Mary's University College)
- MoE = Ministry of Education
- SMUC= St.Mary's University College

- n (in the tables) = number of respondents
- TC= Testing Center (within St.Mary's University College)

CHAPTER TWO

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a review of literature that underpins this study. At first it gives an overview on the concept of adult and non-formal education in general and distance education in particular. It then indicates the highlights on the ways of assisting distance learners in their study.

2.2. The Concept of Distance Education

In most developing countries such as ours, since the majority of the adult population is out of the formal school system, non-formal education is an effective strategy in providing access to education in various delivery modes based on the learners need.

As it is described by Knowles, one of the delivery modes of non-formal education is 'distance education', that has been accepted as a legitimate mode of education by both developed and developing countries. When properly and timely used, it is an effective, economical and productive way of delivering instruction. (Knowles, 1980:25).

Distance education is the system of education in which education is imparted to students from a distance. It contains two basic elements: (a) the physical separation of teacher and learner; and (b) the changed role of the teacher, who may meet the students only for selected tasks such as counseling, giving tutorials or solving students' problems. The system is heavily dependent upon the printed material and too limited to face-to-face contact sessions. (Reddy, 1996)

When we say, distance education is a method characterized by physical separation of the teacher and the learner, it does not mean that there is no interaction with learners and the organizing body (tutors). The learners might face various problems as a result of the content which they are studying. (Rahel, 2009)

2.3. Difficulties that Open and Distance Learning Students May Face During Studying

R. Lewis points out that:

- *there will be a delay in getting, materials and feedback (module, assignment, project work etc.)*
- *they may feel isolated and may find it hard to keep going,*
- *they can be discouraged or 'stuck' and unable to resolve problems quickly,*
- *they may face problems in self-discipline, careful planning and study tactics,*
- *in the case of adults, they may lack a confidence thinking that "they are too old to study." (Lewis, 1981:15)*

In order to solve (minimize) these problems, the following should be taken into consideration.

- Students' work (assignment and projects) should be marked and returned very quickly, as much as possible, with ample comment.
- Students must be provided with sufficient study materials in time (during registration).
- As prevailing situation allows, a variety of mechanisms to contact learners through telephone and correspondence should be facilitated.

- In addition to reviewing the course materials, tutors have to assist learners in developing their study skills by giving them guidance and counseling in face-to-face tutorial program.
- It is very important to give a professional advice to adult learners know 'how to study before they start to study'. In other words, they have to learn 'how to learn' before they enter into actual study program. (Percy D. 1989).

2.4. The Role of Face-to-Face Tutorial Program

As it is explained by R. Lewis, face-to-face tutorial program is useful:

- to establish a personal human link between the tutor, and the learners and to create a relationship among fellow students,
- to reinforce the learning materials and to offer remedial help,
- to encourage a peer-group interaction,

- to make clear the difficulty concepts in the learning material through a two-way communication, and
- largely, to maintain motivation among learners. (Lewis, 1981:125)

Generally, a face-to-face contact (tutorial) program is likely to be the most costly; so, it needs a careful planning. It requires best communicators (tutors) those who:

- are respected by the learners and society,
- know more about adult behavior, and
- have greatest influence. (EMA, 2004)

2.5. The Way of Handling Group Tutorial Classes

A) Preparation Before Tutorial Session

The learners should be clearly informed the schedule of the program. They have to be initiated to come with some questions which might be unclear to them while studying. Also, it is advisable to provide learners with some general questions in advance to be studied before a tutorial class. In addition, since most of the participants are adults, the tutorial classroom should be clean with a sufficient light and fresh air.

Although, it is not convenient to prepare a lesson plan similar to formal education classes, the tutor should be ready beforehand to answer unpredicted questions which can be raised from the participants.

B) During the Tutorial Session

The following are some of the important points to be given attention by tutors.

- Putting the participants at ease by giving them a short and brief introduction how the session is going to be handled,
- Providing a short and general description on the course content,
- Providing a chance (enough time) for participants to ask questions and create interaction. (*http://Rezanur(2006)*)

C) Ending the Tutorial Session

At the end of the face-to-face tutorial session:

- the participants should be asked for ideas and comments which will help the tutor to improve the next tutorial program, and

- a short conclusion should be given by initiating the learners and giving some intellectual pieces of advices to motivate them for better performance. (Lewis: 135)

Reddy V. Points out that *attendance at tutorial centers should be made compulsory. Tutors who are not familiar with the techniques of counseling and treating adults should get some orientation beforehand.* (Reddy, 1996)

2.6. Factors that Contribute to a Successful Distance Education

A) The students

- attitude, motivation, study skills, independent learning ability

B) The course

- Relevance, effectiveness, efficiency of course material and clear media, etc.
- The distribution system and availability of course materials,

C) The student support system

- Registration service
- Academic advice and counseling
- Communication and other components
 - tutorial
 - other means of communication

D) Evaluation system

- Assignment and project work
- Examination
- Accurate and timely grading system (EMA, 2004)

Similarly, as indicated in the implementation guide (manual) of the tutorial program of St. Mary's University College, College of Open and Distance

Learning (CODL), *it is important to give a brief orientation to tutors in advance. Additionally, conducting tutors performance evaluation will help for future action.* (CODL guide, 2002)

CHAPTER THREE

3. Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of the Data

This chapter deals with the presentation, analysis and interpretation of the data obtained through the two types of questionnaires and an interview from three different groups of key people to the distance education tutorial program. The three groups of respondents were distance learners, Tutors, (Assessors from Testing Center, Editor Tutor Assessors from CODL, and from other educational institutions) and Tutorial Coordinators of CODL who involved in Sene, 2003 tutorial program at Addis Ababa Center.

The respondents of the study constituted a total of 150, i.e. 124 learners, 24 tutors and 2 coordinators. The selection of the center for the study was made on the basis of availability sampling technique, whereas the learners and tutors were taken by simple random sampling technique. The gathered data were tabulated, analyzed and interpreted in the following manner.

3.1 Characteristics of the Respondents

Table I. The characteristics of respondents by Age, Sex, Education Level, and Marital Status

NO	Characteristics		Respondents					
			Learners (n=124)		Tutors (n=24)		Coordinator s (n=2)	
			No`	%	No	%	No	%
1	Sex	A) Male	80	64.5	17	70.8	2	100
		B) Female	44	35.5	7	29.2	-	-

NO	Characteristics		Respondents					
			Learners (n=124)		Tutors (n=24)		Coordinator s (n=2)	
			No`	%	No	%	No	%
2	Age	A) 20-30 years	49	39.5	16	67.0	2	100
		B) 31-40 years	48	38.7	4	16.5	-	-
		C) Above 40 years	27	21.8	4	16.5	-	-
3	Education	A) Degree (on process)	67	54.0	-	-	-	-
		B) Diploma (on process)	50	40.3	-	-	-	-
		C) Certificate (on process)	7	5.6	-	-	-	-
		D) BA	-	-	19	79.2	2	100
		E) MA	-	-	5	20.8	-	-
4	Marital Status	A) Single	46	37.1	15	62.5	2	100
		B) Married	78	62.9	9	37.5	-	-

As shown in Table I, from the total of 150 respondents, 66% were male and 34% female.

Regarding educational level, 54% of the learners were from Degree program, 40.3% were from Diploma and the rest 5.6% were from certificate program. The majority of the tutors (79.2%) were First Degree holders and 20.8 % were of Masters Degree.

In terms of age, 67% of tutors were less than age of 30 and 60.5% of respondent-learners were above the age of 31.

The information obtained from the table also reflects that from the total respondents, 62.9 % of learners and 37.5 % of tutors were married.

3.2 Analysis and Interpretation of the Data

Table II. The Experience of Respondents in Tutorial Program

Items	Learners (n=124)		Tutors and coordinators (n=26)	
	No	%	No	%
For how many terms did you participate in tutorial program at SMUC?				
A) For the first time	-	-	5	19.2
B) For the second time and above	120	96.8	21	80.8
C) No response	4	3.2	-	-

As it can be seen in Table II, 96.8% of learners have attended the tutorial program for two or more terms. In case of tutors, the majority of respondents (80.8%) had participated in tutorial program for various rounds. On the other hand, 19.2% of the respondent-tutors were with no experience and skill of tutoring distance learners.

Table III. The Learners' Interest Towards the Tutorial Program

No	Items	Learners Response (n= 124)	
		No	%
1	How do you rate the advantage you got from tutorial program?		
	A) High	25	20.2
	B) Medium	55	44.4
	C) Low	44	35.4
2	IF "medium" or "low" the reason is		
	A) Lack of tutors' preparation	30/99*	33.3
	B) Shortage of time allotted	71/99*	71.7
	C) Delay of module distribution	41/99*	41.4
	D) Being bulky of modules	35/99*	35.3
	E) Unavailability of tutorial questions	60/99*	60.6
3	The time allotted for discussion:	23	18.5
	A) It was enough	73	58.9
	B) Not enough	27	21.8
	C) No time allotted	1	0.8
	D) No response		
4	How clear was the description given by tutors?		
	A) Very clear	24	19.4
	B) Medium	56	45.2
	C) Not clear	43	34.6
	D) No response	1	0.8

*Multiple response

Regarding the interest of the learners towards tutorial program, (Table III), 44.4 % and 35.4% of them responded that the advantage they got was

“medium” and “low” respectively. On the other hand, only 20.2 % of the respondents indicated that they got great advantage from the tutorial program. As it can be seen in the table, question 2, the respondents replied in their multiple response, that the reason for decreased interest on tutorial program was a shortage of time allotted (71.7%) , unavailability of “tutorial questions” (60.6%), delay of module distribution (41.4%) and lack of tutors preparation(33.3%).

In terms of “Time allotment” for discussion during tutorial session, (Qu.3) the majority of the respondents (58.9%) said that the time given for discussion was not enough and 21.8% of them pointed out that no time at all was given for discussion. Only 18.5 % were responded that the given time was enough.

Concerning the clarity of the tutors’ description during tutorial sessions, (Qu.4) , 45.2% and 34.6% of them respectively replied that it was “medium” and “not clear”. Contrarily 19.4% of them indicated that it was very clear.

Table IV. Preparation of the Learners for Tutorial Program

No	Items	Learners’ Response (n=124)	
		No	%
1	Did you come with some questions to ask during tutorial session?		
	A) Yes	71	57.3
	B) No	50	40.3
	C) No response	3	2.4

No	Items	Learners' Response (n=124)	
		No	%
2	For Qu 1, if your response is "yes" did you get a chance to ask and got a satisfactory answer? A) Yes and got satisfactory answer B) Yes, but not satisfactory answer C) No question asked	35/71 10/71 26/71	49.3 14.1 36.6
3	For Qu.1, if your response is "No", what was the reason? A) Lack of time to read the module B) Unavailability of Module in time C) It was clear, no need for question D) Assuming, no time for question E) Unavailability of Tutorial Questions F) No response	8/50 26/50 1/50 5/50 10/50 -	16.0 52.0 2.0 10.0 20.0 -

Table IV reveals the degree to which the learners were prepared beforehand for the tutorial program. As it can be seen in question 1, most of the respondents, (57.3%) came to the tutorial session with some questions which were unclear to them while studying. Others (40.3%) replied that they come with no questions.

As it is indicated in question 2, out of those who came with questions, 49.3% had a chance to ask question and got a satisfactory response. Contrarily, 14.1% of them did not get satisfactory answer. And 36.6% out of 71(Qu.2C) have not got a chance at all to ask question due to a shortage of time.

As it is seen in question 1, those who came to tutorial session with no preparation (40.3%) indicated their reasons under question 3, ie. unavailability of module in time (52%), unavailability of “Tutorial questions” (20%), lack of time to read the module, (16%) and assuming, no time to ask question (10%).

Table V. Preparation of Tutors for the Tutorial Program

No	Items	Tutors' response (n=24)	
		No	%
1	How do you rate your preparation for the tutorial program? A) Well prepared B) Medium C) Low	12 7 5	50 29.2 20.8
2	For Qu.1, if your response is either “medium” or “low” what was the reason? A) Lack of time B) Large content of the modules	7/12 5/12	58.3 41.7
3	How was learners' participation in the tutorial class? A) Very good B) Medium C) Low D) No participation at all	2 8 11 3	8.3 33.3 45.8 12.5

No	Items	Tutors' response (n=24)	
		No	%
4	For Qu3 if it is "low "or "no participation what could be t he the reason? A) Paying less attention of learners for tutorial B) Shortage of time for discussion	7/14 7/14	50.0 50.0

According to the response indicated in Table V, half of the tutors (50%) made preparation for the tutorial program before-hand. The rest, 29.2% and 20.8% made medium and low preparation respectively. As stated under question 2, lack of time (58.3%) and the large content of modules (41.7%) were given as a reason for an unsatisfactory preparation.

Regarding the learners participation, the majority (45.8%) replied that it was "low," 33.3 % medium and 12.5% indicated "no participation at all". Only 8.3 % of tutor-respondents rated that it was "very good".

Accordingly, as it is indicated in question 4, half of the respondent responded that the cause for "low" and "no participation", was lack of learners' preparation (50%) and shortage of time for discussion (50%)

Table VI. Data Gathered from the Coordinators of the Tutorial Program through Interview

NO	Questions raised	Response of coordinators (n=2)
1	How many learners were expected to attend this program?	Approximately 1200
2	How many attended?	900
3	How many tutors were	From SMUC -34 out of the college 7 Total 41

NO	Questions raised	Response of coordinators (n=2)
	assigned?	
4	When compared with previous programs, how was the interest of learners to attend tutorial?	Decreasing
5	What will be the case for decreasing number of learners to attend tutorial?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some learners give less attention to tutorial, as if it is not a part of learning - Some tutors lack efficiency of tutoring, that their weak and unplanned approach do not attract learners to attend the class.
6	In your opinion, what are the major problems of tutors?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of motivation - Boring due to staying the whole day for a single course (specially who join one course)
7	What do you suggest in order to solve or minimize these problems?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some mechanisms should be developed to motivate the tutors (Specially for those who are assigned from SMUC) - Weekly (Sunday) study circle should be organized

According to the response given by the coordinators of the tutorial program through structured interview, (Table VI), from approximately expected total of 1200 attendants about 900 were present, i.e.25% were absent. But, the above figure (900) does not show the full attendance of the learners because once the attendance was taken, it is obvious that some of them (uninterested groups) leave the class in the middle of the session.

As it is indicated in question 3, from the total of 41 tutors, 34 (83%) of them were assigned from SMUC employees (from TC and CODL), the rest 7 (17%) were employed from external educational institutions.

Regarding the interest of the learners for tutorial, as the response for question 4 shows, is decreasing. And as replied in question 5, the cause for

lack of interest in terms of the learners was giving less attention to tutorial program and, on the other hand, lack of efficiency and lack of motivation of some tutors.

Accordingly, the response for question 6, also indicates that the major problems of tutors are lack of motivation and boring to stay for the whole day. In this case, there are such instances that some tutors become absent mainly in the afternoon session. In addition, some of them complete their afternoon program within the morning session by making an agreement with the learners.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter of the study deals with the summary of major findings, conclusions and recommendations based on the information gathered through various methods.

4.1. Summary

The main purpose of this study was to survey and analyze the existing condition of the tutorial program of distance education in SMUC, Addis Ababa Center.

In line with this, as indicated in the preliminary section of this study, the following basic questions were raised:

1. Is there a two-way communication between tutors and distance learners?
2. Are distance learners and tutors interested in tutorial program?
3. What are the main problems of the distance learners and the tutors in the tutorial program?

The respondents of the study consisted of 150 resource persons which include 124 learners from various fields (13.8% of the whole learner-participants of the center), 24 tutors (more than half of total number of Tutors) and 2 coordinators. The sample is selected by using simple random sampling technique, except the coordinators that were taken by availability sampling. So, based on the processed data, the major findings of the study are summarized as follows.

1. Most of the learner-respondents (96.8%) have attended in tutorial programs for 3-9 rounds. In terms of tutors, the majority of the respondents (80.8%) had an experience of tutoring distance learners. Contrarily, 19.2% of the respondent-tutors were with no experience of tutoring.

2. The majority of the learner-respondents, 44.4%, and 35.4% stated that the advantage they got from tutorial program was “medium” and “low” respectively. As the respondents identified in their multiple responses, the reason for such “medium” and “low” result was a shortage of time allotted for tutorial sessions (71.7%), unavailability of tutorial questions (60.6%), delay of module distribution (41.4%) and lack of some tutors’ effective preparation(33.3%).
3. Large majority of the learner-respondents claimed that the time given for discussion during tutorial class was “not enough” (58.9%) and “no time allotted” (21.8%).
4. Among the learner-respondents who came to the tutorial class with some questions to ask, 36.6% have not got a chance to ask and 14.1% have got a chance to ask questions but didn’t get a satisfactory answer.
5. Half of the tutors (50%) indicated that they were professionally well prepared for tutorial. The rest were made “medium” and “low” (29.2%, and 20.8%) preparation respectively. The reason given for “medium” and “low” preparation was lack of time and large content of modules.
6. According to the majority of tutors’ response (58.3%), learners’ participation in tutorial class was “low” due to lack of learners preparation and shortage of time for discussion.
7. As the response from coordinators shows, the majority of the tutors are not interested (not motivated), especially most of those who have been assigned on free-service basis. Additionally, there is a claim on the timing of sessions, i.e. in need of covering one or two courses either in the morning or in the afternoon.

4.2. Conclusions

1. As the study revealed, the interest of the majority of learner-respondents towards the tutorial was found to be below average as a result of lack of sufficient preparation of some tutors, delay of module distribution and unavailability of “tutorial questions.”
2. The findings of the study shows that, while conducting the tutorial program, in most classes, the time given for “discussion” was either not enough or no discussion was made at all. From this, we can infer that the communication between the tutors and the learners was based on one-way communication teaching approach, i.e. lecture method.
3. As the study indicates, most of learner-respondents were found to have a great expectation to cover the whole portion of the courses within tutorial class. Hence, some of them came without reading their modules any more. This indicates that most of the learners came to the tutorial class with no preparation.
4. As shown in the study, the majority of tutors were not interested in providing tutorial on the basis of free-service.
5. Although the majority of tutors have experience of tutoring, there were some tutors with no experience and didn't make enough preparation before the tutorial class.
6. As it is claimed by the majority of all categories of respondents, (learners, tutors and coordinators) the time allowed for tutorial session (3 hrs) is not enough to describe some main ideas of the course, and to make sufficient discussion.

4.3. Recommendations

As obtained from the study and observed from the existing reality, most of the learners were not interested in the tutorial program. Hence, it requires a sustainable effort to devise face-to-face tutorial classes accompanied by motivational schemes. Thus, to provide an effective face-to-face tutoring:

1. The major role revolves around the competence, experience and willingness of the tutors. To attain this;
 - 1.1. Motivational mechanisms need to be facilitated for tutors, especially for those assigned from SMUC on the basis of free-service.
 - 1.2. Those tutors who lack the experience of tutoring need to be inducted (oriented) with the basic concept of Andragogy. In addition, tutors must be assigned on the basis of their interest.
 - 1.3. Since tutoring distance learners is a preplanned professional task, tutors performance evaluation mechanism has to be practiced at the end of each tutorial program; for it can be used as a feedback for further progress.
2. To shape the negative attitude of most learners on the tutorial program, attention should be given to the following factors.
 - 2.1. Providing learners with prescribed modules on time is vital. When the modules are not ready, providing the course out line during registration could be helpful for the learners.
 - 2.2. Almost all learner-respondents are in need of getting “tutorial question” before the tutorial program. As in the previous years, providing learners

with such 'general questions' is believed to initiate the learners to read and work more.

- 2.3. Although distance learning by its nature is more individualized mode, for the advantage of the learners it should be useful if attending tutorial program be mandatory (Compulsory) for distance learners under favorable tutoring conditions.
3. All categories of the respondents in the study indicated that shortage of time for tutorial classes to be a problem. Thus, to give detailed description on the content of the modules, to make discussions on the target area and give professional guidance, the length of the contact hours should be increased. This calls for the revision of the existing time schedule. To do this, arranging the tutorial program twice a term can be taken as an option.
4. As it is suggested by a large majority of both learner and tutor-respondents, there is an interest to cover the given course within either in the morning or in the afternoon session, in terms of saving time and avoiding monotony by waiting for long hours. So, in order for the learners and the tutors, not to waste their time waiting for the afternoon session, it is highly demanded that the time table be prepared consecutively having a little break in the middle, either in the morning or in the afternoon.

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Exploring the Potential of Cloud Computing Infrastructure in Third World Context

**A Paper Presented in the First National Open and Distance Education Seminar Organized and
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Lulseged Ayele

Postgraduate Degree Student of Computing Science

University of South Africa,

Cell phone 251-911-137123; Email: 45377707@mylife.unisa.ac.za

Abstract

The technology landscape is rapidly evolving in cloud computing, its accessibility, scalability and effectiveness can embark socio-economic development. The paper aims at providing an analysis of cloud computing in by exploring the ICT infrastructure and the patterns of cloud system for socio-economy development in the regions. Cloud computing is very new and embryo stage in Africa, and the diffusion of computing in the region is promising due to the improvement of cloud carriers and consumers participation. The challenges are fragmented cloud computing practices in the continent. The cloud computing conceptual reference model are not widely used for electronic socio-economic development activities. Therefore, the fastest economy growth countries in the region will be vibrating by the import ICT goods (import inflation) cost and market competitiveness in the global market share. This paper provides insight threats and opportunities when adopting a cloud computing for electronic socio-economic development. Systematic literature review and data analysis from international databases like World Bank and International Telecommunication Union (ITU) are a key data source.

Keywords: Cloud computing, Cloud infrastructure, Service model

I. Introduction

After the financial crises, people make predication of the world with their toughest of problems in accelerating globalization, environment warming, growing threats to social stability and order, and the impact of new technology. The significances of the challenge are more serious for third world countries.

Not today, and not quite tomorrow, Africa will be haphazard by traditional ICT infrastructure investments, with large capital and operational spending on fragmented data centers and heavily customized suites of application software, with legacies that do not easily link. While there is good news for the fastest economic growth countries to mitigate those problems by adopting a cloud computing, it is as the major enablers for socio-economic transformation. Adopt cloud computing initiatives that intend to cut costs on infrastructure and reduce the environmental impact of government computing system [5].

According to National Institute of Standards and Technology, Information Technology Laboratory, cloud computing is defined as a model for enabling convenient, on-demand network access to a shared pool of configurable computing resources (e.g., networks, servers, storage, applications, and services) that can be rapidly provisioned and released with minimal management effort or service provider interaction [15]. The beginner and the leading of cloud computing is U.S, and it is very new in Africa. The U.S government estimates its IT spending on migration to cloud computing solution for 2010 at \$ 20 billion. EU and Kasumigseki cloud at Japan's [13,14] are also under going project in cloud industry. This tendency is motivated with widely acclaimed cloud scenarios that focus on cost reduction, elasticity, reliability and energy-saving aspects of cloud.

In the paper, the reflection of cloud computing actors' opportunities and challenges were identified for researcher, policy maker and investor. Its purpose is promoting the diffusion of cloud computing initiatives in Africa by exploring the infrastructure and the

regional patterns of cloud system. The paper is used for an input for the new comer researchers.

Cloud computing is not yet matured, time to time, there are various research and developed products are released. In order to describe, synthesize, evaluate and integrate the results of existing scientific work in comparison of cloud actors and distinguishing of cloud infrastructures offering, this paper adopted a systematic literature review and data collection approach. This research method ensures that an extensive number of relevant papers and raw data are considered.

The first step in the literature and database selection process was conducted to identify a comprehensive list of literature sources and available database. The source of Journals, books, conference papers and database were identified by Google scholar search engine.

In a subsequent step, the researcher of this paper chose topic related papers and database from the selected literature and raw data providers. An initial list of papers and database were generated by using key words such as “cloud computing infrastructure, cloud provider, key ICT indicators, imported ICT goods, fastest economy growth in Africa, cloud computing model + requirements + education +Health + e-government + e-commerce + ,actors of cloud computing, cloud computing Vs Africa ” to search for titles, abstracts and key words. The author of this paper only scanned the directories of the journals and conference proceedings manually if no electronic search was possible. Furthermore, this study paper expanded its scientific foundation by reviewing the citations in the papers identified in the first cycle of literature exploration to determine previous papers that should be considered for an analysis in a subsequent cycle of literature exploration. The author of this paper identified 48 papers and website that are dealing with Cloud Computing infrastructure or at least containing related keywords, and then manual reviewed which have high tied content related with the article title. It is surprising that almost the entire set of finally selected papers consists of few points regarding to Africa cloud computing environments. This probably shows that there is a

lack of research regarding to Cloud services and distinguishing opportunities and challenges in Africa context.

In addition to literature review, the study paper were identified the fastest economy growth in the region (Ethiopia, Mozambique, Tanzania, Congo, Ghana, Zambia and Nigeria) since 2011-2015[8]. The ICT penetration test data that found the World Bank and International Telecommunication Union (ITU) database indicator of cloud readiness in developing countries.

Complementary to the literature and database review the provider market of cloud computing infrastructure and hosting countries were investigated. This analysis was base on extensive internet research where the websites of relevant companies were examined regarding their success story.

Finally, based on this analysis the research paper compiled the potential of cloud computing infrastructure in socio-economic development and the challenges that will be persist in Africa.

II. Related Works

2.1 The Welfare of Cloud Computing

Muhamad Yunus in his book “Creating a world without poverty” laid out a framework of three basic interventions to bring people out of poverty. Firstly, it is about establishing marketplaces of social business; secondly, about extending the reach of social services, and thirdly establishing advanced information and communication technology (ICT). The literature review is focus on the benefits of adopting cloud computing for the improvement of a target-socio-economic statistics-like education, health, e-government and e-commerce.

2.1.1 Education

For the last decades, Africa economy is depending on agriculture, the consequence of this, our continent economy become weak. Those Africa countries are not well addressing the basic needs of their citizen like education and health. The distribution of education among urban and rural is not equitable due to lack of professional teacher and teaching aid materials. Student versus book and teacher ratio are not matching with the standard of quality education due to budget and lack of infrastructure. Cloud computing provides an innovative alternative to bricks-and-mortar schooling, and enabling personal and interactive learning.

The cloud would allow students to interact and collaborate with an ever-expanding circle of peers, regardless of geographical location. It changes the way people study by means of interactive learning in the primary, secondary and higher education spheres. It also gives greater longevity to information by storing it in the cloud. There are good success story in various Africa countries, for instance, Ethiopia school Net and Tanzania e-education portal projects. When FullArmor proposed the cloud based nationwide school information systems in Ethiopia, it was possible to re-imagine on a clean slate how content could be delivered to schools nationwide by fully exploiting the unique advantages of the cloud [16]. The initiative projects allowed the students to access a central curriculum and knowledge repositories base in the cloud, the story show us, developing country's citizens could prove to be an equalizer to the gap that stands between rich and poor countries through cloud. In addition, advanced skills and quality education can be widespread in short period.

2.1.2 Health

The cloud computing can improve the access, efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of clinical and business processes utilized by healthcare organizations, practitioners, patients, and consumers to improve the health status of patients. A good benchmark project is Uganda Health Information Network (UHIN), since 2003, 175 remote health

facilities serving more than 1.5 million people are able to send and receive data and medical updates using personal digital assistants (PDAs). The system is used to transmit disease surveillance data, reports related to HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and data for monitoring drug usage and stocks [11]. Integrated health Management Information Systems (HMIS) and eHealth education can improve the chronic death rate. Adopting cloud computing is cost-effect delivering approach for health sector in Africa.

2.1.3 E-governance

E-governance is no longer luxuries but it is key service delivery channel to empower citizens in economic and social opportunities. To know the benefits of e-governance, no required special laboratory test, it make more efficient government management like less corruption, increase transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth, and or cost reduction. Those Africa governments are proactive in the benefits of interactive service to citizens and businesses through E-governance. The domain and the planning of new way of interacting are not well diffuse in Africa region. However there are good success stories in few Africa countries. According to the Waseda University Institute of e-Government has released the 2011 World e-Government Ranking report. Tunisia (62.10) , South Africa (59.71) and Egypt (56.13) are good exampliers for other Africa countries. Those countries are fulfilling the seven main indicators- like network preparedness, required interface-functioning applications, management optimization, National portal, Chief Information Officer (CIO) in government, e-Government promotion and e-participation [12]. Cloud computing based e-governance implementation can make integrated management with automated problem resolution, manages security end to end, and helps budget based on actual usage of data. In other words, reliability, cost effectiveness, ease to maintenance, and other nonfunctional issues addressed through cloud.

2.1.4 E-commerce

All the large IT manufacturing companies are adding cloud computing to their business due to inspired the enterprise to reduce their capital and operational expenditure, thus offering an affordable way to access services, technical and cost effective manner that is relevant to Africa.

In tradition IT management, companies paid for space and resources to handle their IT functions, whether needed or not. This means buying more desktop computers and accessories, licensed business application, and adding more machines to their internal server rooms. However, cloud computing provide an environment in which virtual assets are made to be flexible and dynamic and can be offered on a subscription or on-demand basis. This means that business is only using and paying for actual assets used. Cloud computing approach is one of market penetration strategy for Africa manufacturing industries, they can reduce operational and market transaction cost by pay-on-demand base, the cost and reliability of Customer Relation Management (CRM) and Supply Chain Management (SCM) services are cheap in the cloud.

2.2 Essential Elements of Cloud Computing

In any cloud environment, service model, deployment model and major actors (conceptual reference model) are the basic organs that have to address in cloud computing environments.

2.2.1 Cloud Service Model

According to the National Institute of Standards and Technology U.S department of commerce [15], there are three types of cloud service and four deployment models; Cloud Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS), Cloud Platform as a Service (PaaS) and Cloud Software as a Service (SaaS).

Cloud Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) covers the provision processing, storage, networks, and other fundamental computing resources. The supplier maintains and upgrades these resources and the user pays for the service depending on the amount of usage. The major advantage is that users only pay for the exact amount of resources used, and resources available can be easily scaled to accommodate rapidly changing needs. Architecture scalability is achieved through Full- or Para-virtualization, such that multiple systems or operating systems can be run at the same time on a virtual machine or across multiple machines; Amazon, IBM, Microsoft's Azure are examples for IaaS [2].

Cloud Platform as a Service (PaaS) provides computational resources via a platform enabling the user to deploy onto the cloud infrastructure consumer-created software or service development without downloading tools and software to client machines. In the cloud, there are not standards for interoperability or data portability issues. Google App Engine, Windows Azure, Force.com can be the examples for PaaS [4].

Cloud Software as a Service (SaaS) enables the use of the provider's applications running on a cloud infrastructure. Good example is Google's Gmail. Clients access software services such as email, word processing, spreadsheets, etc. from the Cloud instead of running these applications directly on their client computers.



Figure 1: Resource Based Cloud Service Model

2.2.2 Deployment Model

Cloud computing offers four deployment models; private, community, public and hybrid[6]. Private cloud infrastructure is operated solely for an organization whereas community cloud infrastructure is shared by several organizations and supports a specific community that has shared concerns. The members of the community share access to the data and applications in the cloud. Public Cloud infrastructure is made available to the general public or a large industry group and is owned by an organization selling cloud services. The term “Public” doesn’t always mean free and data is publicly visible. The difference between a private cloud and a public cloud is that in a private cloud-based service, data and processes are managed within the organization without the restrictions of network bandwidth, security exposures and legal requirements that using public cloud services might entail [9]. Lastly, hybrid cloud infrastructure is a composition of two or more clouds (private, community, or public) that remain unique entities but are bound

together by standardized or proprietary technology that enables data and application portability.

2.2.3 Major Actors of Cloud System

The five major participating actors are the cloud consumer, provider, Auditor, broker and carrier. Each actor is an entity (a person or an organization) that participates in a transaction or process and or performs task in cloud computing [6]. Cloud consumer is an actor that maintains a business relationship with, and uses services from cloud providers where as the provider are responsible for making a service available to interested parties. Good examples for this Amazon.com, it is a cloud provider, and you and me are cloud consumers. Cloud Auditor is one of the actors that can conduct independent assessment of tangible and intangible resources. Cloud broker is the responsible party that can manage the pro and cons dispute negotiation between consumer and providers regarding to performance and delivery of cloud services. The last major actor is cloud carrier, it is served as intermediary actor that provides connectivity service from cloud providers to cloud consumer. The major roll and responsibilities of the actors are described in the following figure.

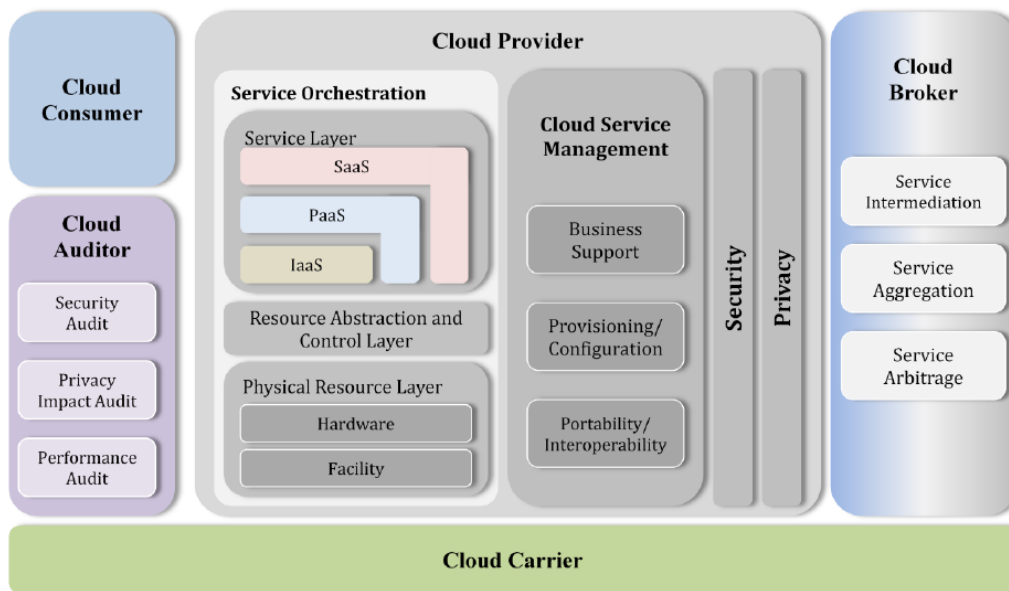


Figure 2: The Conceptual Reference Model [6]

III. Cloud Computing in Africa

Recently Africa Economic is growing in fastest track, and has an inspiration for the new market entrance investors in the cloud environment due to the expansion of mobile, wireless and broadband infrastructure. The majority of the population will be “consumers” of information rather than “producers” and scattered over a large geographical landscape. A Cloud Computing approach makes most sense since these population centers cannot really afford to maintain their own data centers from a financial, logistical, and knowledge perspective. By implementing the cost effective cloud environment, our continent will improve service deliver on education, health, e-government, e-commerce and creating green IT environment. However, the cloud computing diffusion in Africa are not performed an integrated passion, the good example for this, electronic socio-economic development project in Africa are not sustainable due to missing the basic organs of cloud computing during the project design. Projects are usually donor-driven and funded hence their short-term rather than strategic or long-term commitment led them to struggle after withdraw. Best example for this, Uganda Health Information Network project, due to fund withdrawal the project was challenged transferred technologies and technical experts [1]. Therefore, adopting integrated cloud computing for the region is not optional. The state-of-the-art Cloud technologies have limited support and cost-effective management.

One of the determinate factors that a cloud will be exists in one country, the availability of advanced ICT infrastructure. The cloud consumers can obtain cloud service through network access devices such as computer, laptops, mobile phone, and mobile Internet device (MID). The growth trend of ICT infrastructure is at various stages according to their economic development. However, Countries at large, the development of ICT infrastructure is increase dramatically. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) report show that ICT penetration rate is increasing years to years, for example, the fastest economic growth countries in Africa region is extremely booming specially mobile and Internet users.

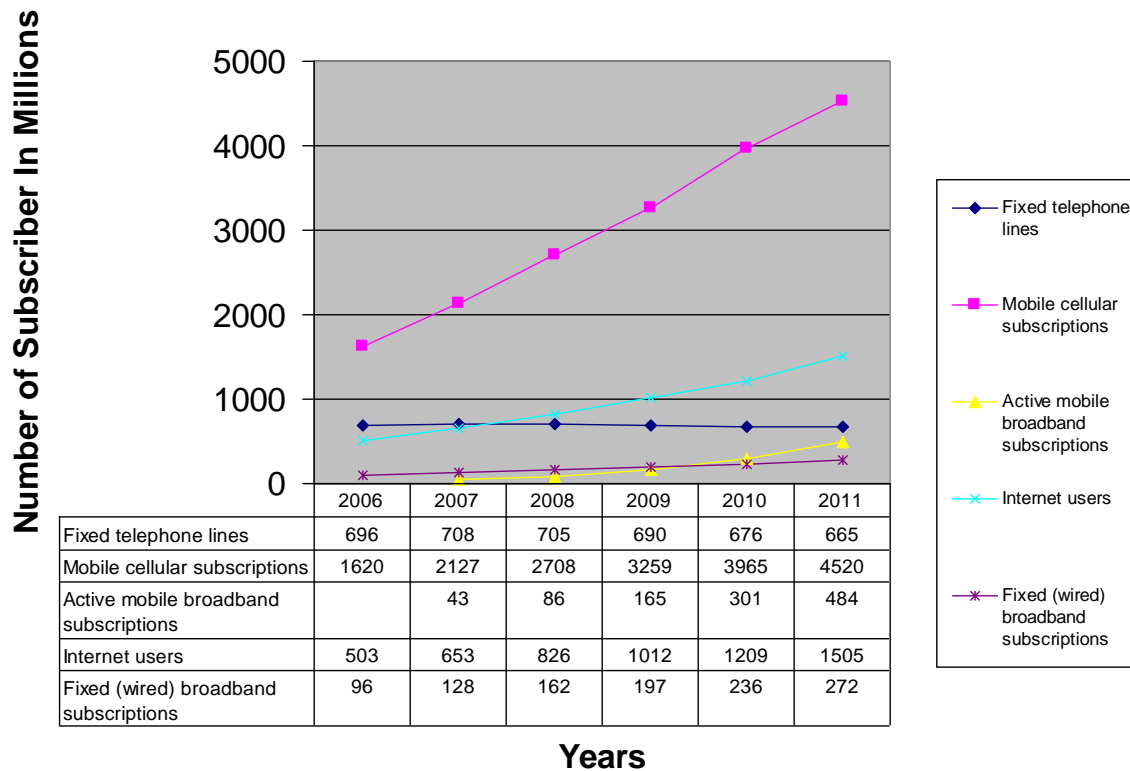


Figure 3: Key ICT Indicator at Developing Countries (Totals and Penetration Rates) [10]

The above ICT penetration test show that a good news for cloud computing actors. While, the bad new is a negative effect on import inflation for those fastest economic developing countries, For example, Ethiopia and Mozambique are the highest scored since 2007 (figure 4). The percentage of import ICT goods figure is increasing rapidly due to traditional IT management, its consequent has be reflected on import inflation, therefore the emerging economy countries in the region have to adopt cloud computing approach to down size the cost of the import items.

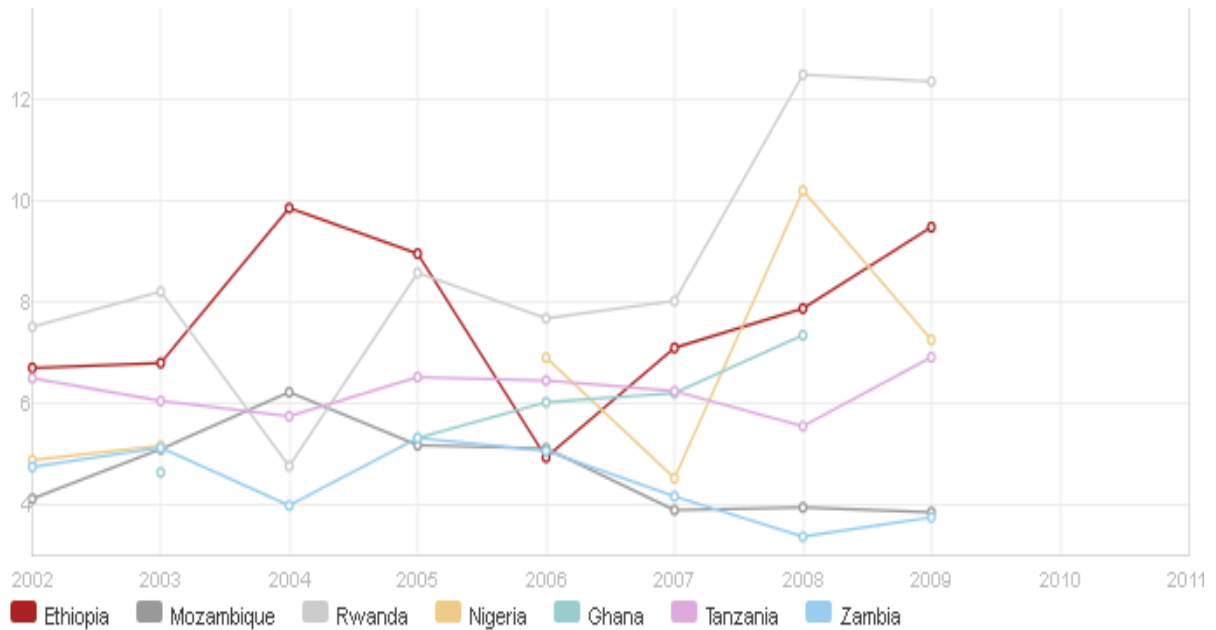


Figure 4: ICT Goods Imports (% Total Goods Imports)[7]

(Source: Information and communication technology goods imports include telecommunications, audio and video, computer and related equipment; electronic components; and other information and communication technology goods. Software is excluded.)

The Internet users are increase time to time but Internet infrastructure in the Africa is still vulnerable, as a great deal of international traffic in the region is carried by a small number of undersea cables, therefore, more innovations are required for cloud computing environment in Africa context.

The second key area that cloud computing need to be considered is cloud Computing Reference Architecture framework. Different Africa countries have been taking cloud computing projects, for example, Ethiopia and Tanzania have good success story in e-education. Tunisia, South Africa and Egypt have outstanding performance in e-government, and Ugandan is best mHealth. All those initiative are good starting point for those countries. But when comparing the cloud computing theories (Service and Deployment model) and the conceptual Reference Model [6], they are at infant stage and performed fragmented way. Adopting cloud computing framework at national and economic region in Africa is not tomorrow job, because our scare resources will be

passing over to non-transparent market with many small and large providers. Moreover, our export oriented industries will be less competitive at international market due to lack of horizontal and vertical market integration through cloud computing. Those Africa countries and Africa Union, which are regional economy integration member countries, will be work together based on their road map. The donors and participants of cloud have to give more attention for long-term socio-economic improvement strategy.

IV. Conclusion

After the world economy crisis, Africa is the best destination for foreign investors due to potential resource and the fastest economic growth in the region. The cloud carriers are growing years to years due to the rapid growth of ICT infrastructure and the purchasing power of information consumers. However, the cloud computing diffusion is not moving well structure passions. Therefore the governments, donors and investors have to work hand in hand and maximized the economical benefits of Cloud computing.

The trend of Application and software are a pay-for-use licensing model, and it is no longer running on bare metal but on virtual machines (VMs). Hardware systems should be designed at the scale of a container Infrastructure. The traditional IT infrastructure management approach is no more appreciate due to technical challenges like data scaling, auditing and logging, rolling out new instances, replication and migration, disaster recovery, policy management system, integration and legacy software, obsolete technologies and migration to new technologies. Top of these, budget limitation and high power consumption requirements are another headache for those who are not adopting cloud computing framework. Therefore, All Africa countries have to promote cloud computing approach on their ICT strategy, give incentive for local and International cloud providers.

One of the tools that narrow digital divide among citizen, countries and continents are cloud computing. Cloud computing is the cheapest system for information service

provider and receivers. Therefore, to bring drastic change of e-health, e-education, e-governance, e-commerce and other societal issues, cloud computing is not an optional. So every country has their own road map for cloud computing.

This paper does not discover the benefit of cloud computing in ICT equipment power consumption and creating green IT environment, In principle, cloud computing can be an inherently energy-efficient technology [9]. Therefore, it is open for the next researcher.

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Online Education and Competence development: Why Online Education May not Provide for the Competence Development of Adult Learners?

By Demoze Degefa

Lecturer, PhD scholar at Addis Ababa University

Abstract

Online education has become the order of the day for delivering higher education by transcending temporal and spatial barriers. Despite its appropriateness in reaching distance learners, there are still issues in relation to the effectiveness of online education in developing the competence of adult learners. This paper makes a review of the literature in the area with aim of informing actors the possibilities whereby online education may fail to deliver its promise. Seen from a pedagogical point of view, the paper concludes that although online education is successful in addressing the physical distance between learners and instructors and among learners themselves, there is evidence that it has not been successful in breaking the psychological and social distance among participants. It is suggested that initial and intermittent f2f contact is arranged for; cyber literacy and related experiences of learners considered, and candid assessment of the leaning needs of online learners be made before implementing online education.

Key words: Online education, E-Learning, distance education, open learning, Competence development, Virtual learning

1. Introduction

¹Online learning (e-learning) is gaining wide acceptance in the education policy discourse all over the world. Several factors, both at macro and micro levels, are said to have contributed to such developments. At the macro level, for instance, higher education systems need to address increasing demand for education through diversification of their mode of delivery of which online education is one such an option. Furthermore, higher education systems are positioned to take the opportunity of market demand for their services, and the available technological breakthroughs such as the Internet. Hence, cost effectiveness, accessibility, and market demand are assumed to be the underlying rationales for the suppliers of online education. Likewise, at the

¹ Online learning and e-learning are used interchangeably in this paper.

micro levels, individuals' decision to enroll in online education² is based on the fact that such provisions are accessible irrespective of geographic barriers- at home and at workplaces. Pedagogically, online learning is flexible, and learner centered so that learners can get learning experience at their own pace, and convenience. It is appealing because of its association with the modern technology such as the Internet which has managed to affect people's everyday life. The purpose of this paper is, therefore to explore why online learning may not be effective in the development of adult learners' competence. It focuses particularly on the pedagogy of online learning such as the development of online community of learners, interactions among members and the facilitations of such interactions.

Statement of the research problem

Although online education, as a means for designing and delivering lifelong learning, is appealing to many stakeholders, evidences show the presence of some issues that require due attention. On the positive note, "advocates maintain that online learning can cut delivery costs, widen student access and improve the quality of materials" (Mason, 2006:6), yet others think that online learning has not contributed sufficiently to competence development of its attendants. For instance, Gunasekaran, McNeil and Shaul(2002:2) argue that "E-and distance learning success is a mixed bag. Technology has eclipsed the ability and motivation of institutions to support it. Many adopters have failed. The marketplace still demands traditional methods of delivery of instruction." Similarly, Bates (2001:117) adds that "E-learning is not the answer to many of the most pressing problems faced particularly by poor developing nations". This trend of dissatisfaction with online education is further marked by the adoption of blended approach for its pedagogical advantages over the complete substitute of f2f approach.

Proponents and experts in the area have provided conditions under which online education program can be effective and deliver its promise. Then, the question will be why "the good practices" advocated for effective online education failed to work in some situations and did not contribute to learners' competence development? In line with this, Mason and Lefrere(2003) (cited in Gunga and Ricketters, 2007:3) have argued that "While promising practices are worthy

² Online education is a means of course delivery seen from suppliers' perspective while online learning is from learners' perspective.

of consideration, the concept of something promising is semantically loaded towards unproven methodologies”. The author of this paper, therefore, aims at reflecting on those factors that obscure the potential advantages of online learning and attempts to bring into light the complexities surrounding the designing and implementing of it.

1.1 Data and Methodology

Secondary data from the literature and research findings were used to investigate the question although primary data from attendants of online learning seems to provide more generous insights. Most importantly, empirical research findings on teaching and learning in an online environment were the main sources of information for this study. These findings were analyzed against the assumption of effective online learning to address the question.

Scope of the Study

Although it is argued that both technology and pedagogy are relevant for the effectiveness of online learning, this investigation is focused on pedagogical aspect of online education because “the technology used in an online program is not as important as other instructional factors such as pedagogy and course design” (Phipps and Merisotis(1999) cited in Johnson and Aragon (2003:2). The investigation considered adult learners perusing entirely online education as part time learners while working full time or having other social commitments under varied circumstances. It is approached from learners’ perspective although technology, institutional policy and leadership play a significant role for effectiveness online education (Menchaca and Bekele, 2008).

1.2 Analytical framework

This study is informed by social constructivist theory of learning, which considers learners as active learning community in a given context (Vygosty cited in La Pointe and resister, 2008). Proponents of constructivist pedagogy argue that “learners construct their own meaning in response to sensory imputes from authentic experience” (Pool, 2000 cited in Brown and King, 2000:1). Constructivism as a philosophy of learning can be defined as meaning making rooted in the context of the situation as individuals “construct their meaning of and give meaning to external world as product” (Brown and King, 2000:1). This conceptualization highlights the importance of individuals’ active roles, contexts, interactions with context as shaping the

meaning making process- learning. Evident in the above statements is the creation of active learning community or learning environments, which is characterized by collaboration among learners, availability of rich context that provides for substantive aspect of interaction (information), and guidance for such collaborative efforts. In line with this, Wilson (1996) cited in Brown and King (2000:2) argues that constructivist learning environment is “a place where learners may work together and support each other as they use a variety of tools and information resources in their guided pursuit of learning goals”. Wilson’s description clearly indicates that learning process consists of learners, their interactions with each other, information in the learners’ environment, technologies that help avail this information, and guidance to make sense out of their interactions. Hence, constructivist learning theory can serve as an underlying analytical tool to conceptualization how effective learning occurs in an online learning context.

Informed by constructivist theory of learning, a more practical framework developed by Collis and Davies (1995) cited in Yoon (2003) was used to frame and guide the investigation. Yoon (2003) convincingly argues that the learning outcomes of online education cannot be fairly judged without looking at the various aspects of products, services, and interactions that online learning provides in more concrete terms. Collis and Davies (1995) cited in Yoon (2003:4) argue that “effective online education is the result of a blend of technology, pedagogy and organizational support.” This model or framework provides clear and comprehensive frame of reference to conceptualize and investigate effectiveness of online education program.

The framework consists of three components. Firstly, pedagogy refers to aligning the learning goals with learning approaches with the aim of managing interactions. Accordingly, Moore (1989) cited in Yoon (2003:8) identifies three types of interactions- learner- instructor, learner-context and learner-learner”. Secondly, as learners’ interaction with technologies remains an important dimension of online interactions, varied technologies need to be in place. These technologies include “print, pre-recorded video and audio, discussion groups, live virtual classes, text based chat, simulations, online references, streamed audio and video, e-mail, and learning management systems” (Yoon, 2003:8). Finally, Organizational support includes institutional support, interaction with faculty, feedback quality, meaningful contents, course structure, student

support, faculty support, evaluation and assessment (Phipps & Merisotis (2000) cited in Yoon (2003)).

2. Analysis

2.1 Why online learning?

In this section I attempted to shed light on some of assumptions underlying the development and use of online education. It sets the background against which the following discussion will be based. It focuses on why institutions embark on online education? What are the pedagogical justifications in favor of this mode of delivery over the traditional one? The prevalence of online education has justifications from institutional policy makers, individual adult learners and instructional thinkers. The justifications posed by each of these parties are highlighted below.

From the supply side, institutions, mostly higher education, take this mode of delivery not only as a means to react to wave of changes threatening them but also as an opportunity to take advantages of such changes. Demographic changes, increased demand for knowledge, financial constraints and the flourishing of information communication technology (ICT) have created both challenges and opportunities. These institutions have to respond to such changes by devising innovative modes of delivery which includes e-learning among other things. Alongside these challenges posed by increased demand for knowledge by individuals and society, the current wave of change has also presented potential opportunity for e-learning to flourish. For instance, Mason (2006) remarks that the unprecedented growth of ICT motivates institutional policy makers to embark on a mode of delivery that extends beyond traditional on campus one to provide for lifelong learning. This helps, according to advocates, institutions cut delivery costs, widen student access and improve quality of learning (Mason, 2006:6)

From the demand side, online education is justified for its convenience in reaching seemingly unreachable learners. It avoids the barriers of time and space to adult learners as they can access online education easily in relative terms. More and more non traditional students (adult learners) are interested in lifelong learning opportunities that suit their lives-working and learning-as the labour market goes more unpredictable than ever before. This unpredictable labour market also shifted the responsibility of learning away from the employers to workers. In line with this,

Mason (2006:8) argues that the unpredictability of the labour market shifted “the responsibility for training, retraining updating re-skilling away from the employer to employees.”

Finally, in addition to its cost effectiveness and accessibility for adult learners that cannot make to traditional, on campus and face to face one, online education is promoted for its assumed pedagogical advantages. It is assumed that online education would remove some disadvantages of traditional, one-way distance learning by allowing a two-way communication. E-Learning allows flexibility, learner-centered teaching and focuses on learning process instead of content of learning. It is argued that these features augment the quality of learning- hence competence development by adult learners. Flexibility is advocated for e-learning for it enables learners to access the learning materials at their chosen time, place and pace. In line with this, Mason (2006) argues that the new technology places control of learning process in the hands of the learners. This last justification leads this discussion of pedagogical rationales upon which online learning is based community of learning.

2.2 Is online education good or bad for adult learners?

According to the social constructivist learning theory online education has huge potential to help adult learners develop their competences as revealed in the literature. Although it may not be manageable to present all the studies that documented success stories of online education, some illustrative cases can be used as a guide to “good practice” in designing and implementing online education. Three studies that I reviewed showed that course design, instructor facilitation, and discussion among participants are milestones for the success of online education. First, Swan (2001) made empirical study on design factors are affecting perceived learning and found that the clarity of design in addition to interaction with instructors and active discussion among course participants has significantly influenced perceived learning. She further reviewed the literature and suggested some design principles like.

- Instructors acting s facilitators
- Use of a variety presentation styles
- Learner control of pacing
- Clear feedback

- Consistent layout
- Clear navigation

Although Swan's (2001) study has focused on design factors, practically design factors do relate to the other two components: interaction with instructors and peer discussion among participants. Hence, an instructor who interacts frequently and constructively with learners can help them develop competences.

Secondly, LaPointe and Reiesetter (2008) have studied the efficacy of online learning community by comparing with the f2f one and suggested some ways to maximize learners online peer connections. Even if they underline the importance of accessibility expertise, and caring conveyed by online instructor for learner-instructor interaction, factors affecting learner-learner interaction are less clear.

Finally, Dennen, Darabi, and Smith(2007) studied the importance of particular instructor's action and concluded that those instructors that maintain frequency of contact; have a regular presence in class discussion space; and make expectation clear to learners are contributing to online learning success. Despite these guides on "good practice" for designing and implementing online education effectively, there are still loopholes worth further investigation. Any discussion on the contribution of online education for competence development should not be considered as yes or no argument but rather as a reflection on the extent to which the potentials of the new technology could have been tapped hence, the focus of this paper is to reflect on the gap between the rhetoric and the realities of designing and implementing online education for adult learners.

2.3 Building and maintaining sense of community for online learning

According to Collis and Davis (1995) cited in Yoon (2003) technology, pedagogy and institutional support are important components for effective online learning. However, this part the paper is focused on the pedagogy of online learning. Particularly, it discusses the challenges associated with building and maintaining community of learning and the perceived value of online learning community. It addresses problems associated with developing, maintaining, and effectively using of sense of community for online based on research evidences.

Community of learning heavily draws on the social constructivist theory of learning. It is analogous to group of learners in a classroom in traditional face-to-face f2f instruction. Community refers to group of people that have some shared concerns, interests and goals. Conrad defines sense of community as “a general sense of connection, belonging, and comfort that develop over time among members of a group who share purpose or commitment to a common goal” (2005:2). Drawing on the social learning theories, researchers emphasize the importance of community in an online learning environment. For instance, Gunawardena and colleagues (1998) cited in Wallace (2003:8) have developed a model of how learning occurs, which includes the following phases.

1. Sharing and comparing of information;
2. discovery and exploration of dissonance or inconsistency among ideas, concepts;
3. negotiation of meaning/co-construction of knowledge;
4. testing and modification of proposed synthesis or co-construction; and
5. agreement statement(s)/ application of newly constructed meaning

This model presupposes the creation and maintenance of sense of community among online learners. However, the difference between the ideal and actual working of community of learning relates to the challenge of creating such a community. Who creates a community? Learners or online tutors? Although all have considerable stake in its development, sense of community emerges from sustained association, connections and mutual trust over time. The available research findings reveal the presence of significant challenges in developing, maintaining and utilizing community of learners to enhance online learning.

First, the initial creation of community of learning is more demanding than it might be thought of. For instance, Conrad (2005) made an empirical longitudinal study investigating how a sense of community is developed and maintained and found that learners who had a chance to meet each other face-to-face had better able to maintain sense of community than those who never met. This finding clearly shows that face-to-face meeting of online learners is one of the preconditions to develop a sense of community. It can be argued that a sense of community is more related to the affective consideration than technical consideration. Online learning could be successful in eliminating the physical barriers but not the social barriers. The question should be to what extent online environment replicates the dynamics of f2f classes whereby sense of

belongingness developed not only during classes but also in extra curricula activities. The fact that learners have common goals and concerns does not necessarily lead to the creation of sense of community. Hence, under circumstances when it is not possible for learners to meet in person, it is unlikely for them to develop sense of community. And this fails the very assumption of online learning and makes it ineffective in some way. The promotion of blended approach to online learning is one of the indicators of the inherent weakness of online learning community.

Secondly, the sense of community among online learners is difficult to sustain even after initial f2f contacts. For instance, Haythorathwaite (2000) cited in Wallace (2003:25) concludes that “although a community was formed in f2f segments of the study, maintaining the community was harder in the online segments of the class than in the f2f portions”. This suggests that as learners go online; their sense of community goes away. It seems that the sense of connectedness-that is missing in an online environment- presence of social and psychological distance are said to have weakened this sense of community (Ravai cited in Wallace, 2003). It can be argued that the loss of humanity and consequent learners’ isolation may not be compensated by advanced technologies that overturn physical distance. On the contrary, the presence of these social and psychological cues in traditional f2f makes it possible for the development of sense of community. Hence, the sense of community among online learners seems to be more fragile than might be espoused by promoters of online learning

Finally, is the learning community worth maintaining? The sense of community is a means to another end, namely learning. Even when it is built; the contribution of online learning community for facilitating learning is doubted by some online learners. For instance, LaPointe and Reisetter (2008) studied the perception of online learners towards the value and efficacy of online community and found that learners perceived online learning community as superfluous and inconvenient, and not supportive of their online learning process. It could be argued that learners’ background could hamper the effective use of online community. Online learners are mostly part time learners and fulltime attendants of other responsibilities like working, taking care of families, and participating in other activities. This varied social context would not allow for synchronous online interaction and makes asynchronous virtual classes the only feasible option. However asynchronous discussions are less powerful than synchronous ones because of

the time interval between attendants' postings, comments and critics in the former. In line with this, it is argued that asynchronous channels are less capable to create social presence of participants. Similarly, Thomas (2002) cited in Wallace (2003) argues that the usual asynchronous threaded structure of online discussion forums does not support knowledge-building instructions." The difficulty of maintaining synchronous virtual classes could fail the success of community of online learners.

Interaction and the learning community

Interaction is used to understand how learners construct knowledge in an online learning environment. Seen from a social constructivist theory of learning, online interaction enables learners experience the insights of others and facilitate the change of perspective and meaning of learning experience. Rooted in collaborative community of learners, interaction is the main route to effective learning. For instance, Yoon (2003:3) argues that "learning should emerge from students interactions with meaningful contents, the course instructors and peers." Then, learner-learner, learner-instructor, and learner-content interactions determine the effectiveness of online community and the learning of its members. The following paragraphs reflect on these types of interactions.

To begin with, educators assume that learner-learner interactions prevail or should prevail over learner-instructor ones and lead to effective learning. This assumption is made on the basis of new a paradigm of learning-learner-centered whereby learners will be responsible for their own learning and instructors act as facilitators. Particularly, the social learning theory places the locus of learning in the learners' ability to interact within the community and construct meanings socially. There is contradicting evidence if online learning fulfils this promise. For instance, La Pointe and Reisetter (2008:7) studied the perception of learners about efficacy of such interactions and found that online learners experienced significantly "more interaction with their online instructors than they did with their online peers."

This trend clearly indicates that there is a gap between the assumptions of how *online learning community operates and actual learners' preferences*. Even when learner-learner interactions prevail, the depth of such interactions and its learning values are questionable. Does it lead to meaningful learning? Wallace (2003) observes that learners rarely move beyond sharing of

information and clarification of technical matters. If learners are not able to negotiate with their peers to change their own insights and not be able to create a new meaning, the effectiveness of online learning will be defeated. This is so because access to information does not guarantee learning although it could be necessary condition. In line with this, Tallent- Runnels et al. (2000) cited in Lapointe and Reisseter (2008) speak of their fear that “online interactions have been shown to be more perfunctory than in depth” and these exchanges conclude before learners have achieved higher level of processing.

Why learner-learner interactions are of limited depth and learner-instructor interactions are so prevalent? First it can be argued that learners attach lesser value to learner-learner interactions than their interactions with instructors despite the assumptions held by educators. These could be explained by the fact that today’s attendants of online learning had once enjoyed f2f instructions and probably depended on their instructors’ expertise. As a consequence of these prior experiences they might attach greater value to learner- instructor interactions. Secondly, unlike young people, adult online learners have formed their perspectives and experiences which form the basis for their identities. Even though it is not impossible to change perspectives, it could be more challenging than thought to be. For instance, Kanuka and Aderson (1998) cited in Wallace (2003) alternatively hypothesize that” it is much easier to ignore or not to respond to online messages that are incompatible with existing knowledge than it is in a face-to – face environment....” This hints at the possibility that online learners prefer independent learning to collaborative one advocated by social constructivist learning theorists. This questions the effectiveness of online learning community and the peer dialogue and collaboration it allows.

Similarly, Youngblood, Trede and DiCorpo (2001) have studied what instructors and learners actually do in an online learning environment and the expectations and learners’ preferences of instructors’ tasks. They found that learners preferred instructors’ tasks such as clarifying expectations, assessment systems for online discussions but showed lesser interest in instructors’ role of facilitating critical thinking, monitoring participation and promoting learner-learner interactions. Youngblood, Trede and DiCorp (2001) also found that instructors’ facilitation roles reported to be well done in these tasks of providing clarifications, expectations and welcoming learners to discussion. This finding indicates that learners look up to their instructors for

procedural information and practical guidance mainly. And this has an implication for learning. Although clarification information on procedures for online discussion is necessary but it may not be sufficient to lead to learning that involves meaning making. Under such circumstances, online learners use surface instead of deep learning approach, according to Mimirinis and Bhattacharya (2007). Accordingly, rote learning aiming at securing certificate of completion instead of meaningful learning would prevail.

Why this happens often times? It seems that both instructors and learners fail to recognize the differences between f2f and online classes. This is evidenced as learners tend to look up to their instructors for help and as instructors tend to think that facilitation that works well in f2f fits in with online environment. In line with this, Youngblood, Trede and DiCorp (2001) argue that instructors who try to use the f2f class facilitation method in an online environment are faced with challenge. Why challenge? It can be argued that instructors need to understand that online learning is a different context. In relation to this, the training of instructors for online facilitation seems a missing element for two reasons. First, there is a trend of belittling the value of teachers' teaching role with concomitant shift of emphasis from teaching to learning. In many cases it seems a revolution that leads to the end of the perceived "authoritarian" teacher roles that have been in place for years. The greater focus on learner and learning instead of teacher and teaching in education discourse, though defensible, could be taken to the extreme and lead to undesirable results. Secondly, most online instructors are moved from f2f or handle both responsibilities being trained as f2f instructors. For instance, Gung and Ricketts (2007) conclude that teacher education needs to be remodeled to reflect the demand of online facilitation. This will take the discussion further to the analysis of instructor facilitation, which is the subject of the following subsection

2.4 Facilitating online learning

Learner participation in an online discussion depends on many factors. Among these are online instructors' role in designing course materials, interacting with learners and providing feedback, which will be discussed in this part of the paper. It seems that there is a need to expect instructors to play facilitative role in an online learning. However, the question will be how the task is carried out?

First course material or instructional design is thought to relate to learners' learning achievement. For instance, Mimirinis and Bhattacharya (2007) argue that there is a relationship between higher learning outcomes and deep approach to learning, on the one hand, and between a deep approach to learning and instructional design on the other. Although there is no rule of thumb for designing instructions that lead to deep learning for online learners, often times it is important to design it in such a way that inquiry, critical thinking rooted in collaboration and communication are reflected in the design. To this effect instructional design for online learning should be based on instructional principles that best suit online learning.

There is a gap between what is actually practiced in designing instruction and the design suggested by thinkers in the area of online learning. For instance, Johnson and Aragon (2003) claim that most online learning fails because course designers think that online course is an extension of traditional f2f like: recorded lectures, online headings, homework, assignment- instead of innovative instructional strategies. They argue that innovative instructional strategies should be built on a combination of learning theories rather than being confined to one persevered perspective. They further argue that quality online learning environments should draw on behavioral learning theory, cognitive learning theory, and social learning theory. And instruction needs to be designed in such a way that it addresses individual difference among learners, among other things. Such differences could include learning styles, approaches to learning, motivation, expectation and desire.

In an online adult learning, individual differences are significant at least in their prior learning and experiences. It could be faulty to assume that all learners possess the same prior experience and have same learning needs. However, in practice, this is the case often times. For instance, study by Kirkwood (2006) showed that "there is mismatch between instructors' assumptions and learners ICT experiences and competences. It was reasoned that course designers had underestimated what their potential students were already capable of doing with ICT. This prior ICT competence is conceptualized as "cyber literacy" (Gurak cited in Meyer, 2008:3). And there is a need for instructors to design online courses based on true assessment of prior knowledge of their potential online learners. Prior learning, even when perfectly assessed, is a mixed blessing. On the positive side, it can help as building block for facilitation. On the negative side, it can

also be threatening factor according to Kanuka and Aderson (1998) cited in Wallace (2003) as it blocks openness to new and different perspectives. Designing online courses also requires aligning the learning activities with intended learning outcomes. For instance, if the outcome is to develop independent thinking and problem solving skills, individual written project work would be the appropriate design whereas if communication skill is sought, online discussion activities would be ideal. The challenge of designing course is worsened by the varieties of course and lack of teacher preparation for online facilitation as it has not found its way into teacher preparation. Related to this, pre-authentication which refers to making “learning materials and environments correspond to the real world prior to the learner’s interaction with them” (Huang, 2002) poses a challenge to course designers when they have little opportunity to assess the learning needs and context of learners. This has been reported in the study of Kirkwood (2006).

Secondly, online instructors can facilitate learning by encouraging interaction in an online learning environment. Whereas instructors’ role in facilitating learner content interactions is addressed by designing appropriate instruction, there is a need for instructors to facilitate learner interactions. What would be the role of instructors in learner-learner interactions? Although there is a shift of emphasis away from teaching to learning, the role of professional teaching still remains important. In understanding the new role of teachers in an online environment, Anderson and colleagues (2001) cited in Wallace (2003) have developed two constructs-teacher presence and teacher immediacy that capture the essence of online facilitation. Teacher presence refers to cognitive presence of teacher in an online learning community. It is characterized by direct instruction. This involves clarifying expectations, initiating and guiding online discussions and explaining assessment criteria (Youngblood, Trede and DiCorpo, 2001). This facilitation attends to learners’ cognitive need. Teacher’s direct instruction is essential if conversation needs to progress beyond information sharing to knowledge construction, application and integration.

Teacher immediacy, however, refers to teaching behaviors that enhances closeness and non verbal interaction with learners. It is very important as a motivation factor for learners. Teacher immediacy involves the affective aspect of learning which is most valued by learners. For instance, Conrad (2005) emphatically argues that learners value more the affective

considerations than technical part of their online learning. However, unlike the geographical distance between teachers and learners, the psychosocial distance is a great challenge to overcome even with modern technology. Likewise, Moore cited in Conrad (2005:16) conceptualizes distance in an online learning “as pedagogical and social than merely physical and geographical”. Teacher immediacy, as a psychological distance, must be addressed duly for effective online learning. In relation to this, Gunga and Ricketts (2007:2) remark that “if e-learning is to compete with face-to-face delivery of richness in terms of psychosocial and emotional flexibility, there is a need to enhance audio-visual and interactive capabilities of course management system to compensate for sensory and emotional loss”. It can be argued that addressing multiple senses of learners through the use of online interactive technology can serve the learning needs of online learners. However, there is no substitute for the psychological loss of online instructions but there are good practices. For instance, facilitators need to be aware of the expectations and desires of learners. In line with this, study showed that there is a gap between actual facilitation need and facilitator assumptions. For instance, Dennen, Darabi and Smith (2007:14), relating learner satisfaction with motivation, have expressed some concern that “online instructors may think what students like may be other than what is good for them, they should not turn a deaf ear to what students claim to want as part of their online learning experiences- if for no other reason than to maintain learner satisfaction.” In their study, Dennen, Darabi and Smith (2007) found that instructors perceived that focusing facilitation on course content and the feedback information would provide for learner satisfaction while learners have opted more for meeting their interpersonal needs. These findings clearly show that instructors were not well aware of the need of learners and made an assumption about the learners needs and acted accordingly. This could be because of two reasons. First, instructor could undermine the importance of attending learner desires and expectations for effective learning. Secondly, they might find assessing these expectations online difficult and resort to making assumptions.

Similarly, online facilitators need to have regular presence in class discussion space and respond to learner initiated communications. This practical guide is based on the new methodology of learner centered teaching approach whereby instructors need to have real assessment of and conception of learner needs and take reactive stance to inquiry by letting learners be proactive to set the agenda for interaction. However, this does not replace the missing psychological element

in human communication. Evidences show that efforts to make online discussion interactive and open may lead to learner satisfaction. Apart from learner's satisfaction, the impact of online interaction in moving learner from information to knowledge construction is rarely established. For instance, Wallace (2003:32) reviewed 100 research articles on distance and online education and concluded that "...moving students discourse from sharing and explaining to knowledge building is an elusive process in online classes." However, two points are worth attention in relation to instructor's presence and reactive position. First, regular online attendance seems infeasible as learners could be located in different time zones with facilitators. Secondly, reactive stance assumes that all learners have the capacity and motivation to reflect on their learning experiences, but this may not always be the case for all online learners. I rather suggest that both proactive and reactive approaches be used based on the assessment of their learning needs.

3. Conclusion

This paper reflected on why online learning may not help adult learners' develop competence despite its perceived value in improving access, quality, and cost effectiveness and flexibility. Data obtained from the literature and research findings were used and the following concluding remark is drawn.

It can be argued that although online learning is successful in removing the physical and geographic distance between instructors, and learners and among learners themselves, there is evidence that it has not been successful in breaking the psychological and social distance among participants. Firstly, developing and maintaining of sense of community among online learners is conditioned by frequent and/or prior face to face contact among learners. Practically, as there would be less chance for participants to meet in person before or during online learning arrangement, the maintenance of the community could be fragile and futile exercise.

Secondly, even the hardly built community of learners found to be ineffective in many respects. To begin with, as attendants are different in terms of their prior experience, including their cyber literacy, their discussions are limited to simply information exchange than deep learning that leads to meaning changing and sharing. That is to say that it provides for shallow discussions only as attendants tend to be defendants of their well established experiences and perspectives. One of reasons for this shallow discussion could be the lack of psychological relatedness need

which is rarely satisfied in an online environment. The other could be instructors' assumptions about their learners and how they can learn best. Studies show that there is a gap between adult learners learning needs, learning styles, prior knowledge and the assumptions made by their online instructors about course design, and method of facilitation. Differences in learning needs are concrete realities among the traditional learners. This would be more challenging when online instructors are dealing with adult learners who have substantially more varied needs than young people.

Despite its escalating support, as a great technological breakthrough, the effectiveness of online learning seems still elusive and under researched. For instance, Hara and Kling (2000) cited in Wallace (2003:15) convincingly argue that "... many researcher bring an optimistic, romantic view of technology that may dampen their ability to look at hard questions and apply rigorous research methods. Much of the research, they maintain, has been advocacy and theorizing about the future".

Finally, online education has potential to advance distance learning and fulfill its promise. However, there is a need for further investigation, in my view, on how can it compare with traditional f2f education in its pedagogy. First, initial and intermittent f2f contact found to contribute to develop and maintain sense of community, but how frequently this contact should be needs further exploration. Secondly, most studies focus on perceived satisfaction of learners in an online education. This variable may not necessarily indicate the learning gain as learners' satisfaction could only be good input. Finally, subject specific studies that can address how teaching and learning can be conducted for specific subjects are noteworthy.

4. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of the study, the following suggestions are made in order to overcome the short comings of online education. Higher learning institutions intending to run online education is advised:

- 1) To arrange for initial and/or intermittent f2f contact among learners and between online facilitators and learners. This can help participants get know each other in person so that later online interaction can be facilitated. Shortly put, it can make up for the lost psychological and social aspect of online education.

- 2) To make sure that attendants of online education have got some prior experience – cyber literacy- so that they can benefit from and /or contribute online interactions, discussions.
- 3) Online education facilitators in charge of designing and facilitating online education need to have a candid assessment and knowledge of learner’s needs, learning styles, and prior knowledge so that planned education becomes relevant for the learners.
- 4) In addition to these suggestions, subject specific studies that can address how teaching and learning can be conducted for specific subjects remain indispensable.

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The Provision of Distance Education in Selected Higher Education Institutions of Japan: Benchmarking Lessons for Ethiopia

A Paper Presented in the First National Open and Distance Education Seminar Organized and Sponsored by College of Open and Distance Learning, St. Mary's University College and Held on 29 September 2012 at St. Mary's University College Moot Court Room

Ermias Kibreab

Lecturer, International Leadership Institute, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Cell phone: 251- 911-149268; Email: ermi2000@gmail.com

Abstract

The main objective of this study was to look for benchmarking lessons on provision of distance education from selected higher education institutions of Japan. The Open University of Japan, Nihon University and Waseda University were selected to draw benchmarking lessons on provision of distance education for Ethiopia. A purely qualitative research involving primary and secondary data was employed to identify best practices from the selected higher education institutions of Japan. Physical visit was made at the institutions and interview was conducted. Five professors (instructors) from the Open University of Japan were selected purposively and participated in the semi-structured interview. Key-informant interview was also conducted with distance education division officials of Nihon and Waseda Universities. Secondary data was also collected and used as a source of data for the research. The findings of the study indicated that the presence of well organized study centers to facilitate the provision of quality distance education in the institutions. Study centers have multiple functions and are places for face-to-face tutorials, examinations, academic counseling, viewing/listening broadcast lectures. Besides, they are places where library services were provided. They have put in place system for course preparation and revision. They have set maximum years that a distance teaching material will be

used, after that it will be re-written. In the provision of distance education, student assessment is one area that has an impact on quality. The institutions have devised mechanisms that help to assess their students objectively and appropriately. The sampled institutions don't apply the "Tutor Marked Assignment" but rather they use tests, quizzes, project works and final examinations to assess student's achievement. To foster communication and cooperation among students, institutions like Nihon University have organized the student group. The sampled institutions have also devised mechanisms to collect feedback from their respective students about courses and programs of distance education and this has helped them to take corrective measures on issues raised which in turn improves quality of distance education.

Key Words: Distance education, Japan, Ethiopia, Benchmarking lessons

I. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

It is important to highlight the increasing importance and popularity of the distance education (DE) systems in the world. Reddy (1999) has underlined the need for distance education in developing countries, especially in Africa, for expanding educational opportunities, development of a country, and to have manpower that carry out social and economic activities. In addition, in most developing countries educational opportunities are available to a small percentage of the population. This is because of limited access to conventional education in classrooms. So, distance education will be the best alternative for opening wide access to these groups. DE is about the recognition that everyone needs education to adequately function in society. Reddy has put forward the following reasons for founding the distance teaching universities: realization that adult people with jobs, family and social commitments constituted a large group; a wish to serve both individual and society by offering study opportunities to adults, among them disadvantaged groups; they found in many professions for further training at an advanced level; and a belief in the feasibility of an economical use of educational resources.

Teaching at a distance is characterized by the separation of teacher and learner. Moreover, the learner is separated from the learning group. In addition to shifting the physical location, the term distance education conveys an impression of ever-increasing technological resources for organizing, presenting and disseminating knowledge (Shomaker, 1998). Distance education has its own advantages and disadvantages. It could be used for expanding access to education, for alleviating trained human power, serve as a means for institutional transformation, etc. scholars also agree that distance education has barriers like lack of feedback or contact with the teacher (Johnson, 2003). Distance education can be used to groups who are unable to make use of traditional/conventional provision of education for various reasons.

Distance education has been utilized in Ethiopia. Accordingly, in the last few years, it seems that distance education has gained its place in the education system of the country. Several government and private institutions are opening and providing distance education programs to the public. The Addis Ababa University, commercial college, in collaboration with the British University, provides diploma and MBA programs to government officials. Different government universities such as Alemaya University, Bahir Dar University, and Mekelle University are providing distance education programs to up-grade the educational qualifications of teachers. The Ethiopian Civil Service College is also providing diploma level distance education programs in different fields of specializations to the civil service employees of the country.

Alpha University, Admass University College, St. Mary University College, etc. are among the private higher educational institutions providing distance education programs in Ethiopia. It is observed that distance education is a steadily growing education in Ethiopia. However, unlike the conventional system, research in this model of education is rather limited. There is a need for conducting research on distance education and provide information for policy makers. Within higher education, there is evidence of constant innovation and changing approaches to provision of distance education. The provision of quality distance education in developing countries like Ethiopia should be improved. Nowadays quality is the main issue in the provision of education in higher education institutions, where distance education is not exception. Currently the Government of Ethiopia has banned the provision of distance Education in the country for quality and other reasons. To improve the quality of Distance Education, taking benchmarking

lessons from other countries, like Japan, which have good experience in the provision of distance education is of great importance. The aim of this paper is to explore the best practices in the provision of distance education in selected higher education institutions of Japan that could be used as best practices for Ethiopian Distance Education.

1.2 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to take lessons from three selected higher education institutions of Japan (The Open University of Japan, Nihon University, and Waseda University) that could be drawn as lessons to the Ethiopian distance education. Though Japan is technologically advanced country, more emphasis was given to the print media and other related issues like; teaching material preparation and revision, the use of simple technology in provision of distance education and assessing/monitoring/authenticating student performance in distance learning.

1.3 Significance of the Research

The research is aiming at assessing best practices in the provision of distance education in selected institutions of Japan that could be used as lessons for Ethiopia. The researcher hopes the study would provide information that could contribute to the improved provision of quality distance education in Ethiopia. The research could also have a major significance as it could be used as a basis for policy and program decisions. The information obtained will also enrich the existing body of knowledge. Finally, the study can serve as a base for the research community and lead other researchers to study in the area.

1.4 Limitation of the Research

The researcher has faced a challenge in accessing secondary data sources of the selected higher education institutions as they were prepared in Japanese language. To overcome this challenge, the researchers' advisor has assisted in translating some of the most important documents to English. Moreover, the OUI being single-mode institution, offering distance education only, has

different management structure than most Ethiopian higher education institutions which are dual-mode institutions, which contains both the distance and the conventional on-campus education.

1.5 Method of the Research

A purely qualitative research involving primary and secondary data was employed to identify best practices in the provision of distance education in the selected higher education institutions of Japan. Semi-structured interview was used to collect primary data from 7 professors (instructors) of the selected institutions. Secondary data was also collected from the respective institutions.

1.5.1 Sampling Design

Three higher education institutions were part of this benchmarking qualitative study. Open University of Japan (OUJ) was selected purposively while preparing research proposal for the funding organization, the Japan Foundation. The other two Universities, Nihon and Waseda University, were selected and arranged by the researcher's advisor as they are convenient for arrangement. From OUJ, 5 professors (Instructors) were selected purposively for interview by considering their experience in distance teaching and production of distance teaching materials. 2 professors (one from Waseda and the other from Nihon University) were selected purposively as key-informants.

1.5.2 Data Sources

Both primary and secondary data sources were used for this research. Primary data were collected from instructors and coordinators of the distance education of the selected institutions using semi-structured interview and key-informant interview. The secondary sources of data were gathered from official statistical documents and other related documents of the selected higher education institutions.

1.5.3 Data Collection Methods

Semi-structured interview and key-informant interview was conducted to collect primary data from the selected interviewees. The interview guidelines focused on issues like; teaching material preparation and revision, quality assurance mechanisms, assessment of learners, technologies in distance education, etc. Secondary data was also collected from different sources of the selected higher education institutions and used for analysis.

II. Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Distance Education

Distance education is known by several names, such as, correspondence education, home study, independent study, external study, open learning, open education, off-campus program, etc. Print medias are at the heart of correspondence institutions (Reddy, 1987). Correspondence education does not have the benefits of audio, video, and computer-based technologies. Today, multimedia approach is the cornerstone of distance and open education system. Compared to the formal educational institutions, there are fewer learning restrictions in the open system. The concept of openness is linked to the idea of access to education. For Reddy (1987) openness involves the following three ideas: People: it would not prohibit applicants on account of their lack of educational qualifications; Place: learning is not restricted to classrooms; and Multimedia approach: the use of new methods and means of teaching. Lockwood (1995) has itemized the following points to distinguish between conventional classroom learning and distance as to why distance learning is said to be open:

- there is no age restriction in terms of someone being too old to study
- there is no strict adherence to entry qualifications
- the learner, in most cases, decides on his/her own pace of study
- the learner is in charge of his/her own study timetable

Reddy (1999) has defined distance education as “the system of education in which education is imparted to students from a distance” (p.1). This definition contains two basic elements: the physical separation of teacher and learner; and the changed role of the teacher, who may meet the students only for selected tasks such as counseling, giving tutorials or solving students’ problems. Scholars like Shomaker (1998), Thrope (1993), Johnson (2003), Lockwood (1995), also shares the idea that there is physical distance between the instructor and the student. Selim (1987) also shares the idea that separation of teacher and student based on the self-instructional principle. So, distance education refers to the teaching learning process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner.

Keegan as cited in Reddy (1999) suggests the following main elements in any definition of distance education:

- the separation of learner and tutor as opposed to face-to-face teaching
- the influence of an educational organization which distinguishes distance education from private study
- the use of technical media, e.g. print, audio, or website to unite tutor and learner
- the provision of a two-way communication so that the student may engage in dialogue with the tutor
- the possibility of occasional meetings for purposes of interaction
- the self-directed nature of the learner’s involvement

In short for Keegan, distance education is the system of education where students learn by themselves in the absence of classrooms. According to Shomaker (1998), distance education is a means of attracting more enrollments by recruiting from a wider pool of students who were place-bound by home, family and employment.

Belanger and Jordan (2000) put distance education as “education or training delivered to individuals who are geographically dispersed or separated by physical distance from the instructor using computer and telecommunication facilities” (p. 6). The authors also added the difference between the terms distance teaching and distance learning, even though they are used

interchangeably, they refer to two different concepts. They viewed distance teaching from the instructors' side and involve delivering education or training material while not being physically present at the same location as the students. On the other hand, distance learning is viewed from the learners' perspective. Learning may not occur in the distance environment if there are barriers from the learners' point of view.

Selim (1987) has identified three elements which differentiate distance education from the conventional teaching approach. First, distance education system involves permanent recordings of instructions in the form of print, audiotapes, Videotapes, or some other forms of electronic media. Second, distance education system highly relies on self-instructional principles which actually are learner oriented. Third, from its nature, distance education requires the use of wider range of expertise for effective instructional course productions.

Peters (2000) has explained distance education system using the idea of industrialization. They argue that distance education is influenced by principles of industrialization like rationalization, division of labour, the assignment of fragmented tasks to specialists, mechanization and automation. Some similarities include:

- The development of distance study courses is just as important as the preparatory work prior to the production process.
- The effectiveness of the teaching-learning process is particularly dependent on very careful planning and adequate organization.
- The function of the teacher is split up into several sub functions and performed by specialists as, for instance, in the production process at an assembly line.
- Distance education can only be economical if the number of students is great: mass education corresponds to mass production.
- As is the case with the production process, distance education needs capital investments, a concentration of the available resources, and a qualified

Clearly understanding the difference between distance education and conventional on-campus education is of great importance to plan accordingly.

2.2 Quality in Distance Education

Although the benefit of DE is unquestionable, quality issues are also together. Most institutions are struggling with many challenges in order to provide quality distance education. There is a perception, among educators and the society at large, that graduates from DE are low graded ones and are also considered not competent with students from the on-campus graduates (SAIDE, 2004; Siddigui, 1987). No one will disagree with the fact that distance education should achieve quality in the overall system commencing from course design to graduation of learners. These may include course design, course preparation, teaching material production, facilitating student support, delivery, assessment, etc. But the question is, what is quality? Do people attach the same meaning to the word “quality”? Higher education has many stakeholders like students, staff (teaching and non-teaching), government, accreditors, employers, society, etc. and each has a different perspective and definition of quality. Many scholars have defined quality in a quite different way depending on their experience, assumptions and values. Some educators define quality in terms of the quality of teaching materials produced. Others might give more weight to the presence of two-way communication as a measure of quality. Garrison and Shale as cited in Modesto and Tau (n.d) also shares the idea that quality of education could be improved through increased two-way communication. Quality was reflected in the nature and frequency of communication between students and teachers and among students also. They also appreciated the impact of print media design and other resources on the quality of education.

Generally, those who view independence as the ultimate educational goal will measure quality in how self-contained the package of learning materials is when supporting the learning process. On the other hand, those who see sustained collaboration as the educational ideal will generally define quality education in terms of the nature and degree of the two-way communication process.

For other scholars like Parri (2006), quality is defined in the following ways:

Quality as exceptionality, excellence: this definition demands higher education institutions to be always the best, and should perform better than others.

Quality as zero errors: this one stresses the point that quality as consistent flawless outcome or perfection.

Quality as fitness for purpose: this definition is the most widely used in higher education institutions. This definition demands institutions to define goals in their mission statements. The level of achievement of the services or product to meet the goal set will be the basis for quality assessment. The product or service should meet the needs and wishes of the customer. Understanding customer wish will be of paramount importance and this demands setting goals that are relevant.

Quality as transformation, shaping: this one gives more emphasis to students, which are considered to be the main customer of the higher education quality. It deals with the notion that how much higher education institutions have prepared their students so that they can manage the future working life with the help of the knowledge, experience, and skills acquired at the university.

Quality as value for money: the essence of this approach is about cost-effectiveness.

Council for Higher Education Accreditation (2002) argued that most accrediting organizations routinely review seven key areas of institutional activity when examining the quality of distance learning.

- Institutional Mission. Does offering distance learning make sense in this institution?
- Institutional Organizational Structure. Is the institution suitably structured to offer quality distance learning?
- Institutional Resources. Does the institution sustain adequate financing to offer quality distance learning?
- Curriculum and Instruction. Does the institution have appropriate curricula and design of instruction to offer quality distance learning?
- Faculty Support. Are faculty competent engaged in offering distance learning and do they have adequate resources, facilities, and equipment?
- Student Support. Do students have needed counseling, advising, equipment, facilities, and instructional materials to pursue distance learning?

- Student Learning Outcomes. Does the institution routinely evaluate the quality of distance learning based on evidence of student achievement?

In whatever way we define quality of education, there are some common factors that deter the quality of distance education. The first factor is giving less time to the planning stage of launching distance education. As noted earlier in section 2.1, the development of distance study courses is just as important as the preparatory work prior to the production process in industry. Course approval should subject to a thorough quality assurance procedure as compared to conventional universities (Rosenblit, 1997). The Open University of Israel has the so called ‘subject area committees’ which are composed of academics coming from different disciplines to discuss each course proposal thoroughly. Designing and preparing courses in a hurry is another factor that hampers quality of distance education. Shortage of finance to produce high quality teaching materials and to have well organized study centers is also considered as a factor. Rosenblit argued that preparation of high quality learning material is at the center of the teaching learning system as it helps to facilitate and enhance self study of learners. Study centers are very important places in the provision of distance education for making students study independently, in group with other students and continuously (Hussain, 2008). Lack of well organized study centers is an implication that we are compromising quality. Conducting classroom teaching, providing academic counseling, availing books for study, availing taped lectures for reviewing, providing place for examination, and providing a place for students to meet and interact are some of the roles of study centers (Reddy, 1987).

Poor language competency of students also has an impact on quality of distance education (Reddy, 1987). Some countries, multi-lingual societies, like India and Sri Lanka produce course materials in more than one language to solve the problem.

2.3 Assessment in Distance Education

One area that needs attention to bring quality in distance education is the assessment and evaluation of students. The purpose of student evaluation is to know the status of achievement of educational objectives by learners. Appropriate assessment tools should be used in evaluating

learner's level of attainment of educational objectives set. Both continuous and end-of-course assessment can be used in distance education system. Reddy (1987) challenged the application of continuous assessment in distance education system as there is no continuous contact between the teacher and the learner. Different distance education institutions have adapted different mode of student assessment techniques. For example; end-of-course examinations were used mostly in Bangladesh Open University (Sultana & Kamal, n.d). Literature from Taylor (1989) indicates that in Allama Open University, Pakistan, home assignments constitute 40 % value and end of term examinations constitute 60 %. Past experiences of Sukhothai Thamnathirat Open University, Thailand indicates that student must undertake an assignment at the conclusion of each major topic and they constitute 20 % of the total evaluation, the remaining 80 % is for final examination. In the Open University of Japan, the evaluation was done (the same is true now) course by course assignments and course examinations. Only those who complete and submit the assignment which is called "mid-term assignment" are permitted to take the end of the semester examination which constitutes 100 % evaluation. The purpose of assignments is just to check the status of students' and to decide their eligibility to take the final examination (Aoki. 2010a). In the University of Terbuka, Indonesia, students have to take unit tests which account 30 percent and the remaining 70 percent will be for the end of semester examination. In some universities of China, experiences indicate that evaluation was mainly through examinations held at the end of each semester. In Andhra Pradesh Open University, India, practices showed the same as OOU; evaluation through home assignment is common but assignments are not counted to determine grade (Taylor, 1989). Case study on International Institute for population Sciences by Sinha et al. (2007) also shows that assessment of students is done by conducting two classroom examinations in a year. In addition, every student is required to produce a research paper at the end of courses.

SAIDE (2004) noted the importance of formative assessment as a crucial part for successful quality assessment in distance education. It is difficult to put in place formative assessment with large-scale programmes, which its absence denies students their opportunity to get continuous feedback on their work. An ethical issue over home take assignments (Tutor Marked Assignments, TMA) is another concern in the provision of distance education.

2.4 Distance Education in Ethiopia

In 1967 the Ministry of Education in collaboration with Addis Ababa University (Extension division) established a correspondence study unit and this marked the beginning of distance education in Ethiopia (Teshome Nekatibeb & Thomas D. Tilson (n.d)). The Unit was established to develop a Senior Secondary Correspondence Course for adults working in various ministries, factories and military organizations in general and teachers in particular. The programme was led by AAU until 1976 after that it was transferred to the Ministry of Education under the Department of Adult and Continuing Education, and later the Educational media Agency (EMA).

Literature from KUAWAB as cited in Tesfaye Ejigu (2002) indicates that an institution known as the British Tutorial College (BTC), which was based in Kenya, had opened an office in Addis Ababa as early as 1967 and offered correspondence education courses in Ethiopia. However, admission to higher educational institutions was based on students' achievements in entrance examinations conducted by the examining body of the University of London. 7,000 students were graduated from the BTC between 1967 and 1978. It was also noted that two other institutions opened office in Addis Ababa, International Correspondence Schools (ICS) and Trans-World Tutorial College (TTC) in 1972 and 1980 respectively. Courses offered by ICS and BTC were: Marketing and sales management, Management, Office Management, Book Keeping and Accounting, Secretarial Science, Industrial Technology and Auto-Mechanics, Tropical Agriculture and Journalism.

Eshetu Woncheko in his paper presented at the AAU Strategic Planning Conference (November 7, 2006) indicated that distance education in Ethiopia was initiated in the 1950's with the objective of upgrading primary school teachers. He also noted that the project commenced under the name *directed study for teachers* through a bilateral agreement of the Ethio-USA cooperative education program implemented by the then Haile-Selassie I University from 1968 to 1972. In 1975, after three years of interruption of the program, the Ministry of Education revived distance education through the Education Media Agency by providing service to primary school teachers.

The pioneer private distance education institution in Ethiopia is Alpha University College, which was formerly known as the National Vocational and Technical Distance Education Enterprise which was established in 1981. The institution was established with an objective of offering vocational and technical training to those Ethiopians who had no opportunity to attend day and evening classes. In 2005, Alpha University College was established from the former National Vocational and Technical Distance Education Enterprise with an objective of providing Relevant, Quality and Affordable Education.

Currently, most public and private higher education institutions are actively participating in the provision of distance education in Ethiopia. Moreover, most Ethiopians are attending their study through distance from different higher education institutions which are found abroad. The UNISA (University of South Africa) which has learning centres in different parts of the world has also opened a regional learning centre in Addis Ababa in January 2007. It is reported that there are a total of 64 private institutions and 23 public institutions in Ethiopia which provide distance education.

Teshome and Thomas argued that distance education in Ethiopia is needed for a variety of reasons like, expanding access of secondary education, improving the flexibility of education with working conditions, improving the competence of teachers in primary education, improving student learning, reducing educational costs, building capacity in the education and civil service sectors. Deribssa (2010) has also noted the importance of distance education in Ethiopia and has also recognized the presence of high demand for distance education.

Recent studies on the Ethiopian distance education by Deribssa Abate (2010) clearly indicates that the sector is marred with a lot of problems and challenges that needs to be tackled for quality provision. According to Deribssa, much emphasis was given to the conventional education and less attention was attached to the distance education, and this was manifested in different situations like less attention given in the 1994 Education Policy of the Country and in the nature of resource allocation, which has neglected distance education at all levels of the education system. According to the researcher, lack of policy in distance education is the center of crisis which has resulted in failure of the system in organizing and coordinating distance

education. Moreover, the research has indicated that institutions providing distance education are characterized by a resource and capacity crisis which has an impact on course design, instruction and support, and assessment and evaluation of students. The main conclusion of the research indicates that lack of national policy and guidelines on distance education has adversely affected the practice of the distance teaching in Ethiopia.

In August 2010, the Federal Government of Ethiopia has banned all distance education programmes provided by both private and public institutions in the country, claiming that ‘distance learning education is unnecessary at this stage in the development of the education sector’. By the time when this report was compiled, the task force which was organized to conduct research on different issues pertinent to distance education system of Ethiopia was on process and has also been expected to disclose the findings of the study shortly.

III. Findings of the Study

3.1 History of Distance Education in Japan

Before World War II, some Japanese universities published lecture notes intended for adult learners who were not regular students. These lecture notes were reportedly very popular and many adult learners utilized them (Mizoue, 2005). According to Kato, Kanya, and Yoshida (1993), the first practice of modern correspondence education in Japan took place in 1883, when Houbunkan School offered courses in Chinese literature to off-campus students. It is also indicated that another school named Tokyo Gakkan inaugurated correspondence program in stenography and bookkeeping in the same year. Full development of distance education in Japan began after World War II and this is due to the Fundamentals of Education Act and the School Education Act were enacted in 1947. Due to this legal arrangement, high schools and higher education institutions established correspondence education programs to open opportunity to people at large. Keio University and Hosei University established correspondence education courses in 1947, which were followed by Chuo University in 1948 and Nihon University and

Japan Women's University in 1949 (Kato et al., 1993). Distance learning has been around Japan for more than 50 years (Aoki and Bray, 2006?). Though it has been for more than 50 years, Aoki (2010a) has described that Japanese distance education is still old static correspondence schools. E-learning is also popular in Japan like other parts of the world. The first time that correspondence schools or distance learning schools were officially recognized dates back to 1950. This is the time were it is noted as the beginning of distance education in Japan higher education system. Since 1950, the Japanese Ministry of Education has maintained two separate accreditation system: one for traditional on-campus institutions and the other for correspondence education. Distance education in Japan is launched with a view to provide access to education for those who cannot afford it in terms of the traditional mode of schooling (Abe, 1987). Aoki has also noted that distance education programs were considered as secondary to the regular on-campus programs but now a days there is a change and she has expressed her feeling that it might disappear in near future.

According to Kubota et al. (2008), distance education universities in Japan have increased for three main reasons. The first is the rapid development of information and communication technologies like internet, computers and mobile phones. Decreasing youth population caused increased competition among universities to attract, in addition to the youth generation, adults such as office workers, house wives and retired people. This is the second reason. The third reason is the change in the Japanese government policy of 2002 which allows students to get all credit units by distance learning courses without taking any face-to-face courses. Interactive synchronous media, such as video conferencing were allowed to substitute the face-to-face schooling and students can complete their degree by attending only distance courses.

In 2009, there are 773 Universities in Japan among which 86 are national universities, 92 are public universities, and 595 are private universities. Besides, there are 6 universities providing correspondence courses only (1 public and 5 private universities) (MEXT, 2009). From the above university statistics, there are around 43 universities that provide distance education. Out of the 43 universities, 37 universities provide both on-campus and distance education programs, while the remaining 6 are solely for distance education providing graduate and undergraduate programs. Among the six universities which provide only distance education, the Open

University of Japan is the most popular one with the largest distance education program in Japan and currently has about 85,000 students. The Open University of Japan uses broadcasts as a major medium to provide education. The second largest is Soka University (16,433 students) and the third largest is Bukkyo University with total enrollment of 15,600.

Three higher education institutions of Japan which provide distance education were considered to draw lessons and the findings are presented below. The Open University of Japan provides distance education only, no conventional on-campus education, while the other two institutions Nihon and Waseda University provide both distance and on-campus education.

3.2 The Open University of Japan

3.2.1 History of the Open University of Japan

The Open University of Japan (OUJ) was founded in 1981, and it was formerly known as the University of Air. The University of Air began enrolling students in 1985 with the following aims:

- To provide chance of lifelong university level education to working people and housewives
- To provide a innovative and flexible system of university level education which is open to all high school graduates,
- To cooperate with other universities in making full use of the latest knowledge and newly educational technology in offering a system of higher education which meets contemporary needs, and
- To contribute to further improving higher education in Japan by strengthening cooperation with other universities, promoting the transfer of credits, encouraging faculty exchange, and disseminating broadcast materials (Abe, 1987; Kato et al., 1993).

It modeled itself upon the Open University UK. Currently OUJ has set two objectives to achieve; providing opportunities for obtaining higher education to a wide range of people and promoting broadcasting media for universities and higher level education. When we see the chronology of

OUI, OUI started television and radio broadcast instructions in 1985. In 1987, it joined the Asian Association of Open Universities. It has advanced in technological innovations and in 1998 it began nationwide broadcasting over communications satellite digital broadcasting. This makes it unique institution than the majority of distance education institutions in Japan; it uses radio and television broadcasting as the major mode of instruction. In 2000, OUI joined the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE). To expand high level education, it launched the school of graduate studies in 2001. To this end, it began accepting students to the school of graduate studies and began broadcasting graduate school lectures in 2002 (OUI, 2009; Aoki, 2010a).

The Open University of Japan is the largest distance higher educational institution in Japan. Currently it has a total of about 85,000 students, which is estimated to be one-third of the total distance education students enrolled in Japan (Kubota et al., 2008). Age wise, 48% of the undergraduate students are in their 30s and 40s and 32 % of the students are over 50s. 56 % of the undergraduate students and 36% of the graduate students are female. Out of the 85,000 students, about 52,000 students are enrolled in degree programs and on average it takes 6.5 years to earn a degree (Aoki, 2010b).

The Department of Liberal Arts offers five BA level course; Living and Welfare, Psychology and Education, Society and Industry, Humanities and Culture, and Nature and Environment. School of Graduate Studies offers six programs, Human Life and Health Sciences, Sciences of Human Development and Education, Clinical Psychology, Social Governance, Arts and Information Science, and Natural and Environmental Sciences. The University also provides Nondegree “Expert” courses like mathematics and social sciences, energy and environment, Japanese culture and society, civil society and public affairs, social planning, food and health adviser, understanding management, and etc.

A lot can be said about OUI for being the largest and for having 30 years of experience in the provision of distance education, but issues that could be taken as a lesson, by considering different situations like technology, were given emphasis. The following are some of the features

of OIJ that could give us an insight of the practice based on which we can draw lessons for benchmarking:

3.2.2 Practices of the Open University of Japan

1. Use of study centers: There are 57 local study centers located throughout Japan. The OIJ rent a part of the land or buildings of other universities, lifelong learning centers, or private institutions under contract base to use as a study centers. These study centers have multiple functions; they are places where classroom sessions (face-to-face tutorials) were conducted. Examinations were also held in the study centers. Moreover, they are centers for academic counseling, opportunities to view/listen broadcast lectures, and library services. They are also centers used for holding extracurricular activities and friendly exchanges among the students. Study centers are located on campuses of public/private universities or incorporated in facilities of municipalities. Strengthening services provided at study centers is crucial for quality improvement.
2. Use of entrance examinations: Entrance examination will be administered for students who apply to join the graduate school but no entrance examination is administered for students who want to join undergraduate programs.
3. Course material preparation and revision: A teaching material is prepared individually by a professor. To prepare a teaching material, the University allocates two years. The maximum year that a teaching material will be used without revision is usually four years (it might go up to six years in some courses) and after that the curriculum committee decides on the need for revision or continuation of the material and will be acted accordingly.
4. Study requirements: To earn a BA degree, students are expected to take 124 credit hrs with a minimum of 4 years. If students are not able to complete within the minimum 4 year, they can extend their education up to a maximum of 10 years (without withdrawal) or 14 years (with 4 years of withdrawal with justifiable reasons). For credit approval, the minimum period is a semester like the conventional education system. One semester comprises of 15 weeks. If a student fails in a course, he/she can request for re-test. If failed again, they are asked to re-register that particular subject.

5. **Assessment:** In the Open University of Japan, assessment of students is conducted through course by course assignments and course examinations. Completing a mid-term assignment which is conducted after the 8th week of a semester (which has 15 weeks) is one of the requirements before taking the final exam at the end of the semester. Only those who complete and submit the “mid-term assignment” are allowed to take the end of the semester examination which constitutes 100 percent evaluation. The purpose of the mid-term assignment is to check the progress of students on the particular subject matter and to decide their eligibility to take the final examination.

6. **Quality assurance mechanisms:** The university has different mechanisms which assist in assuring quality in the education. Some of them are presented as follows:
 - Every teaching material, prior to printing, is reviewed by two blind reviewers (mostly coordinators of study centers).
 - Each broadcast program and examinations are reviewed by two colleague professors
 - The evaluation of each course by students is conducted every year and the information collected will be used to update the course material.
 - Examinations are done in face-to-face mode. All learners have to attend the examination for credit approval in one of study centers.
 - If students have any questions in any course, they can ask in the Q&A corners of the web, by telephone or they can also look for assistance at the nearest study center.

7. **Face-to-face instruction (schooling):** The face-to-face schooling which is held at the study centers provides a platform to conduct experiments and gain practical training. Students can ask questions on matters which are actually difficult for them. In order to graduate, regular students (those registered for Bachelor and Masters Degree) must complete at least 20 credits through schooling. (Each class lasts for 2 hrs and 15 minutes and students receive one credit by attending five classes for one course during a semester). The remaining credits from the total 124 credits will be covered using broadcasting and printed text books. The 20 credits will be earned through schooling and

has also printed text materials. This demands all learners to come to study centers to attend classes. The schooling helps students to acquaint and support each other.

8. Broadcast lectures: The OIJ employs a TV and radio broadcast-based approach supplemented by printed textbooks and face-to-face instruction sessions. Therefore, TV and Radio are there for students to attend and they can study at home at their own pace. If a student missed a transmission or has an interest to retake a lecture, he/she might visit one of the study centers and watch/listen to a lecture using video tapes, DVDs or CDs. Some of the radio broadcast lectures can also be accessed from the internet. In OIJ, one semester comprises of 15 weeks, and two credit courses broadcast 15 broadcast lectures (once a week, 45 minutes each), and four credit courses broadcast 30 lectures (twice a week, 45 minutes each). Each course is broadcast on either radio or television. Broadcast classes are provided from 6 am until 12 midnight every day.
9. Printed study materials: All the courses offered through broadcasting are provided with textbooks. 2 credit courses have 100-120 page textbooks, written by the lecturer who teaches respective courses (Galsanjamts and Ulziinemekh, 1997).
10. Library services: The University Library, headquartered in the city of Chiba, is a comprehensive library. Smaller libraries attached to the Study Centers are utilized by students; students can access the books and journals that are in the University Library in Chiba through the Study Centre library. In addition to this, some students can access libraries where the OIJ makes an agreement with national/private universities for their study (The Open University of Japan, 2009).

These are some of the lessons from OIJ that could be adapted to our existing situations. Now let us see practices from Nihon and Waseda universities:

3.3. Nihon University

3.3.1 History of Nihon University

Nihon University is a private University which was founded in 1889 as Nihon Law School which was renamed as Nihon University in 1903. It offers courses in all disciplines of humanities,

social sciences and natural sciences. It has 20 graduate schools and 11 colleges. Nearly 81,000 students are enrolled in its graduate schools, colleges, correspondence division and junior college. The University provides both conventional and distance education.

The Nihon University correspondence division was founded in 1949 and currently has the following colleges: College of Law (department of Law, political sciences, and economics), the college of humanities and sciences (department of Japanese literature, English literature, Philosophy and History), the college of economics (department of economics), and the college of commerce (department of commerce). It has 18 study centers to support learners. Currently around 7000 students are enrolled in the correspondence division in four faculties; Law, Literature and Science, Economics and commercial (Nihon University, 2010). Like the experience from OUI, to earn a Bachelor's degree, all students are required to take 124 credits including some schooling (face to face) credits. Some college like college of humanities and sciences require their students to submit a graduation thesis and pass a comprehensive oral examination.

3.3.2 Practices of Nihon University

1. Assessment: In Nihon University, most subjects have 12 chapters and for almost 90% of courses “understanding check tests” will be held after every 3 chapters to see their progress. These tests mostly constitute 50% of evaluation and the remaining 50% will be assessed using final examinations. Tutor marked assignments are not part of the assessment in distance education system of the university like the case from the OUI.
2. Use of media: There is no use of Medias like TV and radio. An academic instruction is provided by mail and includes the return of corrected reports as well as written guidance on the graduation thesis.
3. Student groups: In order to encourage closer contacts and joint study projects with students, the correspondence division of Nihon University has organized student groups in some parts of Japan. These groups hold regularly scheduled meetings and study sessions. The 18 study centers of Nihon University which are found throughout Japan are

platforms to facilitate the student groups by serving as contact points and as places where students can write reports or work on joint projects, or where they can go to freely discuss any concerns they might have about their studies.

4. Discussion board: They have also the discussion board in the web page which mainly focuses on bringing instructors and students together to discuss on issues which are not clear on their course. There is interaction between instructors and students and also among students.
5. Schooling sessions: Various schooling sessions are arranged and offered. It includes a day time schooling sessions, spring schooling sessions, night schooling sessions, summer schooling sessions, etc. Each student selects the schooling that he/she is comfortable and attends the same. Students are required to attend 30 credits of face-to-face sessions to earn BA. The Night schooling starts at 18:30.
6. Study periods: The minimum and maximum year to earn BA in Nihon University is 4 and 12 years respectively.
7. Revision of course materials: Course materials, once produced, they will be used for maximum of 5 years without major revision. On some conditions it may get revised before 5 years.
8. Collection of feedback: They collect feedback about courses and programs of distance education annually from their students.

3.4 Waseda University

3.4.1 History of Waseda University

Waseda University was established in 1882 with the Departments of Political Science, Law, English, and Physical Science. In 1893 it launched the first graduate courses in the Department of Literature. In the year 2007, Waseda University celebrated the 125th anniversary of its founding. Waseda is one of Japan's top private, educational institutions of higher learning. Currently it has large number of graduate schools in different fields of specializations. The e-learning courses in the School of Human Sciences which was launched in 2003 are intended to

provide through lifelong education and are the first of their kind in Japan to offer degrees through e- learning. The e-school has graduated 341 students by March, 2010. E-school heralds the beginning of a new stage of learning for Waseda University as well for Japan education (Waseda University, 2007).

3.4.2 Practices of Waseda University

1. E-learning: Like Nihon University, Waseda University has also the e-learning mode of delivery. They have about 400 courses per year, of which 200 courses were prepared in the studio. The remaining 200 were recorded in classrooms while the instructor was teaching in the conventional classrooms.
2. Course revision: Course materials were used for 3 years without major revision. Every year the instructor is expected to revise some part of the material for class consumptions but after 3 years it will be revised completely.
3. Use of feedback: They conduct student questionnaire at the end of every course which will be twice a year to assure quality of courses.
4. Online service: The University has no study centers; it provides every assistance to their students online including library services. The university provides an on-line digital library and students can access it from everywhere with their Id and password supplied by the university
5. Assessment: For more than 90% of courses they provide, the assessment depends on two parts. The first part is students will be given an assignment that is related to the course they are taking and are expected to submit a report of about 3000 words individually. The report accounts for 80% of their evaluation and the remaining 20% will be through quizzes and tests.
6. Study requirements: Students are expected to take 124 credit hours to earn BA degree and the minimum and maximum years to complete BA degree are 4 and 8 years respectively. They can re-register after 8 years. Students are also expected to produce a research project, thesis, of about 13,000 words to earn BA degree and the evaluation is conducted face-to-face. The intake capacity is 150 students every year.

IV. Recommendations:

From the above three universities, we can draw some useful practices that could help to improve the provision of distance education in Ethiopia. The following are recommendations of the study:

1. Distance education stakeholders need to give every emphasis that they are extending to the conventional education; as both contribute to the development of the country by creating trained man power that is crucial to nation development. The Ministry of Education shall have a clear and proper policy about distance education provision in the country. It was a recent phenomenon that the government of Ethiopia has banned distance education provision in the country which indicates absence of clear directions on that. Issues like accreditation of distance education institutions, course design, study centers (numbers and standards), admission and number of intake of students, staff size and composition, quality assurance mechanisms, course material preparation and revision, delivery, tutoring, assessment, etc should be embraced in the policy/guidelines issues. Rigorous process of QA needs to be put in place.
2. Forming an association for Distance Education might also be of great important. Public and private higher education institutions offering distance education will be members of the ‘association’. The proposed association formulates its own code of ethics for distance education, develop guidelines for quality assurance, may organize seminars on distance education so that members may exchange and share ideas among each other and will dwell itself in other activities pertinent to DE.
3. Higher education institutions should strive and work hard to bring and maintain quality in their distance education modality. They should note that quality of education is not a onetime activity; it needs continuous follow-up and involvement of different stakeholders like students, staff, university leadership, and also the government. Quality could be achieved through different mechanisms and the commitment to quality should be part of an organization’s culture. Developing a quality assurance framework for distance higher

education would also be helpful to manage the problem (Gani, 2009). Institutions should establish an internal quality assurance body that follows the provision of quality distance education, preferably separate to the conventional schooling quality assurance committee. This may conduct periodic survey about student satisfaction, retention and dropout, and end of course surveys from students as well as from teachers. The same hold true for the external national quality assurance committee, separate from the conventional one.

4. The good impact of availing some learning resources in study centers should not be underestimated. Compared to the conventional students, off-campus students need more support from their institution. To this end, institutions should have a well established, in human resource, facilities, and learning resources, study centers that could facilitate the teaching learning process. Our institutions may not be able to have a library with large collections at study centers, but they need to avail some reference books at study centers. Availing teaching materials and records of lectures using electronic devices such as CD, VCD... etc should be considered. Beyond the availability, work has to be done to encourage students to use the support system. We may also try to make some arrangements with other universities and public libraries so that distance learners can use libraries at their convenience. This calls for collaboration among universities in the country.
5. Strengthening student support services (Regional/study centers, library, counseling, and language development) should be given much priority. Establishing a body called 'student support division' in institution providing distance education could be of a great help for learners, they can assist learners to solve their questions and challenges in collaboration with other staffs and study centers. Some research findings indicate that availability of strong learner support reduces dropout rate (Ellis, 2009). As evidenced in Creed et al. (2005), a study conducted in Pakistan suggested poor management at regional level was responsible for a 69% drop-out rate. It also indicated low rate of graduation among learners in remote areas.

6. Most scholars agree on the positive effect of maintaining student-student-interaction for achieving quality (Yang, 2008; Gupte, 2009; Farajollahi et al., 2010). Higher education institutions should try their level best to achieve student-student interaction as collaborative work drives students to higher level of thinking. To do this, institutions need to have a well established study centers that are used as plat form for the same. Universities like OIJ, demand a minimum of 20 credits (out of 124 credits to earn BA) to be earned through face-to-face classes (schooling). Other higher education institutions also have the 'student study group' which aims fostering discussion among students. Geographic location and learners convenience should be considered while forming the study group.
7. Distance education institutions need to conduct a continuous assessment of their programs and how the distance education is working. The absence of evaluation of distance education system will have an impact on the quality of its provision. Formative and summative evaluation need to be conducted to check the quality of distance education and shape the program properly. To monitor the progress of various programs of distance education like-the use of university services by students, difficulties they face in learning, effectiveness of teaching methods, dropout rates, effectiveness of instructional media, costing aspects of teaching material production, formative evaluation should be conducted. To see how the distance education is working, summative evaluation needs to be conducted. According to Reddy (1987), this evaluation is the most important, difficult and seldom undertaken. Surveys needs also to be conducted at national level, to see how distance education is progressing in the country. Sound policy should base on scientific research.
8. Like the conventional system of education, establishing recognizing and empowering learner structures such as student representative councils to represent learners on structures of institutional governance could be of great importance. Feedback from students should be collected about courses/distance education program at the end of semester as an integral part of the system. Active student involvement in the learning process is required.

9. I am not far from thinking that one of the biggest challenges that Ethiopian distance education institutions facing is ethical concern over the tutor marked assignments (TMA). There is no doubt that continuous evaluation of learners through assignments is of great importance to achieve educational objectives. The question is how we are administering it; we need to make sure that ethical concerns are not our worries. The “copy and paste” thing, letting others do one’s assignment, etc shouldn’t compromise the quality of distance education. The Open University of Japan evaluates his students using a final examination only. As clearly indicated in the literature part of this paper, other higher education institutions evaluate using mid and final examination and some other also use a series of quizzes and tests to evaluate their learners. I recommend two things from my observation: first, underscoring the need for TMAs for achieving educational objectives but attaching less weight to it and attaching more weight to final examinations. If this is the case, care should be taken while preparing TMAs questions in such a way that they should make the learner think than merely copy from different sources. Second, to exclude TMAs from assessment mechanisms and give emphasis to examination (mid and final) which showers off the ethical concern.

10. Most distance learners are engaged in social issues like family, marriage, etc. The possibility of allowing students to opt for fewer courses per semester in order to reduce dropout problem needs to be explored and acted accordingly. Allowing learners to take courses based on their ability (setting the minimum and maximum courses per semester, setting the minimum and maximum year a student could complete) can be considered for intervention. Counseling need also to be an important part of the distance learning.

11. Institutions should recognize the need for effective staff training in distance teaching. According to Abe (1987), lack of proper training to tutors/teachers in the distance education system has an impact on quality. Institutions should also strive to equip and upgrade their students with language skills, study skills and time management skills through induction training.

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