# DISTANCE EDUCATION IN RURAL AREAS: PRESERVING THE STRENGTH OF THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

**Olaleye, Y.  L.**
*Department of Social Work*
*Faculty of Education*
*University of Ibadan, Ibadan*
*yemisi1957@yahoo.co.uk &*
*yl.olaleye@mail.ui.edu.ng*

**Ayeni, A. O.**
*Department of Educational Management*
*Faculty of Education*
*University of Ibadan, Ibadan*
*biodunmide@gmail.com*

**Abstract**
*The paper examined distance education in rural areas as preserving the strength of the community development in Nigeria. Rural areas are often noted to be poor, lack various services, employment opportunities and leisure activities that cities have and it was against this background that the study examined the extent to which distance education serve as a way of preserving the strength of community development in rural areas in Oyo and Lagos States. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design of the ex-post facto type, while the population was male and female distance learners, distance education facilitators, community representatives and change agents in rural-urban areas of Ibadan North West Local Government Area of Oyo State and Kosofe Local Government Area of Lagos State. Purposive sampling technique was used to sample 397 respondents, while Distance Education in Rural Areas Preserving the Strength of the Community Questionnaire" (DERAPSCQ) was administered on the respondents. Face, construct and content validation of the instrument was carried out, and its reliability value was r=0.93. Chi-Square and t-test statistics were used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings showed that: there was a significant relationship between distance education programme and development of rural-urban areas ($X^2$ = 1.97, P<.05); distance*

*education programme had significant difference on community development of rural-urban dwellers that are exposed to distance education compared to rural-urban dwellers that are not exposed to distance education programme (t=.57; df=395; p<.05). Additionally, choice of distance education programme had significant difference on community development of rural-urban dwellers that are involved in distance education programme and those that are not involved on the programme (t=5.21; df-71; p<.05). The study recommended that stakeholders and government should continually expose rural-urban dwellers to distance education programme because of its positive development impact in the areas of expansion, growth and progress recorded in the rural-urban areas. Also, provision of distance education should be embraced by the rural-urban dwellers since it led to desirable choice among those involved in Distance Education Programme.*

**Introduction**

Rural areas are often poor and lack various services, employment opportunities and leisure activities that cities have.  Rural schools face unique challenges associated with geographic isolation, racial segregation, limited schools and community resources. Many rural schools experience difficulties attracting and retaining teachers for a variety of reasons including poor infrastructural amenities.  Besides problems associated with teacher shortage, rural schools also face circumstances in which it is not practical to offer specialized or advanced courses because there may be insufficient number of students in a school that are adequately prepared or interested in taking such courses. For some years, there have been the constant suggestions that distance education serves as a partial solution to some of the problems rural schools face (Centre for Rural Policy and Development, 2009).

Most societies embrace distance education because of its importance and relevance which cannot be over emphasised. Distance education has impacted so much in the life of both young and old, while the benefits spread beyond its limitation that the society, both rural and urban engaged in the programme. It is the education with

great opportunities and has produced many graduates, educators and instructors. The design of the distance education curriculum enabled many to be certified in their fields of studies which served as an opportunity to be a learner and be promoted in their places of work. Distance education involves obtaining knowledge outside of the traditional avenues of attendance at learned institutions.

Whitacre (2010) affirmed that it gives flexibility to complete coursework from home and remote locations using a computer or a mobile device like a phone or tablet. Additionally, many online programmes allow students to watch lectures and complete assignments at their own time and pace, thereby making the students to have control of the learning environment. This can be particularly beneficial for working professionals who cannot leave their jobs to pursue full-time, on-site study and for parents who cannot regularly visit a campus due to family obligations. The cost of running distance education is considerably cheaper than traditional education as there is no extra cost incurred on housing or frequent transportation to and from the school.

The curricula of distance education programmes are often identical with that of on-campus programmes, allowing students to receive the same education in either format. Additionally, students running distance education programmes have access to many of the same services as on-campus student, including library and career services, academic and financial advising, and tutoring. Some schools even have honour societies and other student groups specifically geared towards online students. The rapid advancement of technology also makes distance education quite popular in recent times.

Most distance education programmes allow students to interact online with peers and instructors, some students might miss the face to face communication and consultation that comes with studying on-campus. The impromptu study sessions and brief questions and explanations that happen so easily on-campus are tougher to come by in a distance education setting. Online students also need to be extra focused and committed to their studies so that they do not fall behind. Some online students might find themselves easily distracted by the demands of their daily lives when studying from home or not disciplined enough to keep up with lectures or complete assignments when they have no set deadlines. Those who are not knowledgeable in

the use of computers or other modern technologies might face a challenge if their course work has to be completed online (Natarajan, 2005). People in rural communities might face huge problem in completing their course work especially if the community is underdeveloped with no access to the internet or even electricity.

Distance education has great benefits to rural communities, because it broadens their scope beyond their communities. Without distance education, many rural students would miss out on opportunity to be educated. Distance education in rural areas helps to preserve the community by overcoming the challenge of hiring and retaining teachers. Most distance education programmes join a consortium between several schools, with a specific school that supplies each distance education teacher paying the teacher's salary. Each school in a consortium typically supplies one distance education teacher to the group of schools, and therefore, the schools are able to share several teachers for the cost of one teacher. Traditional and distance education teachers are paid equivalent salaries, teachers unions generally do not fight against distance education adoption. Unions, however, do argue for limiting distance education class so that the teachers are not overwhelmed (Bennett, Olatosi and Probst, 2009).

Community development takes the lead in confronting the attitudes of individuals and the practices of institutions and society as a whole which discriminates unfairly against women, people with disabilities and different abilities, religious groups, elderly people and other groups who are disadvantaged by society. It also takes a lead in countering the destruction of the natural environment on which all depend. Community development is well placed to involve people equally on these issues which affect development. It seeks to develop structures which enable the active involvement of people from rural areas (Olaleye and Abiona, 2015).Rural schools face unique challenges associated with geographic isolation, racial segregation and limited school and community resources. Many rural schools experience difficulties attracting and retaining teachers for a variety of reasons including lower salary levels.

Aderinoye and Ojokheta (2004) affirmed that education is inherently a developmental process. With the implication that if the expertise required for the expansion of distance education programmes had not been available, the education policies and developmental

issues in place today would have excluded both Nigerians and Africans. To this end, the majority pioneers of distance education were products of the British correspondence system and the London matriculation examination. Aderinoye and Ojokheta (2004) noted that due to the nonexistence of domestic higher institutions in Nigeria prior to the year 1948, Nigeria's first set of students learnt through the distance education modality and they in the long run graduated to become valuable resource personnel whose ground breaking work kick-started the establishment of Nigeria's first schools and institutes of higher education which, later served as springboards for national development and an appreciation of the importance of education plays great role in personal and community development. Schultz (1961) noted that education does not only improve individual choices available to mankind, but provides the type of skilled labour necessary for industrial development and economic growth.

Haythornthwaite, Kazmer, Robins, and Shoemaker (2000) in their study explained how students defined and maintained community while largely restricted to communication through media that have been viewed as unsuitable for the maintenance of close social bonds. Interviews were conducted over a year with 17 students and it revealed the importance of community and its role in supporting them in their "different kinds of world" and important temporal and technological dimensions that are associated with community development. Each cohort began in physical proximity with an intensive, on-campus "boot camp" that acts as a lasting bonding experience. When students returned home, they invariably reinvented this physical proximity as virtual proximity, appropriating technology and the opportunities afforded them by class and programme structures to socialize and work with people they met on-campus. They enjoyed the temporal proximity of "live" lectures and appropriate Internet Relay Chat's "whispering" facility to socialize; they make near-synchronous use of email, and use the timing of assignment submission to initiate email exchanges. Those who failed to make such connections felt isolated and more stressed than those who were more active in the community. Recommendations include: promoting initial bonding, monitoring and supporting continued interaction and participation, and providing multiple means of communication to support the need to engage in work and social interaction, both publicly and privately. In it all, the interviews

conducted by the researchers showed that belonging to a community brings benefits of exposure to distance education to the individuals and to available program, and supports efforts by educators who strive to provide such a community for their distance learners.`

Additionally, it was found that Distance Education provides the opportunity to continue ones education in an independent learning environment. Taking courses online allows for the opportunity to change or enhance somebody's career in the comfort of his or her own home, fit study around work, and reduce travel time. To this end, the choice of distance education can be as follows:  internet (IN) - Courses where 100% of the instruction is delivered through the Internet, Hybrid (HY) - Courses where the primary delivery of instruction is online with a requirement that students also meet in traditional face-to-face sessions, Telecourse (TV) - Courses where video, television or cassette delivers 100% of the instruction.

Based on the foregoing, this study therefore sought to fill the gap by focusing on the extent to which distance education serve as a way of preserving the strength of community development in rural areas. The above study also spurred the researchers to verify if the strength of community development can be preserved with distance education in a rural area. The main objective of the study was to examine ways distance education in rural areas preserve the strength of community development and to determine the citizen's perception about the effectiveness of distance education in the planning and strengthening development of community in rural areas.

**Research Hypotheses**

**Ho$_1$:** There is no significant relationship between distance education and development of rural-urban areas of Ibadan North West Local Government Area of Oyo State and Kosofe Local Government Area in Lagos State.

**Ho$_2$:** There is no significant difference in the level of community development of rural-urban dwellers that are not exposed to distance education in Ibadan North West Local Government Area of Oyo State and Kosofe Local Government Area in Lagos State.

**Ho$_3$:** There will be no significant difference in the level of community development among rural-urban dwellers with desirable choice

of distance education and with undesirable choice of distance education in Ibadan North West Local Government Area of Oyo State and Kosofe Local Government Area in Lagos State.

**Methodology**

**Research Design**
The study used descriptive survey research design of the *ex-post facto type*. This research design was adopted because the variables in the study will not be manipulated.

**Population of the Study**
The population for the study are male and female distance learners, distance education facilitators, community representatives and change agents in rural-urban areas of Ibadan North West Local Government Area of Oyo State and Kosofe Local Government Area in Lagos State.

**Sample and Sampling Technique**
397(male 163, female 234) respondents were purposively sampled based on the criterion of their even distribution across the population currently running the distance education programme. Purposive sampling is a form of non-probabilistic sampling technique.

**Research Instrument**
The main instrument used for the study is questionnaire tagged: "Distance Education in Rural Areas Preserving the Strength of the Community Questionnaire" (DERAPSCQ). The researcher adapted an instrument called Audience Measurement Scale by Meyer (1988). Responses were recorded on a four-point Likert scale from strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) to Strongly Disagree (SD).

**Validity and Reliability of the Study**
The questionnaire used for this study was validated to achieve its aims. To validate the content, face and construct validity of the instrument carried out, while the instrument was presented to colleagues in the Department of Social Work, and other experts in the field of evaluation. Their comments were incorporated into the final drafting of the questionnaire. The reliability of the original scale was determined by

test-retest method. This proposed SES scale was administered on a sample of 65 respondents (5% of sample population) and compling their respective scores. After a month, it was again re-administered on the same sample. The two scores werre arranged pair-wise, a pair being the scores of the candidate in two repetition of the test. Karl Pearson's Coefficient of Correlation between the two series was taken as the measure of reliability. Reliability of the proposed instrument was observed very high (r=0.93) by rest-retest method and there was almost total agreement between the resource persons in respect of the content validity. Almost similar observations were of other authors like Pareek's (0.93), Warner's (0.91). Data was analysed with the use of Chi-Square and t-test statistics at 0.05 level of significance.

**Data Analysis**

**Table 1:** Chi-Square Table Showing the Significant Relationship between Distance Education and Development of Rural-Urban Areas

| Distance education programmes | Items | High | Low | Total | df | $X^2$ | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No | 198(80.81%) | 97(78.8%) | 295(80.16%) | | | |
| | Yes | 47(19.18%) | 26(21.14%) | 73(19.84%) | 1 | 1.97 | <.05 |
| | Total | 245 | 123 | 368 | | | |

The result on table one established that there was a significant relationship between distance education programme and development of rural-urban areas ($X^2$ = 1.97, P<.05). This implied that there was correlation between distance education and development of rural-urban areas and so hypothesis one was not accepted.

**Table 2: t-test table showing the Significant Difference in the Community Development of Rural-Urban Dwellers that are Exposed to and those not Exposed to Distance Education Programme**

| Community development Activities | Distance education Programme | N | X | SD | Df | t | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Exposed | 73 | 3.14 | 1.16 | | | |
| | Not exposed | 324 | 2.25 | 1.73 | 395 | .57 | <.05 |

The result on table two showed that distance education programme had significant difference on community development of rural-urban dwellers that are exposed to distance education compared to rural-urban dwellers that are not exposed to distance education programme (t=.57; df=395; p<.05). This implied that rural-urban dwellers that are exposed to distance education programme (X=3.14; SD=1.16) participated well in the development of their communities than those that not exposed to distance education programme (X=2.25; SD=1.73). Therefore, the stated null hypothesis which stated that "there is no significant difference in the level of involvement of rural-urban dwellers in community development activities that are exposed to distance education and those that not exposed to distance education programme is rejected, while the alternate ($H_1$) is accepted. This implied that there is need to expose rural populace to distance education to make them achieve development in their community.

**Table 3: t-test table showing the Significant Difference in the Community Development of Rural-Urban Dwellers with Desirable and Undesirable Choice among those Involved in Distance Education Programme**

| Community development Activities | Distance education Programme | N | X | SD | Df | t | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Desirable | 32 | 5.81 | 1.12 | 71 | | |
| | Undesirable | 41 | 3.83 | 1.91 | | 5.21 | <.01 |

Table three revealed that desirable choice of distance education programme had significant difference on community development of rural-urban dwellers that are involved in distance education

programme and those that are not involved on the programme (t=5.21; df-71; p< .01). This indicated that rural-urban dwellers who decided to be involved in distance education programme (X=5.81; SD= 1.12) differed accurately and accepted the development of their communities as their own than those that were not involved in the distance education programme (X=3.83; SD= 1.91). Therefore, the stated null hypothesis which stated that, there will be no significant difference in the level of level of development of communities with desirable choice of distance education programme and undesirable choice of distance education programme is rejected, while the alternate (H$_1$) was accepted.

**Discussion of Findings**

Hypothesis one showed significant relationship between distance education and development of rural-urban areas. This was in agreement with the work of Aderinoye and Ojokheta (2004) that affirmed that distance education served as springboards for national development and an appreciation of the importance of education plays great role in personal and community development. The next hypothesis showed a significant difference in the community development of rural-urban dwellers that are exposed to and those not exposed to distance education programme. This finding is in agreement with that of Haythornthwaite, Kazmer, Robins, and Shoemaker (2000) in their study that explained the importance of community and its role in supporting students in their "different kinds of world" and important temporal and technological dimensions that are associated with community development. Each cohort began in physical proximity with an intensive, on-campus "boot camp" that acts as a lasting bonding experience. When students returned home, they invariably reinvented this physical proximity as virtual proximity, appropriating technology and the opportunities afforded them by class and programme structures to socialize and work with people they met on-campus. They enjoyed the temporal proximity of "live" lectures and appropriate Internet Relay Chat's "whispering" facility to socialize; they make near-synchronous use of email, and use the timing of assignment submission to initiate email exchanges. Those who failed to make such connections felt isolated and more stressed than those who were more active in the community.  The third hypothesis found a significant difference in the

community development of rural-urban dwellers with desirable and undesirable choice among those involved in distance education programme. This is also in consonance with findings of Schultz (1961) that discovered that education does not only improve individual choices available to mankind, but provides the type of skilled labour necessary for industrial development and economic growth.

**Conclusion**

Conclusively, distance education has positively been related to development of rural-urban areas and has greatly influenced expansion, growth and progress recorded in the rural-urban areas. Difference exists in  the Community Development of Rural-Urban Dwellers that are exposed to and those that were  not exposed to Distance Education Programme, and it is a sign of what education does in terms of lightening the minds of the beneficiaries and with a difference in their approaches to many issues in their lives, families, various activities too. Furthermore, the significant difference in the Community Development of Rural-Urban Dwellers with Desirable and Undesirable Choice among those Involved in Distance Education Programme indicates that education makes an individual to be able to make his/her choice in the activities of life. Right choices can be made against wrong choices of life.

**Recommendations**

Stakeholders and government should continually expose rural-urban dwellers to distance education programme because of its positive development impact in the areas of expansion, growth and progress recorded in the rural-urban areas.  Rural-Urban dwellers should continually be exposed to distance education because of the differences it makes in the life of those that are exposed to distance education, compared to those not exposed to distance education. Additionally and reiteratively, provision of distance education should be embraced by the rural-urban dwellers since its provision led to desirable choice among those involved in Distance Education Programme. Acquisition of Distance education made possible making of right choices which can be made against wrong choices of life. The implication of this study is that people that do not have privilege to attend schools as a result of income or other reasons should be

encouraged to enroll for distance education which can be offered far away from where they are living without any stress.

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