OPEN ACCESS, ADULT EDUCAION AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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In this contribution, I examine the availability of Open Access (OA) literature in Nigeria and suggest, against the thinking among experts in international financial institutions, that massive injection of public funds into education, and higher education in particular will advance adult education and development. I also suggest that a more inclusive OA discourse will impact positively on adult education and development in Nigeria.

Peter Suber (2006) in "Open Access Overview", retrieved May 5, 2006 from http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/, indicated that "Open-Access (OA) literature is digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions." What makes literature OA, then, is that it has to be available on the Internet and readers do not have to pay to read, copy, download and share information, so long as the author is acknowledged and is not misrepresented. The literature shows that the discourse on OA and the OA movement focuses a great deal on open access to peer-reviewed literature/scholarly publications and their pre-prints.

Availability of Open Access Literature for Adult Education and Development in Nigeria

The key organizations that ought to support open access to peer-reviewed literature in Nigeria are professional associations, university libraries and university publishing outfits, research institutes and, perhaps, commercial publishers. However, education, especially higher education, took serious knocks as a result of military misadventure in governance in Nigeria. Research and academic publishing suffered serious setbacks. This was even more so because the international financial institutions that gave loans to Nigeria and supervised her economy and governance had convinced the military rulers that Nigeria should reduce spending on higher education. (See Olukoju, A. 2002 "The Crises of Research and Academic Publishing in Nigerian Universities: The Twentieth Century and Beyond" at http://www.codesria.org/links/conferences/Universities/Ayodeji_Olukoju.pdf for more details)

By the mid-1990s, ICTs somewhat came to the rescue. Academics, students and other Nigerians could not only access information that was relevant to their needs from the Internet they could also share their own knowledge by publishing outside the country and on-line. Through the Internet, the Dakar-based Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), which supports research and disseminates the reports of research by Africans in Africa, and about Africa, became more visible and accessible. CODESRIA provides open access to all her peer-reviewed literature. So does some other Africa focused peer-reviewed on-line journals such as feministafrica supported by the University of Cape Town, and the Binghamton University supported titles in the Africaresources stable.

However, there is still little sharing of much of the knowledge produced by Nigerian scholars within Nigeria with other Nigerians, especially through the Internet. This is largely due to the poor funding of education and the digital divide. I will fill-in details from my own University, the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. The university library holds the copyright to all dissertations written in the university, and they currently number around 3,000. Although the university librarians told me that the university does not have an archive, the library has what might be regarded as a repository that holds seminar/conference papers and post- and pre-prints of staff publications, and they are currently estimated to be around 2,500. The librarians indicated that, for sometime now, faculty members have not been depositing their work with the library, and I must plead guilty to this myself. They affirmed that dissertations and staff publications have not been digitized and placed on-line for easy accessibility for the following reasons among several others: the high cost of digitization; the library requires a library management software package which will cost about 150,000 USD and is therefore beyond reach; constant power outage has ruined the library server, which the library is yet to replace; because of constant power outage, the library will require a battery inverter which is expensive; and the library requires capacity building to run the virtual library. The librarians also told me about their failed attempts to source for locally developed software for the library. However, they disclosed that the Carnegie Corporation is providing support in respect of staff training, software package development and the purchase of a battery inverter.

Given the problems of ICT infrastructure and funding, and the solutions on ground, it is clear that my university library is still sometime away from making open access literature available to faculty, students and others in such need. Clearly, for my university, the problem is not about opposition to open access; it is the cost of achieving open access. Most of the universities and research institutes in Nigeria face similar problems in different degrees. A quick look at the websites of a few research institutes revealed that some of them had abstracts of their peer-reviewed literature on-line, but not full texts of the articles. The implication of this is that adults, including development workers, who would otherwise have logged on to university virtual libraries and the websites of research institutes to gain access to literature, will have to, at times, travel some distance to access needed literature. This means that universities cannot effectively run on-line distance learning programmes.

There is no doubt that most Nigerian universities and research institutes have Internet access, although power outages and the high cost of maintaining electricity generating sets usually constrain such access. However, the cost of gaining access to the Internet is prohibitive for many Nigerians outside the universities, research institutes, banks and multinational corporations. Mejiuni, O. & Obilade, O. (2006) in an article entitled "The Dialectics of Poverty, Educational Opportunities, and ICTs," in Oduaran, A. & Bhola, H. (eds.), *Widening Access to Education as Social Justice*, a joint publication of UNESCO, UIE and Springer, made the point that those that have compelling reasons to make use of ICTs to gain access to education are usually unable to access ICTs because of poverty. Unfortunately, even those who can afford to pay for access to the Internet in Nigeria and the rest of the Economic South may also face discrimination and commercial exploitation when they try to access information from outside their countries on the Internet. Let me share an experience. Two years ago, I stumbled on an interesting write-up on the education of women in Africa on the Internet, and when I made to read further, I was advised to subscribe to Questia, an on-line library. I inquired about the library from my Professor friend who teaches in the US.

He was completely unaware of the existence of that kind of library, and dismissed it as "a facility for our people back at home." Around September/October 2004, I paid a year's subscription to Questia which was about 110 USD, and Questia does not have a special rate for users in the Economic South. The official exchange rate then was about 128/130 Nigerian Naira to a US Dollar. For sometime, I was excited about the amount of information I got from books and journals in Questia until, to my surprise, I tried to access 2 books, and then I got an automatic response that said available information shows that I am trying to access from a part of the World to which access to the books is not allowed. In spite of my anger at the discrimination and what I consider commercial exploitation, I am still a subscriber to Questia.

The summary of the foregoing is that research and academic publishing suffered serious setbacks as a result of military misadventure in governance in Nigeria. Nigerian scholars are beginning to recover from the problems created by the dearth of space for sharing knowledge, and access to the Internet has been an important factor in the recovery process. A university library is aware of the need for OA and is working towards it. However, because universities are consumers and not producers of the technology required for OA and because they lack the needed infrastructure to support the technology that they consume, as well as the unwillingness on the part of government to fund higher education, the prognosis of the possibilities of open access to information for adult education and development in Nigeria is bad. But there is an explanation for this. And there could be others. Increasingly in Nigeria, education is being seen as a commodity that should be subject to market forces. Primary, secondary and, recently, university education have been deregulated. Groups and individuals now invest in education as they would in stocks. It does make sense (of some sort) that top government functionaries who are establishing their own universities and libraries cannot be persuaded to fund federal and state universities properly, especially when the international financial institutions have convinced them that universal basic education, primary health care and water supply should attract priority spending. The story is not different in the non-formal education sector. Except for the non-formal education provisions of non-profits and religious organizations, other non-formal educational provisions are driven by the profit motive.

Not-for-Profit Organizations, Open Access and Adult Education and Development

It is interesting that education and training activities, and research and publishing by non-profits increased markedly during the height of the crises of research and publishing that Nigerian universities faced in the 1980s and 1990s. This was partly due to the fact that education, training, research and publishing were some of the strategies that civil society organizations adopted in response to the challenges posed by repressive military administrations and the HIV/AIDs pandemic. Through civil society organizations, international development agencies funded the activities they hoped would ensure respect for human rights, promote democracy, alleviate poverty and stem the tide of HIV/AIDs. Many non-profits did, and are still doing, a good job of providing access (not necessarily OA) to information for adult education and development. Interestingly, some university teachers were and are active participants in the activities of the non-profits as activists and, or experts. Remarkably, Nigerian non-profits have achieved great strides in the area of

publishing the reports of their experiences, research and interactions with the social justice needs of Nigerians on the field. The non-profits use the Internet and traditional modes of communication to disseminate information about their activities. They use e-mail and paste their newsletters on their websites. They also distribute and sometimes sell hard copies of their publications at every available opportunity. Even though most of their publications are not on-line and not peer-reviewed, they are good sources of information for adult learning. Perhaps the strength of their published works lies in the fact that they have not been subjected to peer review which is sometimes about gatekeeping. Clearly, international development agencies have a task of assisting national NGOs to put their publications, which ought to be copy edited, on-line so that they will be accessible.

Need to Expand the Discourse of "Open Access"

In view of the foregoing, I think the Open Access discourse should include other forms of knowledge, other ways of knowing and other ways of knowledge production. There is so much information and knowledge all around the world, especially among people who are not academics and who are not in the mainstream, that may never make their way into peer-reviewed journals and scientific/scholarly publications. In other words, the open access movement needs to be more inclusive.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, as long as we remain consumers of the technology that makes open access possible, and the ones who own the technology are concerned that they continue to make profit, and our government is more attuned to the prodding of international financial institutions, we will not be able to make knowledge that we produce available on-line free of charge, and we will also have difficulties accessing available OA literature.

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