

# The Utilization of Information Communication Technologies: A Means of Assuring Authenticity in Open and Distance Learning in Nigerian

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## Abstract

The paper attempts to establish that applying the right information and communication technology tool at different stages would help authenticate and as a ripple effect promote the open and distance learning process in Nigeria. Achieving authenticity in the open and distance learning in Nigeria only seeks to ensure that educational professionals and administrators understand the uniqueness of the Nigerian terrain and hence ensure that information and communication technology tools be introduced at all stages to achieve high quality in these institutions. ICTs would help improve the credibility of the open and distance learning institutions and also help students who study by open and distance learning attain a level of freedom and autonomy.

**Keywords:** Authenticity, Information, Communication, Technology, Open, Distance, Learning.

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## INTRODUCTION

The concept of authenticity is the idea of 'being one self' or 'being true to oneself', and is widespread and familiar. It is one of the central notions of modern moral thought. Yet it is a puzzling and paradoxical notion. Surely I am always myself and necessarily so? How can it be otherwise? 'I am I' is a trivial and logically necessary truth. How can I possibly not be myself? In what sense is it possible not to be true to oneself? How are authenticity and in-authenticity possible? There is no problem in understanding how one person can be true or false to another: for example, by giving a correct or misleading impression of their feelings and thoughts. In this sense, the language of authenticity and in-authenticity can be applied even to things. A painting or an antique, for example, is said to be authentic when it is genuine, when it really is what it appears or purports to be; and inauthentic when it is an imitation or a fake. The same seems true of animals and, it is often said, of very young children too (Yacobi, 2012).

Authenticity implies the possibility of in-authenticity, of being false to oneself. For this, a person must have acquired a degree of self-consciousness and hence of internal complexity and self-division. To further explain authenticity, we refer to the saying: "To thine own self be true!"

“But what do we mean if we say that somebody is an authentic person, or a very genuine person? Personal authenticity is often defined as being true and honest with oneself and others, having credibility in one’s words and behavior, and an absence of pretence. Its meaning is then often clarified by contrasting it to in-authenticity, like comparing light to darkness” (Yacobi, 2012). “However, in the absence of any clear criteria for judging authenticity, the boundaries between being authentic and being inauthentic are amorphous and uncertain, and often porous (Yacobi, 2012)”. “The quest for authenticity is in part related to achieving some measure of autonomy and freedom. That is the desire to be the architect of one’s own life. Personal authenticity provides an antidote to outside conditioning, and to some extent is a reaction to the in-authenticity prevalent in culture, religion, politics, and everyday life. The desire for authenticity is also critical for the discovery of the truth, and for finding fulfilment in life, and making it more meaningful and comprehensible. In general, a state of in-authenticity can be a source of profound dissonance, prompting people to try to become more authentic, in harmony in their inner and outer lives” (Yacobi, 2012).

According to Yacobi (2012), “becoming authentic is an individual mission, since each person has their own way of being human, and consequently what is authentic will be different for each individual. Furthermore, personal authenticity is highly contextual, and depends on various social, political, religious and cultural characteristics. But the unique nature of each individual is best seen not in who he is, but in who he becomes, and becoming authentic is continuous process, not an event. Authenticity involves not just knowing oneself, but also recognizing others and the mutual influence between individuals. If the quest for personal authenticity is just for self-fulfillment, then it is individualistic and ego-based; but if it is accompanied with the awareness of others and the wider world, then it can be a worthwhile goal”.

### Limitations on Authenticity

Factors that may hinder the development of authenticity include (Yacobi, 2012):

- “A lack of understanding of authenticity, one’s prior programming, the fear of rejection and failure, and social pressures to conform (and thus live in-authentically). In the latter cases, individuals typically try to show their best faces and express what is expected of them so that they will be perceived in a good light. In many situations, the need for collaboration with others may demand some adaptation, that is, some inauthentic compromise”.
- “Being under constant observation and scrutiny at best inhibits authenticity, and at worst makes it nearly impossible”.
- “The attempt to achieve authenticity is also exacerbated by ever-advancing technologies that inundate an individual’s perception of reality with illusions, such as television. Another such technology is virtual reality. The pervasive use of virtual reality may eventually result in difficulties distinguishing between virtual and real experiences, exacerbating the endless human propensity for self-deception and self-delusion. Generally, the future of human experience is related to emerging enhancement technologies, including memory and cognitive enhancement techniques. The merging of human and machine may necessitate new definitions of what a human being is, and

generate new problems related to human nature and identity, the nature of society, and the meanings of existence and human authenticity”.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

Information and communication technology (ICT) is one of the fastest growing fields of human endeavors. ICTs are so robust and versatile that almost nothing can get done in this present time and age without integrating information and communication technology. It has been observed that ICTs have been successfully integrated in the fields of medicine, engineering, visual, theatre, and applied arts, music, finance, sales and marketing and educational technology, just to mention but a few. One benefit of information and communication technology is its ability to get tasks that hitherto would have taken more time to be completed, done in shortest available run-time. This reduced through-put increases efficiency, consequently saves man-power and conserves funds (Ezike & Chigozie-Okwum, 2014).

Information and communication technology is the term that describes communication devices examples radios, cellular phones, computers, satellite systems, etc. as well as the services and applications associated with them. Information and communication technology is a very broad field hence is often defined in the context of any particular field of interest such as ICTs in education, ICTs in medical Sciences, ICTs in human kinetics etc. The term ICT also refers to the convergence of audio-visual and telephone networks with computer networks through a single cabling or link system. The broadness of ICT covers any product that will store, retrieve, manipulate, transmit or receive information electronically in a digital form, e.g. personal computers, digital television, email, robots.

Today's society shows the ever-growing computer-centric lifestyle, which includes the rapid influx of computers in the modern classroom. Information and Communication Technology can contribute to universal access to education, equity in education, the delivery of quality learning and teaching, teachers' professional development and more efficient education management, governance and administration. UNESCO (2002) takes a holistic and comprehensive approach to promoting ICT in education. Access, inclusion and quality are among the main challenges they can address.

## **OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL): AN OVERVIEW**

Open and distance learning refers to the provision of flexible educational opportunities in terms access and multiple modes of knowledge acquisition. ODL is flexible in the sense that it provides availability of choices for educational endeavours anywhere, anytime and anyhow. ODL makes opportunities available to all, irrespective of work schedule, hence freeing them from constraints of time and place (Ezike & Chigozie-Okwum, 2015). In ODL the normal or principal means of communication is through technology. Obviously teachers in conventional classrooms may use technology as a supplement to their teaching, but since it is not their principal means of communication the classroom is not considered to be distance education.

The historical evolution of distance education has been in four main phases, each with its own organizational form derived from the main form of communication:

- **Correspondence systems** originated at the end of the nineteenth century, and are still the most widely used form of distance education in less developed countries. Based around a

study guide in printed text and often accompanied by audio and video components such as records and slides, interaction in the correspondence method is by letters and other written or printed documents sent through postal systems.

- **Educational television and radio systems** use various delivery technologies. Terrestrial, satellite, and cable television and radio to deliver live or recorded lectures to both individual home-based learners and groups of learners in remote classrooms where some face-to-face support might be provided. Some systems offered limited audio or video-conferencing links back to the lecturer or a moderator at a central point.
- **Multimedia systems** encompass text, audio, video, and computer-based materials, and usually some face-to-face learner support delivered to both individuals and groups. In this approach, which is that used by the open universities, instruction is no longer an individual's work, but the work of teams of specialists, media specialists, information specialists, instructional design specialists, and learning specialists. Programmes are prepared for distribution over large numbers of learners, usually located across a whole country.
- **Internet-based systems** in which multimedia (text, audio, video and computer-based) materials in electronic format are delivered to individuals through computers, along with access to databases and electronic libraries, and which enable teacher-student and student-student, one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many interactions, synchronously or asynchronously, through e-mail, computer conferences, bulletin boards, etc.

## **PRESENT TRENDS IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING**

Considering the challenges of education and development, both in developing and developed countries, it is not surprising that open and distance learning is often seen as an important new approach and strategy which could make a significant contribution towards resolving problems of access, quality and equity. When conventional systems and approaches cannot meet the needs, it is necessary to look for new strategies. Confidence seems to be growing that open and distance learning is such a strategy. Examples of this growing confidence can be found in many countries. For example, it has been recommended that distance education efforts in the nine high-population countries (Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan, referred to as the E-9 countries), focus on expanding work for school equivalence, for teacher education, and for non-formal education, especially in relation to health.. Strategies for all these areas have been developed that could usefully be applied in most if not all of the E-9 countries. Low-tech and broadcasting strategies figure strongly but there are also a growing range of projects which make innovative use of the new information technologies (UNESCO, 2001, p. 61).

## **ICT APPLICATIONS IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING**

ICTs used to support ODL can be classified into two main categories, the first being hardware and second being, software. The hardware currently in use include radio, television, telephone (land, mobile, fax, Voice over Internet Protocol or VoIP), and computers. ICTs have now converged thanks to recent advances and enhancements made to the infrastructure, such as the laying of fiber optic cables and satellite and microwave transmission facilities. What differ,

however, are the levels of use and applications of specific hardware technologies and purpose driving their use.

Much variation can be observed in the ICT software components needed to support open and distance learning. Such ODL software tends to be customized to address variables such as:

- specific applications or purpose for which it will be used; the combination of hardware used to support ODL applications;
- features that need to be incorporated to meet users' needs.

Customized forms of software are typically evident in the form of learning management systems (LMS) that are used to simulate classroom settings and facilitate academic discussions/interactions. LMS are often meshed with other, pre-existing technologies such as databases and digital libraries.

Thus, various forms of LMS and their related hard- and software-components necessitates the formulation of appropriate policies, processes, and procedures that must align with preexisting policies, processes, and procedures – all of which must work in concert to support the smooth operation of the technology.

There are wide variations in ICT used in ODL institutions around the world. Further, specific applications and combinations of these applications are very much shaped by the context of their target user populations. The various ways and means in which ICTs are used include:

- Delivering instructional content.
- Delivering Support Services to ODL Learners.
- Research and Development Work.
- Performing Management and Administration Functions which include:
  - Document Tracking System (DTS) for application for admission.
  - Online registration system;
  - Online submission of grades;
  - Digitization of student records;
- Orientation of new/ incoming Students.

## **THE CURRENT TREND IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING IN NIGERIA**

Championing open distance learning (ODL) in Nigeria is a task saddled on the juvenile but capable shoulders of the national open university of Nigeria (NOUN). For the present, NOUN cannot compete with many of the open universities, such as: United Kingdom Open University (UKOU), Indira Gandhi National Open University, India (IGNOU), ETC, in the area of e-learning. The method of instruction at noun is by the distance learning mode within an open learning environment. Open learning means any form of learning in which the process enables individual learners to exercise choice over any one or more of a number of aspects of learning. Distance learning however, refers to an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner. This instructional mode provides opportunities for working people to acquire knowledge, skills, and techniques which may be relevant to their present work situations or to future career prospects.

The NOUN instructional delivery system is modeled after that of Indira Gandhi National Open University of India. It does not provide students with lectures rather; students are being taught through the provision of specialized study materials on the basis of self-learning.

Students' admissions processes, verification and registration of courses and examinations are done online via the university's website. Tutor marked assignments which are assessments are also done online, marked and graded real-time over the Internet on the student's portal on the Internet. E-exams are also common practice in NOUN, even though pen-on-paper exams are also carried out. Students' fees payment and result checkers are some other features the noun student's online portal also possesses. In the aspect of instructional process, NOUN has an iLearn platform, an online virtual classroom for students to catch up on facilitation and instruction online.

## **SUBMISSIONS**

Authenticity as a concept emphasizes that one seeking to be authentic should strive to attain a high level of credibility, absent from pretence and hence enable him to be true to himself and as a result achieve autonomy, freedom and self-reliance and sustainability. How do we achieve authenticity in an open and distance learning environment, if not through the use of information and communication technology which is a proven bridge that connects open and distance learners spanned across geographical divides and locations in Nigeria today.

Information and communication technologies are used in several ways to promote open and distance learning as discussed above. However with respect to noun on who are saddled with the responsibility of managing and implementing authentic and best practices in open and distance education the following submissions are made:

1. Instructional delivery: presently printed modules are the major means through which instructional materials are delivered to the students of the NOUN. While it is best practice in developed countries like the United Kingdom Open University and likes to employ the Internet and world wide web, online conferencing, social media platforms alongside other modes of instructional deliveries, it would be inauthentic to the Nigerian situation due to factors which might include:
  - Limited access to Internet enabled devices by open and distance learners;
  - High Internet service charges;
  - Lack of technical know-how;
  - Epileptic power supply

However, authenticity advocates discovery of one's self thereby working towards enhanced credibility and genuineness. To that effect, advocacy on utilization of widely spread and readily available ICTs like:

- Interactive radio programmes;
- Interactive television lecture programmes;
- Use of Short Message Service (SMS) to share vital information to students;
- Conference telephone calls; and
- Distribution of pre-recorded lectures on CD-ROMs and DVDs, etc.

These would ensure versatility, autonomy, and freedom of the Nigerian open and distance learner.

2. In Research and Development, it is advocated that moderation and supervision of student's research become flexible, in the sense that students can interact with their supervisors through the Internet either through e-mails, texting, chatting and telephone contacts. Submission of projects online could also be made possible to promote flexibility, freedom and credibility. Students too are enjoined to harness the World Wide Web and the Internet which are global repository of knowledge during their research.
3. Orientation and induction of new students can be done via the television stations at stipulated time, where new and returning students can tune in and watch from the comfort of their homes.
4. One aspect where NOUN is utilizing ICTs tools optimally is in the management and administration. The noun student portal which is unique to every student ensures online admissions processing, course and examination registration, submission of grades and result publishing, payment of fees and digitization of all student's records. However periodic upgrade and update are advocated.

From the afore stated, it is clear that if the NOUN must make a make in the academic circle world over, there must be an improved and regular utilization of ICTs if authenticity in ODL processes in Nigeria.

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