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## Dislodging the “University of Nkwo Nnewi” through Open and Distance Learning

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### Abstract

*It is not uncommon for a young Igbo trader from Anambra State to announce proudly that he is now at UNN (University of Nigeria, Nsukka) and the uniformed listener believes him not knowing that this brand of UNN stands for “University of Nkwo Nnewi”, representating various markets in Nigeria where Igbo boys who dropped out of schools and attach themselves to prosperous businessmen for igba odibo,(apprenticeship) before establishing their own businesses. The rate at which young boys abandon school is becoming worrisome so policy makers in Anambra State focus on curbing low male enrolment and high school dropout. **Those who dropped out of school early in life are completely forgotten, so, this research is to fill that gap.** The objective of this research therefore is to present this group, the problem they encounter and proffer solution. The findings indicate that they face more problems in business than their forebears because information technology has rendered moderate education inadequate for the business transactions. Consequently some of them yearn to go back to school but are*

*incapacitated by time constraints. The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), provides an excellent platform for them to study at their own pace but there is need advocacy campaigns through town unions, market associations, age grades and drama to create awareness for them.*

## **Introduction**

A learner that withdraws from learning for one reason or the other before completing the programme is regarded as having dropped out. The result of a survey conducted by National Bureau of Statistics reveals that in 2010, over a million children dropped out of school but the rate of drop out in the rural area is more than double that of urban area and the dropout rate for males is higher than for females. (NCML 2010) The same survey shows that awareness of adult literacy programmes is higher in the Northern states of the country. This means that gradually, the states that were regarded as educationally backward states are making concerted efforts to acquire education. For instance, the awareness rate of literacy programme and literacy centres in Adamawa is 52.2 and 43.6 respectively while in Anambra state it is 40.2 and 39.7(NCML 2010)

In Anambra State, the young men who dropped out of school boast that they are studying at UNN and are very proud of it. Many of them were admitted into their own brand of *UNN* after primary school education, some after secondary school while the rest dropped out of secondary school. They justify their options with the question “*ndi gulu akwukwo ha gutalu gini?*” meaning that the educated ones have nothing to show for it - in terms of money. Any rational thinking person at ceremonies like weddings, birthdays, funerals and other celebrations will be shocked at the vulgar display of wealth by some of these young businessmen. Unfortunately, many of them fail easily in business because they lack the foresight which higher education would have imbued in them. Also, the public at such displays forgets that the percentage of those who “made it” is very negligible and that a greater percentage of those who went into business are still groping, trying to establish themselves after their disengagement from their masters (*settlement*) while those in the category of failed businessmen (*ndi afia ha dalu*) are forgotten. They could not rent shops so engage in selling goods (*Igba oso afia*) for the more successful ones and may not be able to sell an item for some days. Consequently, they depend on the magnanimity of their colleagues for pittance for food (*ego nni*), a meal that is sometimes taken

once a day. The boys, who hawk wherever there is hold - up in Lagos in what is termed *mobile shops* or *shop on the run*, are predominantly Igbo boys.

Many of them dropped out of secondary school while a considerable number completed their secondary schools but could not move further. Some of them realize that they are deficient in terms of Western education but are quick to speak English (incorrect most of the times) to impress onlookers. However, some of them yearn for education but cannot go back to school because they cannot abandon their businesses in the bid to acquire Western Education which is vital for their personal and communal development. Yet they need to be educated because, education is seen as a major force in economic, intellectual, social and cultural empowerment (Burtch 2006). In this wise, Martswra asserts that lighting the lamp of education is a common duty of free human society because education is an aspect of socialization that is very vital to human existence (Martswra 2006). In another vein, Emile Durkheim (2004), maintains that “society can survive only if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity which education perpetuates and reinforces...”. Education from this viewpoint provides a link between an individual and the society so by implication, for success in life. The strategic role of education in capacity building and national development is therefore not in question.

The history of the Igbos could not have been the same in Nigeria without the notable contributions of their educated forebears like Kenneth Dike, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Chinua Achebe, Emeka Anyoku, Cardinal Francis Arinze, and many others great scholars who achieved wealth and fame through Western Education are from Anambra State where boys now spurn the same mode of education. The reason is that the present generation pays less emphasis on integrity, the society places premium on wealth and ‘the end justifies the means syndrome’. Also, with the high unemployment rate in the nation the lowly –placed educated ones are derided by the illiterate or semi-literate businessmen. In Anambra State the incumbent governor, Peter Obi, recently appealed to these boys to embrace formal education before going into business and promised to embark on an intensive campaign against low male enrolment and drop-out in secondary schools in the state (Sun Newspaper).

In this study, we tried to identify the percentage of this group that is aware of the facilities offered by NOUN; if they are willing to go back to school and the challenges that hinder them participation in the second chance for university education offered by NOUN. Questionnaires were administered to

a randomly selected population of businessmen in selected markets in Anambra and Lagos States. Unfortunately, less than only five out of hundred questionnaires were returned, some refused to collect so the information here was basically from oral interviews and informal interactions. It was worse at the Onitsha Main Market and Nkwo Nnewi. A total of one hundred respondents were interviewed and the interviews were not structured in the same pattern because, sometimes, a response determines the next question.

### **Access to education**

The aspirations of our forbears to seek education with enthusiasm and motivation to excel is lacking in the present generation despite the fact that “education is relevant to the demands of a new African nation” (Jegede 2007). Some boys are forced into business but still yearn for formal education but could not gain the desired access to education at a higher level. The issue of wider access to education became imperative in Nigeria because conventional face-to-face institutions are few and limited by inadequate infrastructure. The establishment of the National Open University has enhanced access to university education for many Nigerians especially those who could not further their education due to financial constraints, inability to gain admission or by choice. Ironically, most of the people who need to take advantage of this access to education that affords them the opportunity to study in the comfort of their homes or business premises are not aware of it. This study is designed to create such awareness.

In educational discourse, access to education means getting an opportunity for education through an unhindered contact with educational materials and other associated facilities. The concept of access encapsulates a number of concerns which include rights to education which materializes through the right of admission, the right of entry, and the right of usage (Obi,2007). In the same vein, Obanya(2003) submits that access to education should cover fundamental requirements like getting enrolled in school of educational programmes; regular attendance; making steady progress through all stages of learning; completion of learning cycle; and successful learning achievement. Bhola (2006) explains further that access to education is seeking to bring literacy or adult education to adult men and women who had been by-passed or underserved by school systems. According to Munzali (2000 quoted in Jegede 2007) the nation needs to expand the capacity of the university system by a factor of ten, by either multiplying the current admission by a factor of 10, or expanding the number of existing universities

by a factor of 10. He contends that it is impossible for the country to do either of them considering how to handle the issues of facilities, infrastructure and manpower. The easiest way to solve the problem of access becomes through a reliance on Open University and Distance Learning with the hope that what the conventional universities cannot absorb, the Open University system will mop up.

Open and Distance Learning is a mode of education that differs from traditional form of face-to-face learning. In the face-to-face mode of learning, the focus is on the teacher who as the guide dictates the pace, prescribes the pattern, content and duration while directing the learners on what to do and when. In Open and Distance learning on the other hand, the learner is at the centre taking decisions on what to learn, the mode and when. The learner is removed from the instructor in time and space. Dhanarajan defines it as open entry access to learning opportunities and the removal of barriers to learning opportunities. He sees it as a unique method for the organization, and dissemination of knowledge or expanding learning opportunities (Dhanarajan, 2003). The Nigeria, Education Sector Diagnosis – synthesis Report (2007) describes Open and Distance Education as the mode of teaching in which learners are removed in time and space from the teacher. It uses a variety of media and technologies to provide and or improve access to good quality education for large numbers of learners wherever they may be. In ODL knowledge is imparted on the learners through teaching aids in form of printed study materials, recorded audio /visual electronic materials and on-line instruction. The prospective learner is at liberty to use the medium that suits him/her. The concept of ODL therefore provides education through which one can qualify in one’s chosen field without attending formal classes in person. It also creates opportunities for lifelong learning. In summary, ODL is a type of education in which the students study outside the conventional school system and knowledge is imparted without the necessary personal interaction between teachers and students.

There are many forms of ODLs in Nigeria; they include correspondence study education, distance learning (Sandwich programmes), Part-Time Teacher Training Programme (PTTP), Open University, continuing education, weekend programmes, adult literacy education programmes, National Teachers Institute (NTI) and e-learning. ODL is not for undergraduate programmes alone as NTI runs programmes in TCII and NCE. Many universities in the county now run dual-mode system whereby their

distance learners also engage in face-to-face meeting with their instructors. Between 1997 and 2002 many universities in the country established outreach centres for continuing education in major cities in Nigeria, especially Lagos. The centres thrived for awhile but were closed down by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2002. These centres operated the conventional face to face mode of learning on weekends. In the place of such centres, the government established the National Open University which is a mono-modal institution. The National Open University of Nigeria on the other hand de-emphasizes face-to-face meeting between learners and instructors. This mode gives the learners the opportunity of distance learning which not only shares the goals of the conventional school system, but also aims to provide educational access to a population that has lost hope of acquiring university education. This makes it possible for people in full time jobs, housewives, traders and youths waiting for employment to avail themselves of educational opportunities at their own pace. The under-privileged and disadvantaged in society also have an opportunity to study and improve themselves since it is cheap and affordable.

The National Open University of Nigeria was not established to compete with conventional universities but rather to complement them by fulfilling the government's search "... for alternative models to the traditional conventional system which was rather restricted and limited in scope"(NOUN Students Handbook). Distance learning institution as reflected in the 1977 National Policy on Education is geared towards ensuring that "maximum efforts... [is] made to enable those who can benefit from higher education to be given access to it" through an institution(s) designed to encompass education for all, education for life, life-long learning, personalize learning, part-time studies and much more. NOUN has become the leading provider of open and distance learning at tertiary level and is also the largest tertiary institution in terms of students' enrolment in Nigeria with a population of 50,615 students for the 2010/10211 session. It operates from the headquarters in Lagos with other two campuses locations in Abuja and Kaduna and 42 study centres distributed throughout the country. Currently, it offers over 80 programmes of study composed of 1,600 courses. It employs a range of e-learning course delivery methods like audio, video, CD-ROMS and on-line study materials. However, most courses are distributed in form of printed modules. The phone numbers of programme leaders, coordinators and facilitators are given to the students to call on the staff concerned for clarifications on particular issues on the course.

The establishment of NOUN is a significant milestone in widening access to education. The University seeks to improve skilled manpower and also improve the skills for those already at work. For instance The Centre for Life Long Learning Workplace Training offers training facilities to artisans while the Access Programme helps those with deficiency in the entry requirement to remedy it before being admitted into undergraduate programmes. There are many entrepreneurial courses in the university that would be of benefit to the traders. NOUN is the first and only university that operates in an exclusively open and distance learning mode in Nigeria. It is poised to provide panacea for the perennial problem of provision of equitable, accessible, convenient, and affordable education which reduces poverty levels and increases literacy levels.

### **Male drop out of school in Anambra State**

Low rate of male enrolment in schools poses human capital problem for the youths in Nigeria in general and Anambra state in particular. If this is not checked, it would lead to the dearth of the intelligentsia which is expected to contribute meaningfully towards the state’s development as part of the human capital. Human capital is known to be sustainable when it is continuously maintained, improved on and constantly supplied in high quality for the future (generations) benefit (Evans, 2002). One major way of enhancing sustainable human capital development is through education. The focus of this paper is on Western education which as a way of improving the mental, physical, psychological and social development of the people. A well educated population is endowed with the skills to adapt and transform the society for the benefit and comfort of humanity. School dropout, just like every other societal problem is a type of brain drain because it inhibits qualitative development of potential human capital. Mass dropping out of school may deprive individuals the possibility of meaningful participation in the societal development as they do not have other forms of training opportunities necessary for potential skill and intellectual capacity development. They are therefore limited to engagement in buying and selling and are proud to be addressed as *importers and exporters, general merchandize*. Consequently, potential academics, scientists, managers, leaders, democrats, and other professionals of which the state was known for are no longer developed, at least, to an appreciable scale. Worse still, these noble potentials may be wasted because essentially, youths are the labour

force of any society and for them to withdraw from school at that age is rather unfortunate for the socioeconomic development of the state.

According to the Nigerian Literacy Survey 2010, the magnitude of drop out among children (6-14 years) in the nation is presented below:

	Male	Female	Both Sexes
	589,545	498,288	1,087,833
Urban	89,945	104,420	194,365
Rural	499,600	393,868	893,468

The rate of drop out in the rural area is more than double that of urban for males. Anambra State ranks 8<sup>th</sup> in the adult literacy rate in English language and 14<sup>th</sup> in the literacy rate in any language. The overall literacy rate was calculated based on ability to read and write in any language, English or any other languages. According to the survey, overall adult literacy rate in the country was 71.6 per cent. The adult literacy rates were 73.6 per cent and 49.5 per cent for urban and the rural areas respectively. The overall adult literacy rate among the males was 79.3 per cent while that of females was 63.7 per cent. This means that more males were educated in the past when these adults were younger. The females are gradually taking over especially in the rural areas as the table above shows. Unfortunately, while “Yobe State, which used to have the lowest rate up to the past year, had an improved adult literacy rate of 48.9 per cent”(Nigerian Literacy Survey:2010), Anambra State is slacking.

The age at which these boys drop out of school is a period in human development that is characterized by vibrant and virile functioning of the human system needed for the manifestations of individual skills and talents. Functional and qualitative education facilitates these manifestations while lack of education retards or even prevents them. Educational training therefore produces new breed managers who understand the emerging systems (Oghvbu, 2007) vis-à-vis sustainable development. The trend of buying and selling alone cannot contribute to the meaningful development and the drive for poverty eradication in the nation. Igboland is blessed with

resources which can be harnessed. For instance, the cashew plantations, the palm plantations, the rice fields and yam barns are all gone as the importation of virtually everything has taken over. The trend could be reversed because or else, very soon, the importation of palm oil and cassava would commence. Gradually, *garri* is being brought to Anambra state from Delta State while Abuja and Lafia yams are gradually replacing the Aguleri and Otuocha yams hitherto found in Anambra state. Education offers many courses in Agriculture, fishery, animal husbandry and many others that can help to modernize farming and stem the mass embrace of buying and selling finished products as the ultimate ambition for the youths. Industrialists could also harness the raw materials from these plantations, if revamped, for the manufacturing of various products that are currently being imported from China. The Igbo man has the ability to use local resources to enhance gradual and sustainable societal development but he needs to be educated to be able to transfer or adapt what is lacking in local resources from other nations or to improve what is obtained locally for the benefit of his community. The world is changing rapidly and the Igbos must embrace mass formal education once again to remain competitive in business and general development. Dropping out of school means losing the human resources that would have constituted the agents of change in the region.

The major cause of drop-out of school is poverty which is very endemic in Nigeria. Other factors include the motivation for quick wealth because of the societal consideration of affluence as an indication of good living and higher social status. Another vital factor is the disenchantment of boys with formal education because graduates roam the streets without gainful employment. Going to the university is therefore seen as a waste of time since there is no guarantee of employment for sustainable living thereafter. The dropouts then leave school with the aim of achieving greatness, independence, and self-reliance early in life as *Ochinanwata* or *Osi na nwata bulu ogalanya* (Young prodigies in terms wealth). Unfortunately, they abandon educational opportunities without due consideration of the long-term consequences of their actions which many of them face now.

## **Findings**

It was difficult to obtain the percentage of NOUN students who are businessmen because there is no provision for occupation in their admission forms. It was also very difficult for me to elicit meaningful responses from most of the traders. However, I was able to discuss (not necessarily

interviews) with the chairmen of some market associations who warned me not to reflect their identities or mention their associations and others. In all I managed to interview a total of 100 traders of various ages were interviewed in the following four markets; Balogun/Idumota and Ladipo in Lagos; Nkwo Nnewi and Onitsha Main Market in Anambra State, with 20 respondents from each market. The interviews were not structured in the same pattern as responses determined follow up questions. In all only 3 respondents agreed to disclose their ages and 82 respondents are from Anambra state. The findings are as follows

- At Nnewi and Lagos, 27 respondents acquired their GCE certificates from the literacy centres in what is termed *Akwukwo Mgbede*. These centres have facilities for primary and post primary education.
- Close to half of the respondents dropped out of secondary school and would like to go back to school.
- Five respondents are graduates in various fields but are forced into business by unemployment. They contend that education is an advantage in business.
- Less number of older persons was interested in going back to school probably due to age.
- The study revealed that only 22 out of 100 respondents were aware ODL and existence of NOUN
- Access to literacy programme is measured by the distance and the nearest study centre of NOUN is about between 10 to 40 kilometers to the markets.
- Those interested expressed desire for the establishment NOUN study centres close to them.
- However one respondent in Lagos was so enthusiastic and has actually made more inquiries which were supplied. Five others have called me for more directives.
- Many of them are frustrated, very aggressive and antagonistic. Maybe this group constitutes businessmen who are neither successful in their business nor educated.

## **Recommendations**

To address the low literacy levels there is need to:

- Give more emphasis to adult literacy programmes and create more awareness on ODL and existence of NOUN.
- NOUN should collaborate with NITDA to use its computer centres located in every local government area in Nigeria as facilitation or liason centres.
- There is need for serious enlightenment campaign to spread the information through town union meetings, age grades, religious organisations and market associations.
- They could also be reached through the dramatization of the need for education in drama skirts or community theatre.

Adequate mass reorientation of Igbo youths is very necessary to inculcate in them the values and the benefits of education. The recent fuel subsidy crisis in January, 2012 in Nigeria that paralyzed economic activities in the nation for eight days reflects the level of awareness of the national socio-political issues by an average Igbo person especially the traders. For instance, at the Onitsha main market and other markets in the south east, the traders went about their businesses and were angry that the banks were not open for them to lodge their proceeds. Also, some of the Igbo traders in Lagos defied the strike action and went to open their shops at Ladipo market but were dispersed by the policemen. These Igbos did not care whether fuel is sold at one thousand naira per litre or if the nation is in turmoil as long as they make their money. They seem not to be interested in national issues or the protection of their fundamental rights. This explains why extortion, brutality and extra judicial killings by the police abound in Igboland. It is reported that the Nigerian Police force between 2009 and 2011 “enriched themselves to the tune of over N53.48billion from road block collection ...July 2010-December 2011, N21.91billion with Anambra and Abia on top with 7 billion each” and that as at the first week of December 2011, such road blocks in the south east zone was estimated at over 1,500 with Anambra and Abia topping the list(Umahi 2012) The simple reason is that everything translates to money for an average Igbo man. He is therefore exploited at every opportunity with the erroneous belief that *aku na-ekwu* which means that wealth that determines issues. Adequate education is therefore necessary for the businessman to support his wealth-creation with reasonable expenditure. Even the seemingly successful ones have the need to embrace this fomal education to consolidate their wealth and put them to proper use.

Corruption and mismanagement of the national resources need to be reduced to the barest minimum as the political class has a negative influence on the youths who are lured to quick wealth in place of formal education. The blatant mismanagement and looting of national treasury and exhibition of affluence by politicians tend to convince the youths that long period of educational training is a sheer waste of time since a school dropout could win an elective post or is appointed a Special Assistant to a politician, and an overnight millionaire. Transparency and the culture of constant exposure of corruption and the punishment of offenders should be propagated.

ODL is a veritable tool for mass education because it is cheap therefore the low income traders can also afford it. Embracing flexible learning will assist traders and other working class citizens to pursue their educational ambition without a disruption of their business. Education will help embellish their productive capacity, sharpen their business acumen and widen their perspectives. The artisans have the opportunity of learning new and modern skills to improve talents through NOUN.

### **Conclusion**

Education is a fundamental human right as entrenched in United Nations Charter and it enhances people's ability, increases employability, and increases workers' efficiency and productivity. With formal education, more people would contribute meaningfully to the building of an Igbo society in which everyone can make a contribution in cultivating positive attitudes and re-creating an open society based on solidarity and promotion of new economy. Education helps to create avenues for individuals to explore their environment, discover their potentials and indeed realize their aspirations. It is therefore necessary for the Igbos to change their mindset de-emphasize mundane wealth, "...noisy exhibitionism and disregard for humility and quietness" (Anber in Achebe 2012: 76), unbridled attachment to monetary values and embrace intellectual wealth. It is common to hear remarks like, *asuo pipiri suo pipiri, oputalu one na naira*, meaning what is the monetary value of a well-made speech in English? What matters therefore is how much money one can throw about and not ones intellectual attainment. This is tragic. There is need therefore to radically improve the nation's moral and ethical standards through a reevaluation of the value system. The Igbos should recapture their pre-civil war position in the nation when the tribe had "...the highest literacy rate, the highest standard of living, and the greatest proportion of citizens with post secondary education in Nigeria" (Achebe

2012: 76) Our youths should embrace this second chance for education provided by NOUN to enable them compete with others globally because in the words of Ene Henshsaw in *This is Our Chance*, “the world outside moves fast... and we shall move with it. This is our chance”.

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