

## CREATING EMPLOYMENT THROUGH THE PERFORMING ARTS IN AN OPEN AND DISTANT LEARNING (ODL) SYSTEM

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### Abstract

Two major arguments are presented in this paper. The first one is that the Performing Arts programmes can reduce unemployment in many nations. The second argument is that, the Open and Distance Learning institutions could include Performing Arts in its programmes to boost the employability of youths because the courses (Music, Dance and Drama) guarantee immediate employment. This claim is premised on the number of emerging popularity of musicians, dancers, actors, actresses, and the frequency of musical shows/jamborees, the increasing number of awards for performers, TV reality programmes, and astronomic rise in dramatic productions (home videos, films, soaps and other TV plays) in Nigeria. With the flexibility, accessibility, and wide coverage of the University, National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) could design undergraduate, certificate and diploma programmes to enable those with innate talents to improve on them and others with the desire to learn to have opportunity. The recommendation includes a blended e-learning approach that would be made up of 30% face to face whereby students meet with their instructors; 30% individual learning and practice and 40% collaboration with group mates.

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**Key Words:** ODL, Performing Arts, Learning, Systems, Practice, Employment

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### Background

The Performing Arts professionals (dancers, dramatists and musicians), who were regarded as never-do-wells and loafers in the traditional Africa society are gaining wealth, prominence and popularity in the contemporary society. In the face of increasing unemployment problems in many African societies, youths are turning to the performing arts for employment, self-employment and sustenance. This is evidenced in the student's enrolment in the renowned Juilliard School (Music, Dance, Drama) in New York which admitted only 846 students from 42 countries with an undergraduate enrolment of 510 out of 2466 (Fall 2010) undergraduate applicants, it means that there are thousands who need admission to such schools. Also, the fact that the Juilliard alumni have collectively won more than 105 Grammy Awards, 62 Tony Awards, 47 Emmy Awards, 26 Bessie Awards, 24 Academy Awards, 16 Pulitzer Prizes, and 12 National Medals for Arts further attests to the fact that such schools do not only provide employment but also fame for the graduates.

Here in Africa, The Dance Academy in South Africa trains students in all forms of dance "... to give them (the youth) the best opportunity of being employed as young professionals" (<http://www.uct.ac.za/about/arts/dance>). The National Open University could complement such institutions through a blended e-Learning approach upon which this discussion is structured.

In the African traditional society, music and dance were past activities that people indulged in during festivals and other ceremonies that are located during the leisure periods of the year. The bards and other performers in that society were not professionals in the modern sense as one was not expected to make a living through performance. Drama did not really stand out on its own as a form of entertainment as obtained in the Western world where people go to the theatre to watch a particular play for a fee. Instead, re-enactments or other forms of drama skirts were intertwined with the festivals. This scenario changed after colonization and advent of Western education which brought with it the definition of drama and the controversy on whether or not drama existed in African traditional societies. According to Ruth Finnegan (1970), what existed was "certain dramatic and quasi-dramatic phenomenon" (501). African scholars and professionals embraced drama not just as a form of entertainment but as a profession through which one could earn a living so it became a course of study in universities. Performing Arts as a profession started with the Lagos concert which was very popular in late nineteenth century. Although the aim was for the entertainment of the colonial masters, it also afforded the Lagos indigenous elite the opportunity to demonstrate "... an interest in and an appreciation of music and theatre in so far as these were symbols of appreciation of status and

culture” (Ogunyibi, 1981: 357). The concerts were structure in the European theatrical tradition so gate fee were taken and performers or the organizers made some money. Hubert Ogunde is regarded as the first professional dramatist in Nigeria as his troupe comprised of paid actors and drummers who were mainly members of his household. He started, like his contemporaries, with the concert in the church but unlike his contemporaries who remained with the church, he formed his own theatre company and lived on his earnings as a professional performer. Duo Ladipo, Kola Ogumola, Baba Sala and many others followed suit but their performances did little or nothing to influence the attitude of the greater populace towards the performing arts as parents opposed their children’s desire to study any course in the Performing Arts. They preferred their children to study the ‘prestigious professional’ courses like Law, Medicine, Engineering or Accountancy.

The trend is reversing gradually with the increase of awareness on the potentials Performing Arts as a viable profession hence parents not only support their children but also identify publicly with their performances like in *Maltina Dance All*. Musicians and actors/actresses are instant celebrities, hailed and admired while many recording and production companies are springing up everywhere. In South Africa for instance, “the new freedoms of post-apartheid South Africa have brought new life - dance which has become a prime means of artistic expression, with dance companies expanding and exploring new territory”. For instance, music and dance are “pulling in new audiences and a number of home-grown productions, particularly those aimed at the popular market, have taken South Africa and, in some cases, the world, by storm” (www.bankokcompanies.com).

The number of reality shows in our televisions worldwide further attests to the fact that the entertainment industry is growing in leaps and bounds. The shows expose the youths to invaluable opportunities to explore their potentials and talents for subsequent gainful employment. There is therefore the need for more of such schools in Africa since the entertainment industry provides avenues for self-employment especially for the youths.

The Juilliard School I used for illustration started as a Juilliard Graduate School in 1924, and merged with the Institute for Musical Art in 1926 to become the Juilliard School of Music. In 1951 and 1968, the dance and drama were added respectively and it changed its name to Juilliard School as it is known presently. The images below; illustrate activities at the school.



Drama

Dance

Music

Source: <httpwww.juilliard.edu/about/history.php>

### Definition of Terms

**Performing Arts:** This refers to courses in the university that are embedded in forms of artistic expressions that are realized in performances meant basically for the entertainment and sometimes the edification of the audience. It is subdivided into music, dance and drama. It is also referred to as theatre arts.

**ODL:** This is an abbreviation of Open and Distance Learning. It is an institution whose learners receive instructions from a distance as opposed to the conventional face to face learning method. In an ideal situation, it is affordable, flexible, and offers qualitative education in an open admission process that encourages as many people as possible to enroll, study and graduate.

**Curriculum:** In this paper, this refers to the programme or courses that are offered by an educational institution.

### Introduction

In Lagos, Nigeria alone, we have over ten television stations and in one of them, the drama programmes for this quarter are seventeen (*Eldorado, Tinsel, Spider, So Wrong So Right, This*

*Life, Treasures, Together, living in Lagos, Nowhere to Be found, About to Wed, Face to Face, Family Ties, Clinic Matters, Dear Mother, Papa Ajasco, Super Story, Eldorado*). Some of the reality TV performing arts-centered programmes include *Star Quest; Amstel Malta box office (AMBO); The Next movie star; Idols West Africa; The Nigerian Idol; MTN Project Fame West Africa; Celebrity Takes Two; Maltina Family Dance All; Nigeria's Got Talent* and many more. It is important to note that new talents are discovered and encouraged but some of them need formal training to perfect their arts.

There are about twenty-two dance/drama companies/schools mainly owned by individuals in the Nigeria ([www.bankokcompanies.com](http://www.bankokcompanies.com)) but the discovery is that most of the proprietors set up the companies to for specific performances and recruit the needed categories of artists for each performance after which the cast and crew are disbanded. However, some have resident artists who feature in all their performances. The most prominent is the Wale Adenuga Productions (WAP)'s PEFTI School for training of actors and actresses. The Centre for Media Development of the Catholic Archdiocese of Lagos incorporates an acting School which has graduated its first set in November 2012. Some Nigerian Universities offer degree and diploma programmes in Performing Arts but they are not adequate. Consequently, some of the renowned artists opt to train abroad but they could still acquire the needed training and skills on an ODL platform that is flexible and cost effective.

A different scenario exists in South Africa where there is a vibrant culture of performing arts. They have about seventy-two such schools and companies but many of the dance schools focus on classical ballet or jazz as the predominant performance in pre-independence era. However, after independence, many of them widened their scope to include African traditional dance and other forms of contemporary dance. A good example is The University of Cape Town School of Dance which "... was originally established [in 1934] to train classical ballet dancers and teachers in the British tradition but later broadened its vision and curriculum to reflect the diversity and rhythm which is South African. During the 1990s a shift in emphasis saw both African dance and contemporary dance being offered as full majors".

(<http://www.uct.ac.za/about/arts/dance>).

The foci of the schools are as varied as the schools. The Professional Actor Training for instance, runs eight-week short-term programmes for careers in theatre, film and television. It trains actors and in addition "offers practical insights into the business of theatre, film and television from casting directors to talent agents".

(<http://www.scr.org/education/professionalactortraining.sppx>). The major objective of this schools is to train its students to "become multi-skilled" in their areas of specialization "in order to become marketable well-rounded professionals".

(<http://www.capedancecompany.co.za/CAPA.html>).

It is clear that the emphasis is on the gainful employment (marketability) of the graduates. So, there is no doubt that performing arts is a good avenue for the employability of youths in Africa just as it has been in the Western world from the days of Thepsis in Athens to the modern American Hollywood, and Indian Bollywood, Nigerian Nollywood and others

### **The Proposal**

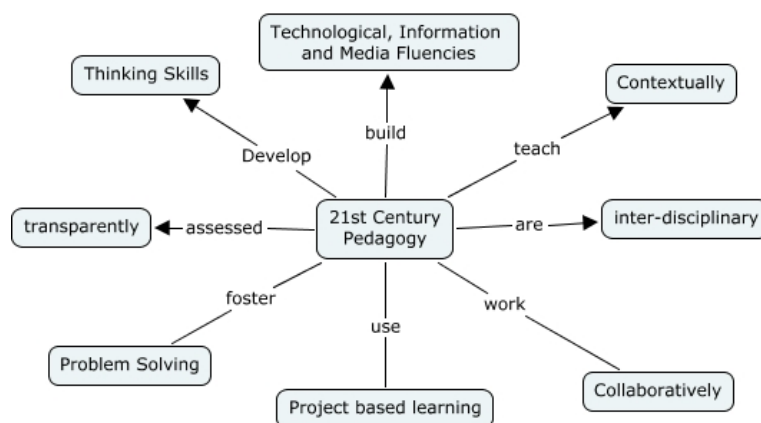
The Open and Distance Learning presents a movement from the traditional courses in the Arts and Social Sciences to more skilled-based and entrepreneurial courses. Such skill based courses in the contemporary society are also embedded in the Performing Arts. So, there is need to review the conceptions, theories, notions, and principles of education by Western educational theorists and philosopher's centuries ago which are not relevant to the contemporary African experience and instead focus on practical steps to entrench educational systems that would meet African peculiar environments. This would include a system designed to meet our special needs of preparing the younger generation for a stable future. The world is changing and evolving and e-Learning Africa provides the platform for proposals and innovations in that direction. Some proposals may seem illusionary and even utopian but each should be given a chance to evolve.

Gauthier (2010) posits that the world is witnessing the globalization of educational reforms and that nations are competing to become front runners. The implementation of this proposal would accelerate the ODL institutions' bid for the premier position and to empower more youths for

self-employment and sustainability. Some of the arguments in this paper are based on the 21<sup>st</sup> century pedagogy which states, among other things, that the 21<sup>st</sup> teaching must “be flexible, and adaptable to move along with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century teacher who is an adaptor, a communicator, a leader and a learner, a visionary and a model, a collaborator and risk taker. This means that the curriculum should be flexible with appropriate facilities that would aid effective learning. This will help to equip the graduates with necessary tools needed to perform optimally in society (<http://web.mac.com/iajukes/thecommittedsardine/Handouts.html>). The students should therefore learn and be involved in practical projects and not concentrate on theories.

The inclusion of practical-based courses like drama and music in the ODL curriculum requires a special design of learning materials, learning process, periodical assessment, feedback, and final evaluation bearing in mind the face to face teaching is de-emphasized. The style and approach to instruction delivery and learning should therefore be tailored towards an emphasis on the learning/teaching methods in the 21<sup>st</sup> century proposal from the educational origami- 21<sup>st</sup> century pedagogy (<http://edorigami.edublogs.org> files, 2008). All references to the 21<sup>st</sup> century pedagogy is from this site.

The key features of 21<sup>st</sup> century pedagogy are: building technology, information and media fluencies [Ian Jukes]; developing thinking skills; making use of project based learning; using problem solving as a teaching tool; timely, appropriate and detailed feedback; It is collaborative in nature and uses enabling and empowering technologies. These features are illustrated in the diagram below.



Source: <https://www.teachthought.com/the-future-of-learning/a-diagram-of-21st-century-pedagogy>

The students would be expected to make use of technological/information technologies like the computer and DVD/TV and work collaboratively and practically on projects that form part of their training and reflect the primary goal of equipping the students for the world that is rapidly changing, adapting and evolving. The relevance of this model to the proposal in this paper will be validated in the course of the presentation **ON FOR TRE Designing of the Instructional Materials**

The design and production of learning materials are vital aspects of open and distance learning because the learner is mostly separated from the instructor. ODL offers qualitative education deliberately designed to be flexible, accessible, and cost effective. An effective instructional material therefore determines the rate of assimilation, success in examination and the acquisition of the prerequisite knowledge and skill needed for an effective operation of the graduate in a chosen profession.

The absence of performing arts in ODL curriculum constitutes a gap in the existing curriculum and its inclusion would enhance knowledge, skill, and eliminate this gap. The course is performance based so in order to design the material to meet the basic principles of accessibility and flexibility of ODL, the recommendation is a dual mode approach in the instruction delivery in which the course material will be 30% print and 70% in audio-video CD-ROMs. Instructional design refers to the planning and implementation of instructional materials or activities in any field and there are many rules and principles guiding it but the important

factor is that a design should be “sensitive to local conditions (learners, instructional setting, support resources, learning cultures, and so on)” (Romiszowski, 2010: 1). Instructional design should therefore be goal-oriented, take into consideration the environment in which the learners operate and the expected result. It is in consideration of the environment that online mode of instructional delivery is left out because regular internet connectivity (in many African countries) (Why not restrict self to Nigeria?) has remained a mirage and electricity supply elusive. A full online approach may truncate the workability of the proposal so E-learning mode whereby the students can access the materials at any convenient time and place without the problem of internet access becomes preferable. – Not clear! Is online not an e-Learning. This should be properly clarified. If electricity is a problem, how does e-Learning works?

In the design of the instructional materials the needs of the learners, the instructors and the institutions should be considered at the onset. Thereafter, the need for instruction, specific learning goals/objectives and outcomes are specified, alongside the means for assessing progress towards those desired outcomes that is, “the determination of goals and objectives for the course, the identification of the scope of the course” (Romiszowski, 2010: 46). Subject experts, mainly professionals and practitioners of the art should design and develop the materials because the materials would need a lot of graphic illustrations which both a professional and a practitioner can provide. This illustration would go beyond the normal, “diagrams, tables, charts etc. to aid learning and increase understanding” to include recordings of life rehearsal in which emphasis would be on the instructor’s guidelines on the basic principles of art. This like other forms of illustrations would “... stimulate interest, increase comprehension, and help retain information on long term basis. They must however not dominate the content of the unit” (Stride and Ignou, 1995: 12). The successful implementation of this would depend largely on collaboration between the developers and the renowned Schools of Performing Arts or productions companies for the recording of various stages in the rehearsals – production processes.

There should be different course materials for those who just need to sharpen their skills and those who are coming into the profession for the first time. The Commonwealth of Learning’s publications on how to model good ODL study materials which provide key study materials for ODL training may provide useful guides. However, without prejudice to the publications, the course materials for this proposal will according to Romiszowski (2010), provide an indication of the knowledge, skills and attitudes that learners are expected to acquire. In order to specify details of the curriculum, it is necessary to determine what knowledge, skills and attitudes learners are expected to have at the outset (P. 43). This refers to the qualification of the learners before they are admitted into the programme. Each University has its own minimum entry requirement which should apply but in addition, since this course is basically geared towards skill acquisition, the entry requirements should also consider previous skill or experience in the area of study.

In ODL, every aspect of instructional material developed is carefully thought out and planned primarily because the distance learner does not have the luxury that a conventional learner has of being able to have regular face to face contact with the instructor. However, in this proposal, there would be a minimal opportunity for a face to face contact but the guiding principles of instructional design and development would apply for quality assurance. Quality assurance is a very important consideration when designing ODL material to ensure that the end result is of acceptable standards in terms of appropriateness, relevance, and coherence. Coherence here refers to how meaningful the material is to the learner. It should, therefore, be presented in “simple and clear language [that] makes communication effective” (Stride and Ignou, 1995: 14).

### **The Learning Process**

The learning process in this proposal will not be based on abstract examples but on real life experiences. Information technology devices would facilitate learning through collaboration in spite of spatial distance. This collaboration would offer the students and facilitators a forum to build, share knowledge and develop understanding. The collaboration would not be only among students but also among institutions in a way that one institution could contract another institution to produce the materials that would be recorded electronically (CD – ROMs). This is different from an adaptation of course materials as the proposed material would be produced

with specifications according to the demands of the contracting institution to meet the needs of her students. A master tape would be produced by the contractor institution while the recipient would reproduce it locally to save cost and also make it cheaper for its students. It could also be duplicated and distributed via flash drives and e-mails. After all, "mobile phones are now being used for instruction delivery and learning" (Ozlem et al, 2010). Learning would, therefore, be on a blended e-learning approach to be made up of 30% individual learning and practice; 30% face to face whereby students meet periodically with their instructors; and 40% collaboration with group mates as illustrated below.

### **30% Individual Learning and Practice**

The learners who have registered for the courses should be given the printed and electronic learning materials to study at their convenience just like students read text books. They could access the electronically produced materials through computers, DVD/television set, I-phones, I-pad, blackberry and other such devices. They could use any of these devices to listen, watch, learn and then practice what is learnt. It would be like someone watching a home video and could invite siblings and friends to watch and offer some useful suggestions. These suggestions may translate into collaboration, observations and constructive criticism which would help the learner to improve in his/her art. A solitary learner may use a full-length mirror to evaluate his or her progress.

In acting, the students would be cast in a play and the prototype of the play presented in recorded form for observation. Firstly, the student learns the lines, secondly, he/she views the prototype and lastly, he/she practices. His/her progress would be observed in comparison to the actor/actress being represented. Friends or relations could help to give him/her the cue lines. A student who is interested in directing, designing, choreography, playing musical instruments, or other aspects of technical theatre would follow the same step. His/her art is expected to be perfected during group rehearsals and the meetings with the facilitators.

### **Meeting with Facilitators**

In some ODL institutions, facilitators meet periodically with the students for tutorials. The facilitator in this proposal must not necessarily be University lecturers but practicing producers, directors, designers, choreographers and other instructors who would be able to guide the students appropriately. The programme would be designed to accommodate a meeting between the facilitators and the students at the onset to guide the students in their areas of specialization, answer their questions and conduct an audition. Thereafter, they would meet periodically in a face to face approach or video conferencing. These facilitators would be responsible for grading their practical assignments and discuss feedbacks before the final examinations.

### **Group Collaboration**

Collaboration among the students is very important because this course thrives on teamwork. For instance, a musician needs instrumentalists, dancers and others to work with. Consequently, the continuous assignment of the students would be presented in groups but graded based on individual performance. This collaboration may not necessarily be confined in the institution, but in partnership with the private sector for the use of studios or theatres which may not be available in the institutions. This would enhance practical and realistic study as students would acquire a first-hand experience in areas of specialization. This collaboration is a key element in education because it enhances the student's ability in each of the four pillars of learning – which are: Learning to know; Learning to do; Learning to live together; and Learning to be (<http://www.unesco.org/delors/fourpil.html>).

The third pillar also implies 'learning to work together'. The collaboration in school work would prepare them for the collaboration in their professions on graduation. The Igbo of Nigeria have a proverb which states that "only a mad person dances when no one is beating the drums (music)". This applies to other areas of the performing arts where each 'dancer's dance steps must adhere to a particular rhythm provided by another person. The diverse roles assigned to students during their first meeting with the facilitator would, at this stage, be synthesized, and synchronized during these group meetings which are mainly rehearsals. The facilitator comes in once in a while to evaluate their progress and guide them appropriately.

### **Assessment and Feedback**

Assignment is the means through which the instructor assesses the students' performances and provides feedback to enable learners evaluate their performances and study to improve their weak points. Thus assignment enhances learning process so an important device that presents a two-way communication between the learner and the instructor, especially in ODL where the learner does not meet frequently with the instructors. It is important to consider the time frame for the submission of the assignment and its return to students so that the aim of the feedback as an important learning tool is not defeated. Feedback is only useful to students if it is given in a way that guarantees its judicious use and effectiveness which depends largely on a timely, appropriate, detailed and specific assessment. In a course that depends on collaborative performance, the instructors "...must provide and facilitate safe and appropriate feedback ...where students can safely and supportively be provided with feedback" (<http://web.mac.com/iajukes/thecommittedsardine/Handouts.html>). Only this can guarantee the success of this proposed course". The assignment should be taken home, completed and submitted within a specific time while the instructors are to grade and return to students within a time limit too. Assignment should be performance-based test to determine student's ingenuity, level of comprehension and competence in the various roles assigned to them. Another option might be to test them on the prototypes given to them so that the feedback would help them in perfecting their roles.

Assessment is a vital aspect of the learning process especially if the learners are allowed to conceive and present a performance feedback. In this way, the learners would be involved in all aspects of the assessment process with clear goals and objectives. They should be aware of the assessment procedure, marking and moderation criteria to enable them "have a clearer understanding of: what they are meant to do; how they are meant to do it: why it is significant [and] why it is important". (21<sup>st</sup> Century Pedagogy: URL: <http://casestudy-itgs.wikispaces.com/>) There is no doubt that such learners would perform better and use the assessment process to enhance their learning, sharpen their talents and imbued with the ability to criticize one another objectively.

### **Examination**

The students would participate in the semester examinations of the institution but a practical session should form part of the examinations. The student's final performance would be recorded and the examiners would watch and award marks appropriately. The sharing of examination scores between the theory and practice would be at the discretion of the institution but the recommendation here is 30% for written aspect of the examination while the performance would be graded based on 70%.

### **Recommendation**

The recommendations include a blended e-learning approach that would be made up of 30% face to face whereby students meet with their instructors; 30% individual learning and practice and 40% collaboration with group mates. The study materials will be made of 30% print and 70% in audio-video CD- ROMs and video conferencing. Interested institutions should be ready to work in partnership with established schools and other professionals. In the words of William Shakespeare - "some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness entrusted on them". Likewise, in the performing arts, some have natural talents and are able to develop them; some are discovered and are helped to develop; and some learn the art and excel. The institutions that are interested in this proposal may not necessarily include the three main forms of the Performing Arts in their curricular at once but should consider their own peculiarities so could start with one and gradually increase based on demand.

### **Conclusion**

This proposal is in consideration of how education provided through the open and distance learning could equip the youths and even adults for gainful employment and improved standard of living for a better society. In this way the conception of education as a medium for the promotion of progressive social change becomes a reality. Performing Arts, as an academic discipline, empowers the learners to develop or improve their talents; transform themselves from objects to subjects, from passive to active individuals, foster self-reliance and reduce over-

dependence on government. Such youths would be able to resist the lure into crime and domination or manipulation by the privileged class.

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- <http://www.youtube.com/watch> in this site, there is a recorded rehearsal but not to be downloaded but with collaboration, it could be packaged for an institution.
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