

MAINTENANCE CULTURE AS THREAT TO EDUCATIONAL ACCESSIBILITY IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: Educational accessibility has become a millennium phenomenon in Nigeria as many prospective candidates jostling for admission into the nation's conventional universities have their hopes dashed yearly. Many of the affected prospective candidates have been frustrated and this has inevitably, increased the number of miscreants on Nigerian streets. The inability of the nation's universities to provide adequate access to higher education over the years has worsened the situation. However, the Open and Distance Learning which has now been accepted as an alternative mode of learning providing access to education without constraining learners to the four walls of the conventional school system. The wide acceptance of the Open Distance Learning system stems out from its convenience in dispensing instruction to mass of the people at the same time regardless of place and time. The feature of individualized learning also possessed by open learning has always made it to stand out as a preferred mode of learning. The opportunity to work and study concurrently has given ODL advantage over the conventional system of learning. Quite a number of factors determine the effectiveness and sustainability of Open Distance Learning and these include the employment of various information communication media, availability of Students' Support Services (SSS) and functional Study Centers among others. A survey of the aforementioned

factors in Nigeria shows that there is a wide gap between what should be and what actually is. For instance, instructional communication media are not readily available and where available, they are not functioning because routine maintenance is not being carried out on them. Sequel to this, it has become practically inevitable for many of the distance institutions to still depend and rely on the medium of print in the midst of various modern communication technologies. Many of the study centres are uninviting to students as facilities are not in good condition. Consequently, the learning convenience enjoyed in ODL is eroded and by extension, educational access becomes limited. Generally, Nigerians are yet to cultivate a culture of maintenance and this has greatly been one of the key factors to sustaining development in every sector. This is corroborated by the fact that there is a high rate of infrastructural decay and wastages involving buildings, roads, machineries and other tangible assets resulting from lack of proper maintenance. The ODL as a sub-system of the Nigerian educational structure is not isolated from this infrastructural decay. This scenario does not support sustaining ODL as an alternative provider of educational access which invariably is one of the cardinal points of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as resolved by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2000. A better way to remediate this

challenge is for stakeholders in the Nigerian ODL (Providers, Instructors and Learners) to cultivate the culture of maintaining the existing structures and facilities if ODL is to continue in the provision of educational access to desiring candidates. This paper therefore explores possible ways of creating awareness about the culture of maintenance among stakeholders of ODL in Nigeria. Also examined in this paper, is the meaning of maintenance and its various aspects. The paper provides answers to the questions of where, when and how does maintenance start and of what relevance is it to the practice and sustenance of ODL in Nigeria? The area of inhibiting factors to maintenance practices was also explored. In conclusion, the paper reveals various measures that could be taken to ensuring good maintenance practices on facilities in Nigerian Open Distance Learning system in order to continually provide education access to mass of the people.

Keywords: Educational access; Maintenance Culture; Open Distance Learning; Sustainable, Threat

INTRODUCTION

Maintenance is the act of carrying out a periodic check and repairs on something such as to either prevent a system or structural failure or to allow such to be sustained over a considerable period of time. The regularity in attitude of carrying out this maintenance culminates into a culture of maintenance. Maintenance is key to every sphere of life as it promotes good functioning of materials. The culture of maintaining and sustaining infrastructures or facilities is germane to national development and indeed educational development through institutions. Unfortunately, the idea of developing good attitude towards maintenance is yet to be cultivated or imbibed in Nigeria and this is why facilities decay at an alarming rate. A visit to government establishments across the country will lend credence to this as many infrastructures that could have been redeemed through maintenance are lying waste and unserviceable as a result of no or poor intervention through routine maintenance. In other words, a cursory look at our surroundings will speak volumes as one travels by road from one location to the other one sees one structure or the other calling for one type attention or the other. Buildings in nearly all public organizations, the highways, both inter and intra cities and inter and intra states constructed with billions of naira are all in a state of disrepair. None of the nation's institutions of learning from primary to tertiary levels can be said to be without any of such dilapidating structures. The hospitals and industries are not better either. The machines in the factories and the sensitive instruments in research and

consulting laboratories are not less described. Several multibillion naira projects such as the refineries at Warri, Port Harcourt and Kaduna, the Ajaokuta Steel Rolling Mills, Airport and Seaport facilities and the rail system are all going down in history as a result of no maintenance. The nation's various road networks are worse off because it is hard to locate a stretch of road from one major town to the other without a single pothole and which nobody cares about as it begins until when it becomes impassable. Electricity and hospital facilities are not exempted from this situation just like our school facilities such as buildings, laboratories, vehicles, libraries and in the least furniture and electrical fittings. This practice has for long held back development by whatever name it is known in Nigeria. Since the low maintenance culture affects all areas of development, it is safe to infer that education generally will not be exempted and by extension, Open Distance Learning. The rate at which educational facilities are provided are in our institutions of learning may be said to be slower than the rate at which these facilities wear and tear without corresponding attention to repair the wrongs according to their original standard. This is because these school facilities loose their originality by day and some become completely out of use therefore limiting the opportunity of usage by those they are meant for. For instance, dilapidated buildings which ought to house students as lecture rooms are likely to be responsible for a reduction in the number of candidates to be admitted per session especially, when there are no new ones to replace them. Unfortunately, the number of candidates who indicate their readiness to enroll in one higher institution of learning in Nigeria through the controlling body – Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (JAMB) is always on the increase but among other factors, the lack of maintaining existing infrastructures has contributed to their being deprived of admission. This therefore has serious implications on open distance learning which is expected to provide succor for these willing candidates but whose facilities are not being maintained either.

Maintenance

Anyone who learns to build but does not learn to maintain what he builds is worse than he who does not build [1]

The term '*maintenance*' is characterized by proliferation of definitions depending on the objectives of maintenance. However, there are some basic defining elements that are intrinsically fundamental and these are: people and machines and while the general aim of maintenance is anchored on conservation and protection of life span of whatever is to be maintained.

Maintenance, according to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, 8th edition as ‘the act of keeping something in good condition by checking or repairing it regularly’ [2].

Maintenance is the totality of all processes and actions put together to ensure retaining the original nature of a thing or restoring such back into its original position. Discussions on maintenance has for long been on within a limited scope as affecting machines and other tangible assets such as buildings and vehicles. Whereas, maintenance is much broader in scope than from the perceptive with which discussants approach it. Thus, maintenance covers virtually every aspect of the society from human to material, from animate to inanimate. In general terms, maintenance is a process that is carried out on any thing that has value no matter the degree of value attached to it. Maintenance can be preventive or corrective depending on aim, time, nature of object to be maintained. The cost may not be very important here because the essence of maintenance is to save the item being maintained and by this cost will be saved and new value attached. Preventive maintenance is usually done as a precaution. It is futuristic and visionary because it has to do with ambushing deterioration before occurrence. It is always planned and executed to avoid any likely systemic failure. Corrective maintenance aims at restoration after a breakdown within the system. In other words, corrective maintenance is carried out to rescue after a shortcoming has been noticed which in many cases would have tampered with the original nature of the item and perhaps have caused dysfunctionality in its operations.

Culture

Culture has always been difficult to be defined either as a concept or as a way of life. This is because it has been used by different people in different disciplines and societies in a number of dimensions. For instance, culture is defined as ‘the total way of life of a people, the social legacy that the individual acquires from his group’ [3]. It is often referred to as a way or pattern of life which implies that one is used to a particular way of life. It is the accepted ways of behaving for members of a particular society [4]. Culture involves the way we think and act which all influence our actions and activities. Culture has the attribute of addiction which translates to mean that culture has the influence of repetition or routine which invariably make a person or a group of persons to be identified with such a thing which may be a practice. This is why it is often difficult for some people to change from a cultural pattern to the other. Culture is good if the content is valuable and of good virtues.

Maintenance Culture

From a simple parlance, one could express maintenance culture as the culture of maintaining something. This is the inbuilt attitude of reviewing; planning and implementing routine checks on facilities no matter how small, to maintain its present or original state to justify its life span. If culture is said to be a way of life it follows that maintenance culture should be a way of life with maintenance practices. At this level, maintenance would have become attitudinal. The cultivation or formation of attitude to maintain facilities or items will enhance the following among other things: (i) Protection (ii) Restoration (iii) Ensuring adequate and consistent functionality (iv) Evaluation (v) Projection for the future (vi) Formulation of policies in respect of the object being maintained (vi) Achievement of results Maintenance culture is one of the instruments by which development can be driven. Driving development is even not enough but its sustenance should be ultimate and to achieve this is to be mindful, conscious and committed to the cause of checking on what we have on routine basis to ascertain their condition and provide necessary intervention to put right what is wrong. By this, the entire system whether economic, social, political, environment and even human resources will function without major disappointment to the system each belongs. In other words, without a strong maintenance culture, efforts at infrastructural development will amount to nothing. [5] Therefore, to maintain is to sustain and the conscious habit of maintenance is a prelude to sustenance.

Where, when and how does maintenance start?

To consider *where* maintenance starts, a popular maxim says ‘beauty is in the eyes of the beholder’ Thus, maintenance is a function of human rational thinking which will eventually see the need for carrying out maintenance especially, if such is corrective. It is very common that many see deteriorating objects and items and nothing is either said or done about such, even, when they are in a legitimate position to carry out such maintenance. Although, the factor of corruption which is ravaging the Nigerian society also comes into play here in such a way that if such maintenance would not allow for personal enrichment, nobody cares about what goes rotten. However, it is the duty of the Chief Executive Officer of an organization who is expected to initiate maintenance. As the overseer of the organization, it is required of him to be acquainted with the operations of both human and material resources of the organization. He is to initiate and determine the nature of maintenance to be effected.

As regards *when* maintenance starts, this is when the idea of a project is conceived, that is, at the planning stage. Many projects are in the state of disrepair today because provision for maintenance was not given consideration at the planning stage. Usually, a working maintenance plan ought to accompany the establishment of every project covering objectives, logistics, time frame, and contingency in case there is a shortcoming in future and human resource involvement. If this is done, projects don't need to call for attention before maintenance is carried out. This is a straight course to sustainability because a maintenance pattern has evolved which invariably will culminate into a culture of maintenance.

On the issue of *how* maintenance should be done, this has to do with a conscious process through: (i) Setting desired standards (ii) Purchase of equipments and materials (iii) Conformity/compliance with the set standards (iv) Identification of factors militating against conformity with standards (v) Record keeping (vi) Evaluation of proper performance after maintenance (vii) Check and re-check routine

Maintenance Culture trends in Nigeria

A survey of all sectors of the Nigerian society will reveal an uncommon situation of wastages starting within individual homes. Many appliances within the home system gradually loose value while in use and no one cares either about repair or replacement until when they are out of use and the entire system becomes dysfunctional. In which case a little effort towards maintaining all these would have saved the system from functional collapse. Nigerians are culturally deficient in maintaining anything that belongs to them. In the quest to achieve sustainability through effective maintenance culture, it is concluded that "maintenance culture starts from ourselves". [6] Personal effects therefore, like shoes, clothes books, electronics, furniture and many others suffer maintenance because its culture is not present in the people hence, a lot of wastages litter the environment contributing to environmental pollution. If Nigerians are not conscious of maintaining their personal possessions, how then would they become conscious of effecting maintenance on the society and its material components? A tour of cities, towns and villages in Nigeria, will speak volumes in terms of environmental and facilities degradation. Lack of the culture of maintenance has overtime increased government expenditure resulting from systemic failures. This is why things rarely work in Nigeria. It has been observed that projects that are not up to fifteen to twenty years are either out of use or tending towards being so because of lack of proper maintenance. For instance, pot holes on trunk A roads like other classes of roads are getting deeper to

becoming trenches and from this state many have become impassable for road users because there are no conscious effort to maintain them. Most of the government edifices are dilapidated because of lack of maintenance. It is disheartening that we spend huge sums of money building and developing infrastructures in Nigeria only for us to look back after few years to find out that such beautiful infrastructures are left unattended to.[1] Thus, electricity has been very irrational because of not carrying out routine checks on electricity facilities to get them on among other factors. Erosion is now a common phenomenon in Nigeria because drainages are not taken good care of and until when an evil is wrecked upon the society, nobody wakes up to his or her responsibilities. This is the period when emergency laws and policies to remediate the occurrence come up. One interesting thing about these policies is that they short live. This is why the government involving in budgeting and re-budgeting of essential sectors of the economy because there is no culture of maintenance things are allowed to waste away. Since there is no government policy on maintenance culture, it gives room for not sustaining initiated policies and programmes by one successive government or the other. It is equally common that Nigerians do not have proper culture of maintaining themselves. Nigerians work round the clock and get stressed up. However, rather than maintaining there health through routine medical check ups and attention, Nigerians prefer to manage rather than maintain themselves medically. This accounts for huge medical bills because a little maintenance from time to time would have prevented the health degeneration as an adage says "a stitch in time saves nine".

A critical analysis of the situation in Nigeria would reveal the following as responsible factors for low level of maintenance culture: (a) *Political factor*: every succeeding government wants to outshine its predecessor by initiating new programmes therefore neglecting the existing ones. (b) *Historical antecedents*: Nigeria was colonized by Britain for almost a century during which virtually everything was shipped into Nigeria. This is a corollary of not involving the indigenous people in key areas of development because of lack of expertise. In other words, maintenance is *alien* to Nigeria and Nigerians (c) *Economic manifestation*: Nigeria attained independence on October 1, 1960 amidst oil boom. Extravagant life became the order of the day as people found it difficult to maintain any damaged material for instance but prefer to replace it immediately. However, the economic recession that bedeviled the oil sector as a result of oil glut in the

'80s caused many industries to close down hence, many Nigerians were thrown back into the labour market. As if this was not enough, there was an increase in price level generally. Since, it was never part of the citizenry to maintain things it is difficult to build the culture that was never part of them overnight. (d) *Lack of enlightenment*: There has not been any conscious effort by the government or any of its relevant agencies such as the National Orientation Agency (NOA) to enlighten the populace about the importance of maintaining our general environment and the need to imbibe the culture of maintenance to sustain our society and all the components making up the society. (e) *Absence of a working policy and legislation on maintenance*: The government has not in any way taken the issue of maintenance seriously as done in other sectors such as agriculture, education, economy and others. There is no policy or workable plan or legislation on maintenance. This is consequential upon the fact that the government is yet to come to the realization that without adequate maintenance, sustaining other sectors may become a mirage.

Generally, there is a downward trend in the culture of maintenance in Nigeria and unless something urgent is done to bring Nigerians into the limelight of maintenance, developmental trend is likely to shift faster towards further degradation especially with the alarming rate with which population is growing without corresponding increase in the provision of new facilities. Abatan's perspectives on Nigeria maintenance culture corroborates the fact that there is virtually absence of maintenance culture in Nigeria when he states that "Nigerians lack a maintenance culture. We drive our cars until they break down, we live in houses until they become a hazard to live in, and we use our roads till they break up. Even in factories, I have heard of parts used till they cease up, causing an entire production line to come to a grinding halt". [7] A good intervention strategy to improving this situation is by maintaining the existing infrastructures to sustain and improve the present level of development.

Maintenance Culture: A threat to educational accessibility in Nigeria

Educational accessibility is the making available or possible education access for prospective candidates. The issue of educational access has become a major challenge for all governments in Nigeria both past and present, federal and states. Government efforts to get rid of this menace have not provided a permanent solution even with the establishment of more higher institutions in the country. The trend has been downward as many of the would have been students

still roam about the streets.. However, a critical look at our educational institutions accommodates a lot of abandoned projects whether under construction or not maintained. Lack of adequate seats for students, damaged electrical fittings and many other facilities which would have allowed the institutions to admit more candidates. Government at various levels today find it difficult to wholly finance education therefore, calling for Public-Private Partnership (PPP) to finance education. Many facilities have been neglected without maintenance effort and as such becoming unusable. As a result of the bad condition of these facilities such as lecture rooms, hostels, chairs and lockers, there is a limit to which institutions especially of higher learning could admit. Available facilities of any institution are a function of the number of students to be admitted. So, this situation of not maintaining facilities is now posing a serious threat to educational accessibility and this becomes a factor in educational inaccessibility. It therefore behoves every institution of learning in the country to strive and maintain the available facilities to sustain educational access especially when developmental trends are not based on research findings and recommendations. As a result, policies in Nigeria are likely to continue to be a failure as adequate planning is not made for the future.

Implications for Open Distance Learning in Nigeria

A lot has been written on the Open Distance Learning System by various scholars and one thing that is common to all the views expressed by the scholars on ODL is that it is a mode of study which removes distance in the process of learning, flexible as learners can learn anywhere and time, that the teacher or instructor is at liberty to meet with his learners at an arranged time occasionally and that learning content is transferred to the learners through a wide range of communication media. [8,9] In other words, Open learning is an alternative leaning system which is not disposed to confining learners into a classroom continually. This mode of learning has for long been providing educational access to mass of the prospective candidates in various locations at the same time. In other words, it is an alternative means by which candidates secure admission. This among other factors aforementioned makes ODL to have a better advantage over the conventional system. However, the low level of maintenance culture ravaging the Nigerian society does not preclude ODL from infrastructural decay which in turn limits the number of intake into ODL programmes as against it culture and capacity to admit mass of candidates. The implication of this is that if ODL as an alternative learning system absorbing scores of those deprived

admission by the conventional system can not sustain its facilities through maintenance, hence, the figure of admission seekers will tremendously increase. It implies further that ODL practitioners and learners should begin to imbibe the culture of maintenance in order to sustain its facilities. Such facilities include: (i) Instructional Aids e.g communication media tools (ii) Sports Centres (iii) Laboratories (iv) Workshops (v) Studios (vi) Vehicles (vii) Buildings (viii) Aesthetic materials and designs (ix) Furniture and electrical fittings (x) Study Centre environment (xi) Records (xii) Staff

If Open Distance Learning facilities are not properly maintained, it may bring the whole education sector into a crossroad and development generally may be an aberration as it is the only mode of education that is presently 'working the magic' in terms of mass expansion of education access to willing candidates hence, the need to sustain it.

Conclusion

For a meaningful maintenance culture to be evolved, serious consideration should be given to design stages of our projects such as buildings, highways, laboratories, workshops, heavy duty equipment purchases and a host of others. The issue of awarding contracts and starting a project without setting standards should also be addressed. The major hindrances to evolving a culture of maintenance are negligence, poverty, selfishness and poor management techniques. Also, since Open Distance Learning strives to create education access on a massive scale, it is necessary to ensure its sustainability by maintaining its facilities both human and material. Since education is generally believed to be the bedrock of a nation's development, it is sufficient then to say that development of the Nigerian nation would be sustained once its educational sector does not fail in its role to develop human and material capital. It is a common knowledge that Nigeria is presently facing the challenge of educational inaccessibility as the existing institutions can not cope with the rising figure of those who want to go school especially at the tertiary level. It has also come to reality that the Open Distance Learning has the capability of expanding education access and reduce the trend of emerging miscreants on the streets therefore, it deserves to be maintained in order to be sustained and this is only possible if Nigerians cultivate the habit of maintaining the existing facilities and structures. Nigerians need to change their perspective about maintenance culture. The more regularly we maintain what we have, the longer we will be able to get some long life usage out of it (Abatan, 2009)^{ibid}.

Recommendations

- (1) Government should as a matter mandate the National Orientation Agency to take it up as responsibility to educate and enlighten the Nigerian masses on the need and benefits of maintaining facilities and the environment generally
- (2) Government should evolve a policy on maintenance to aid regular check ups and sustenance of facilities in the hands of succeeding governments
- (3) To kick start, government at all levels should declare a state of emergency on all projects either abandoned or in deplorable condition including those of the educational sector and carry out maintenance on them.
- (4) Maintenance culture should be introduced in our various homes. It should be taught right from childhood by training the children to keep their teeth, clothes clean, washing their plates, having correct positions for each item after use.
- (5) Maintenance culture should be included in the school curriculum at all levels. It is strongly suggested that it is made a core course carrying a reasonable credit unit attached to it at the tertiary level.
- (6) Regular maintenance capacity development programmes should be periodically executed
- (7) For every staff of both private and public establishments.
- (8) A Maintenance Board/Commission should be established at all levels of government with the power to regulate, supervise/monitor maintenance activities in the country and sanction any erring individual and/ or organization.
- (9) Regular supervision and evaluation must be carried out immediately after maintenance and this should be repeated on regular basis and a renewal certificate be issued to certified properties within a given period of time as may be stipulated by the Maintenance Board or Commission.

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