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Distance Education as a Tool for Development: The Prospects Of Private Distance Education In Ethiopia

By

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Abstract

The major aim of this paper is to analyze the role of distance education for development effort in an Ethiopian context. The study of this paper shows the gap between the demand for Open and distance learning and its supply. The study shows that Ethiopia didn't utilize the Open and Distance learning modality to the potential it has or to the extent that other African countries benefit from it. There are technical and policy problems related to this disparity. As the study indicates there is a close relationship between education and development. It reveals that the spread of educational opportunities could be enhanced through open and distance learning. The paper identified problems of Private Open and Distance learning in Ethiopia and recommendations are forwarded

Introduction

Background

Expanding educational opportunities for all citizens is a crucial task that developing countries are striving to accomplish. Due to an increase in population and high demand for training and education, expanding educational opportunities to all citizens through formal education is very difficult if not impossible. Open and Distance learning (ODL) has to be encouraged to accomplish this task. In a huge country like Ethiopia where opportunities of education are not equally distributed, the importance of

distance education is tremendous. It can significantly improve the quality of life of the people by making technology-mediated education accessible to the remotest corner of the country and to all those who cannot afford or able to attend regular classes.

Statement of the Problem

The writers of this paper believe that Ethiopia didn't exploit the benefit of ODL to the extent that other African countries used it. Despite the fact that ODL is more than two centuries old, its utilization in our county is not what it ought to be. The problem is that ODL is considered as an appendix to formal education and not as a complementary alternative. This paper identifies problems and challenges and proposes recommendation so that Ethiopia benefits from the intensive use of ODL as complementary alternative to formal education. The following research question was formulated to address some of the problems of ODL:

Research question I: Is ODL an important method in expanding educational opportunities to more citizens?

- **Research question 2**: If so how?
- **Research question 3:** Are there practical examples for ODL, to perform the above functions in developing countries particularly in Africa?
- **Research question 4:** Is Ethiopia benefit from ODL as other African nations?
- **Research question 5:** Why not?

Objectives of This Paper

The main objectives of this paper can be summarized as follows:

- To elaborate the relationship between economic development and education in general and economic development and ODL in particular
- To review the practical application and benefit of ODL in some selected African nations
- To undertake comparable analysis of ODL in Ethiopia
- To assess the status of private ODL institutions in Ethiopia
- To put forward some recommendation to enhance ODL in Ethiopia

Methodology

This paper focuses on identifying the problems and challenges of ODL that should be addressed in order to boost its contribution to the development of the country. A case study method involving mainly qualitative method of data analysis has been employed. Bothe qualitative and quantitative methods are used to gather data. Data are collected from relevant literature, books and internet. Questionnaires are also designed and distributed to respondents from HERQA, ODL students and professionals to respond to the basic research questions. Respondents are also asked to write their opinion on open ended questions. Descriptive statistics and qualitative methods are used to analyze the collected empirical data.

Significance

Human capital is critical for GDP growth in any nation. It can be achieved if competent workforce is produced through formal and informal education that creates wealth. Human capital is the formal education, training

and on-the-job learning embodied in the workforce. ODL as a complementary option of formal education thus addresses the issue of access, equity and quality education provision if designed properly. In the era of information and technology, universities are using different teaching and learning modalities such as ODL to reach all interested students where ever they are and let students learn at their own pace. ODLS enhance development efforts in various ways such as tackling the shortage of trained manpower, facilitate accessibility, equity and continuity in education, maximize technical skill and quality of teachers and increase productivity of working population.

The significance of this paper is therefore to point out some of the opportunities and contributions of ODL to the country and higher education institution providers and identify challenges they have currently faced, what the government, MOE and HERQA can do to help them survive and thrive.

Scope

There are more than 24 distance educations providing higher education institutions in undergraduate programs in Ethiopia. Postgraduate level cross boarder providing institutions are currently increasing in number. Cross boarder education providers are not included in this study. Thus the findings of the study need to be interpreted and understood taking this into consideration.

Literature Review

Distance Education: Conceptual Definition and Understanding

According to UNESCO (2003) ,distance education is any educational process in which all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone

removed in space and/or time from the learner, with the effect that all or most of the communication between teachers and learners is through an artificial medium, either electronic or print. Distance education involves the use of range of media, such as print, written correspondence; audio, video and computer based media and networks as well as multimedia facilities both for presentation of information and for, communication between participants of a program.

In most literatures distance and open learning are interchangeably applied, and the common phrase is Open and Distance Learning (ODL). "Open" has to be understood against the backdrop of "closed" or "formal," and "distance" against the ideas of "contact" or "face to face." (Arun K. Mishra 2002). ODL apply self-instruction materials and process in which materials take learners step-by-step through an instructional process; and self-assessment exercises. Here the feature and instruction can be paper-based or computer-based. In a developing country like Ethiopia distance feature of instruction is predominantly paper-based. Distance learning is a flexible form of learning where a student can study from home, work, on the move or wherever it is convenient.

The separation of learners and instructors is partial. There are tutorial classes and educational process that require on-site presence for any reasons like examination is conducted face to face. Through time, radio, television, and the Internet have all been used to further distance education. Computers and the Internet have made distance-learning distribution easier and faster[6]

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[6] Accessed from : http/www. Wikipedia 2012

Types of Distance Education

Different types of distance education could be sited from different perspectives, but the most common types of distance education systems are:

1. *Correspondence systems (the most common in Africa)*

2. *Educational television and radio systems* use various delivery technologies. Such system is practical in our country by the Ministry of Education. But it is **beyond the reach of private** educational institutions at least at present.

3. *Multimedia systems* encompass text, audio, video, and computer-based materials, and usually some face-to-face learner support delivered to both individuals and groups.

4. *Internet-based systems*

Advantages and Disadvantages of Distance Education

A. The Advantages of Distance Education

The advantages of ODL can be summoned as:

1. Life-long or continuous education

2. Creating equity and accessibility for education or democratization of education

3. Cost effectiveness and social benefits

4. TVET deliveries

5. Teachers training

6. Flexibility in delivery

B. Disadvantages of ODL

It's potential and actual benefits notwithstanding, distance education remains confusing because of the many issues that converge within it. Some of these are;

- Distance learning does not offer immediate feedback
- Distance learning does not always offer all the necessary courses
- Distance learning does not give students the opportunity to work on oral communication skills
- In some countries and institutions the quality of distance education is such that it is simply a diploma mill. It means it is more susceptible to abuse more than formal education

Economic Development

Economic Development and Economic Growth

The definition of economic development varies greatly from expert to expert, the phrase "economic development" generally refers not only to economic growth, but to changes in the ways in which goods and services are produced in a country as well as improvements in inhabitants' quality of life. Theories of economic development attempt to explain the social, political, and economic processes that countries go through as they transform from being what are known as "Less Developed Countries" (LDCs) to being "Developed Countries" (DCs) (Joseph Schumpeter 2007). By economic development we refer to technological and structural progress. It implies radical changes in the way goods and services are produced, and not merely an increase in production achieved using the old methods of production on a wider scale.

At a national level if transformation of an economy is happing from an agrarian to an industrial one and from thence to knowledge based economy, and as a result such transformation improved the living standard and quality of life of its citizens, then and only then we can say that economic development is achieved. Economic growth, on the other hand implies the limited increase in quantitative output in production. Even though important, it may or may not involve development. It is mainly the increase of production or output by the same mode of production. The main yardstick of economic growth is rate of change of gross domestic product, which means the percentage increase of GDP or gross domestic product. Simply stated GDP is the aggregate value-added by the economic activity of a country within one fiscal year.

Education and Development
Importance of Education for Development

Enhancing human capital is critical for GDP growth. But sustained GDP growth doesn't just happen. In order to make investments in technology, a country must have sufficient human capital. Human capital is the formal education, training and on-the-job learning embodied in the workforce. Education not only improves individual choices available to mankind, but an educated population provides the type of skilled labor necessary for industrial development and economic growth (Dreze and Sen 1995). On the individual level education increases productivity, improves health and sanitation, and it increases equality. To the society at large education Improves economic productiveness, Reduces poverty, Maximizes concern for the environment and it empowers women. Increasing access to education in various ways, among which ODL is one, to all citizens

contributes in developing human capital which eventually increases GNP and wealth of a nation. This is the thus the main reason Ethiopia as a developing nation should look into various methods of expanding education to its citizens such as ODL.

The Importance of Distance Learning for Development

ODL enhance development efforts in various ways;

- Tackle the shortage of trained manpower
- Facilitate accessibility, equity and continuity in education
- Maximize technical skill, and quality of teachers
- Increase productivity of working population as the result of the above

Practical application and Benefits of ODL in some Developing Countries

Distance education in Africa started in 1946 with the establishment of The University of South Africa as a correspondence university (Saint 1999). Now, let's look some particular examples of open distance learning from Africa for it gives us better insight related to the experience of Ethiopia

Namibia

In 2006 there are 28,106 learners enrolled with the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL). This is significant number of learners for a country like Namibia with less than 2 million inhabitants. (Marope Mmantsetsa Toka 2005). Currently 45% of the University of Namibia student population is studying at a distance. Ninety nine % of CES students are working and play important roles in their communities (IRRODL 2004).

Since 70% of people studying through distance are female, ODL is assisting in realizing the country's equity goals as most female rural professionals will become wage earners like their male counterparts, who are usually urban based (IRRODL 2004).

The Sudan

In the Sudan, Open Learning Organization (SOLO); representatives of the Sudanese Ministry of Education, and selected members of the community, described the contributions of the SOLO programme as follows:

- SOLO has assisted the Sudanese government to improve the quality of education by improving the quality of teachers.
- Fourteen Sudanese states increased their education sector's workforce by training 50,000 teachers, many of whom had not previously taught within a formal ''four walled'' classroom setting.
- The Certificate Education issued by SOLO and approved by Sudan's Ministry of Labor and Ministry of Education, has enhanced the image of teachers (UNESCO 2002).

Nigeria

The giant of Africa in terms of population and in economic terms, Nigeria also put ODL at its best use. Over a period of eight years, the total number of primary education teacher graduates rose from 45,150 to over 300,000. In Nigeria, the first independent institution dedicated solely to distance education was the National teachers' institute (Aderinoye 1995). The NTI's Pivotal Teacher Training Programme, designed to support the introduction of the Universal Basic Education scheme introduced in 1999, produced 19,025, 20,800, and 15,587 qualified teachers for years 2000, 2001,

and 2002 respectively (NTI 2003). These activities of NTI have helped to maintain stability, quality, high rates of retention, and have reduced the dropout rates at the basic level of education across the country.

Botswana

The School based Teacher Development programme SBTD Programme in Botswana has trained 1,200 Teachers Advisory Centre Tutors (TACs) in distance education support methods. By the end of its implementation cycle, 54,000 teachers will have been reached, comprising 29 per cent of the total primary education level teaching force of 180,860 teachers.

Tanzania

Tanzania is a country with an area of 943,000 square kilometers; Tanzania has a population of about 34 million. The Distance Education Association of Tanzania (DEATA) described in its annual report reported that it enrolled over 18,000 students (SAIDE 1999). The Open University of Tanzania (OUT) boasts a total enrolment of over 25,000 students in various disciplines (OUT 2006). The number of students enrolled at the Institute of Adult Education 1972 – 2006 is 211,571 (Willy L.M. Komba 2009).

The Learning Curve and Distance Education

Learning curves graphically portray the costs and benefits of experience when performing routine or repetitive tasks (American Heritage Dictionary: fourth edition 2004). Thus such curves illustrate how the cost per unit of output decreases over time as the result of accumulated workforce learning and experience. That is, as cumulative output increases, learning and

experience cause the cost per unit to decrease. The slope of the learning curve is an indication of the rate at which learning becomes transformed into cost savings.

An 80 percent learning curve is standard for many activities and is sometimes used as an average in cost forecasting and production planning. An 80 percent learning curve means that, for every doubling of output, the cost of new output is 80 percent of prior output. As output doubles from one unit to two units to four units, etc., the learning curve descends quite sharply as costs decrease dramatically. As output increases, it takes longer to double previous output, and the learning curve flattens out. Thus, costs decrease at a slower pace when cumulative output is higher. The following data illustrate the 80% learning curve relationship (Table 1).

Table 1: Data showing the 80% learning curve relationship

Quantity (in Units)		Time (in Hours)	
Per Lot	Cumulative	Total (Cumulative)	Average Time per Unit
15	15	600	40.0
15	30	960	32.0 (40.0 · 0.8)
30	60	1536	25.6 (32.0 · 0.8)
60	120	2460	20.5 (25.6 · 0.8)
120	240	3936	16.4 (20.5 · 0.8)

Source:http/www.Wikepedia, 2012

It is easily notable that as production quantities double, the average time per unit decreases by 20% of its immediate previous time. It can be graphed as below.
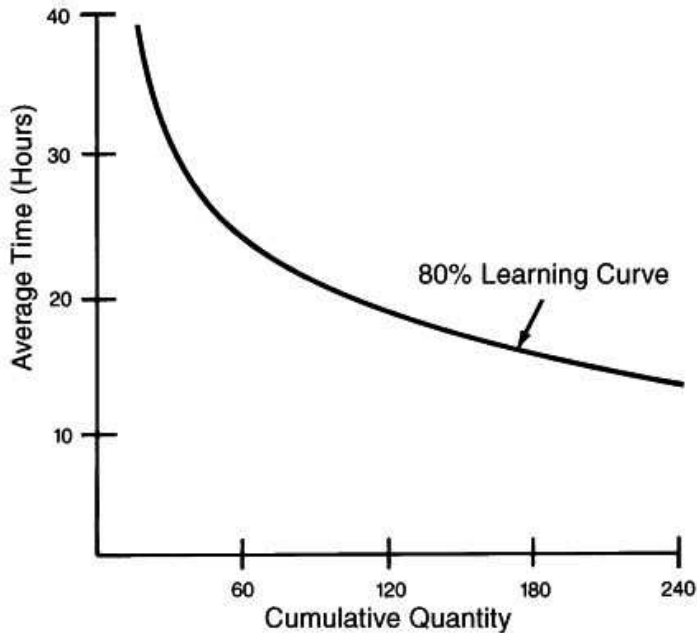
An employee can increase his learning in various modes, but it is most likely that ODL can offer many possibilities for an employee to improve his educational level by enabling him/her continuous learning without quitting his job. Thus, ODL, if applied in TVET and other fields can increase output by improving the learning curve.

ODL in the Ethiopian Context
ODL in Ethiopia

During the last seven years Ethiopia registered impressive economic growth and recently the government launched an ambitious five year growth and transformation plan that will bring about an economic development of significant magnitude. In this development process educational development

65

is highly pronounced in the higher education subsector. Thus, there were only 2 universities in pre 1984 period. Now there are 31 full-fledged public universities. The number of graduate and post-graduate students increases from 138,159 in 1996 to 319,217 in 2001 Ethiopian Calendar (Tesfaye 2012).

Still there is much to be done to improve educational quality and to expand educational accessibility. Tertiary enrollment in Ethiopia is only 1.6% and that put the country 138th of 151 countries[7]. Thus expanding education and controlling its quality is a job that has attracted high attention by the Ethiopian government where huge investment is incurred to address such educational gaps that have contributed to the backwardness of the country. ODL can play a big role in this regard. In Ethiopia, a distance education program, which is known as directed study for teachers implemented in 1960 E.C. (Tesfaye Ejigu, 2002a). Noting the importance of distance education, the Ministry of Education has established Distance Education Division in 1982.

In 1967, MoE (Ministry of Education) established the education media agency (EMA) to be responsible for distance education unit. The agency in collaboration with different national and international organizations has operated in-service teacher training program called Project 17000 (Tesfaye 2002). All these efforts are worth valuing; but they had not developed as they should be developed and their contribution is very minimal compared to even some African countries. The involvement of the private sector was insignificant.

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[7] Accessed from NationMaster.com FACTOR ≠5: American Interesting education facts.

Private ODL in Ethiopia

The efforts of expanding ODL is not confined to MoE but private bodies also took initiatives. Kenyan based British Tutorial College (BTC) was the first pioneer of ODL that started distance education in the form of correspondence education in 1967 (KUAWAB 1999). In 1969, NGO initiated distance education pilot program of a non-formal education nature moved in by Agri-Service Ethiopia in the current Wolayita Zone of SNNPR (Tesfaye 2002). The first indigenous entity that has been involved in ODL is Alpha International. It established the national vocational correspondence enterprise (NVCE) in 1988-9 (Kabwasa 1999, 19).

However, distance education in Ethiopia on a tertiary level is a recent phenomenon. It is started with emergence of private colleges and universities in the country. So far it is providing programs at higher education level including diploma and degree. There are also postgraduate programs started recently by private providers. In fact most of the masters' level programs are given in cooperation with foreign institutions. Some examples in this respect include the cooperation between St. Merry University College and Indra Gandhi Open University, Institute of Leadership and Management in collaboration with the University of Greenwich, UK, etc.

Enrollment of ODL in Ethiopia

The enrollment of students in distance education providing higher learning institutions in Ethiopia 'between' 2003-2010 is increasing manifold as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: ODL enrollment in Ethiopia for the period 2003-2010

Year	M	F	Total
2003 - 2004	4426	599	5025
2004 - 2005	31466	5652	37118
2005 - 2006	19246	2736	21982
2006 - 2007	51211	18005	69216
2007 - 2008	45463	12273	57736
2008 - 2009	55423	20537	75960
2009 - 2010	108748	36121	144869

MoE, statistical abstract 2003 up to 2010

The above figures indicate that the number of enrolled students in distance education programs is very insignificant when compared to the population of the country which is more than eighty million. This indicates the presence of untapped and huge potential for ODL in Ethiopia. This shows that ODL is not widely applied in Ethiopia in comparison to other African countries. If we summarize those figures of the previous chapter it will give us the following picture.

Table 3: Selected African Countries and ODL

Country	Profile	Gov.tal institutions	No of students
Botswana	581.730km^2, 2.029.307 population	The Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL)	54,000 teachers are covered and this constitute 29% of total teachers
Namibia	824.000^{2}km, 1.800.000 population	4 Major institutes	28,106 only in one institute and 45% of Namibia University
Nigeria	923.768km^2, 167.000.000 population	National Teachers institute	300,000 teachers
Sudan	1.886.068km^2, 30.894.000 population	Sudan Open Learning Organization SOLO	50,000 teachers
Tanzania	943,000km^2 34.000.000 population	The Cooperative Education Center, the Institute of Adult Education, the Southern African Extension Unit, The Open University of Tanzania, University of Dares Salaam and the Tanzania Global Development Learning Center	211,571

Thus, while Nigeria trained 300,000 ODL in teacher's training field only, Ethiopia has trained 144.869 ODL students all in all in 2010. The ratio of ODL students to population in Ethiopia is 0.002%, while that of Botswana 2.7%, Namibia 1.6%, and Tanzania 0.6%. The above figures spot light that the demand for ODL in the country continues to increase for the coming five years. The basic reasons for the demand to increase are the following, among others:

- The continued need for competent graduates in business, agriculture and industry and specialized skills,

- The growing recognition of ODL by the government,

- The competitiveness of the labor market,

- The increasing need from working people to acquire education and training in a flexible learning environment,

- The cost effectiveness of the education system for students and for ODL institutions,

- Advances in ICT technology that simplifies the learning and teaching process on a distance basis, and

- The envisaged high economic growth of the country.

There has been high suppressed demand from working people who are looking to learn in a flexible environment accommodating their work and education need. It is believed that with the launch of distance education many working people line up to enroll into the program. Accordingly, based on the enrollment pattern of the last three years a conservative estimation of 30% growth per annum is a reasonable estimate. Based on this the projected demand for ODL enrolment in Ethiopia would look like as presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Projected Enrollments in ODL in Ethiopia
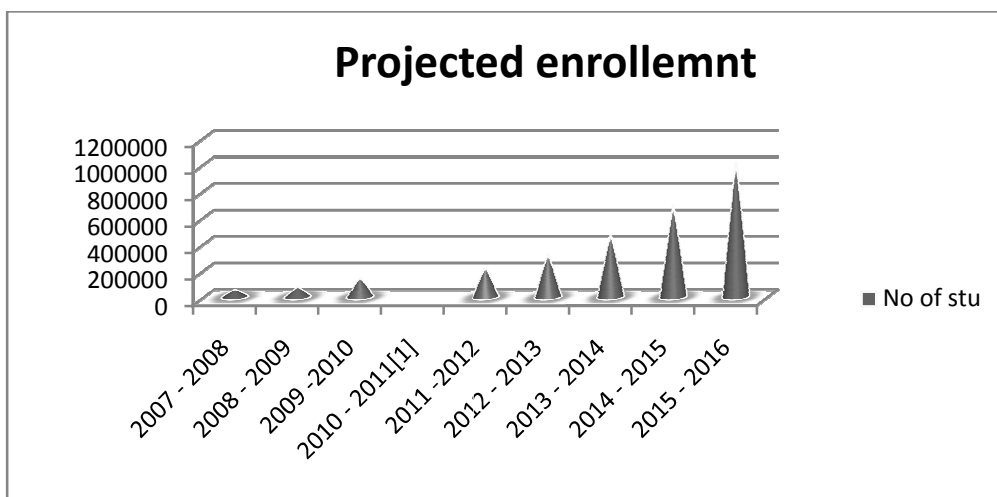
Source: Ethiopian investment Office 2007

Other factors that make ODL the best alternative for education seekers is the growing number of high school dropouts, thus the results of Ethiopian General Secondary Education Certificate Examination (EGSECE) for the last four years have the following picture.

Table 5: Number of students who couldn't join higher education

Year	No of students examined	who score <2.00	%
2006/2007	434,961	251,241	58
2007/2008	504,596	371,017	74
2008/2009	499,866	351,902	70
2009/2010	525,908	407,169	77
Total	1,965,331	1,381,329	70

Source: MOE, Education Statistics Annual Abstract 2009-2010

71

Thus, in the past four years 1,965,331 students took the EGSECE exams and 1,381,329 of them couldn't join higher education. Most of these dropouts could use ODL model of delivery to train and educate themselves to improve their life and thus contribute to create vibrant socio-economic development of the nation. While engaging in different work to help themselves and their family, they can improve their educational qualification through ODL-TVET while engaging in employment. The other potential area for ODL is the growing number of manufacturing workers. According to the statistical abstract 2010 of Central Statistical agency, the number of manufacturing workers is increasing tremendously from 2006 till 2009 as depicted in Table 6.

Table 6: Newly Employed Workers

Year	Newly employed
2006/2007	136,043
2007/2008	131,803
2008/2009	148,817
Total	416,663

Source: Statistical Abstract, CSA 2010

These 416, 663 workers can improve their learning through ODL to be more productive employees through the process of learning curve and improve their standard of living consequently. The quality of Ethiopian teachers is left much room for improvement, thus:

Table 7: Certified Primary and Secondary School teachers 2008/2009

	Teachers	Certified Teachers	% Qualified teachers
Primary 1st cycle (1 - 4)	168,798	26,094	15.46
Primary 2nd cycle (5 - 8)	114,293	88,896	77.78
Secondary (9 -12)	46,06	31,227	67.8
Total	329,151	146,217	Average 54

Source: MoE Statistical abstract 2009/2010

Only 54% percent of Ethiopian teachers are qualified for the job they are hired. ODL would be an option to support the efforts of the government in offering opportunities of training and improve their teaching and learning identified gaps and thereby play its role in boasting quality education provision if designed and be implemented properly. It is easy to infer conclusion that by improving the quality of teachers the quality of education will be enhanced. Despite all these potentials, ODL is not adequately exploited in Ethiopia. The chapters below discuss the problems and prospects of the ODL in Ethiopia.

Problems and Prospects of ODL in Ethiopia
Problems of Private ODL in Ethiopia

Problems of ODL in Ethiopia are an extension of problems of education in the country albeit it has its own unique obstacles. The problem of education in Ethiopia is the desire and the pressure on the part of the government to expand education and the difficulty of combining expansion with quality. The limited financial resources of the government could not

solve the conflict between expanding education to many and the quality of the education rendered. In our country there is a considerable gap in refreshing school leavers and its trained workforce (Lishan Adam 1999) a quick observation shows that the majority of the workforce in the country is highly ineffective partially due to lack of up to date training, refreshment and inability to keeping up with new developments in their areas of expertise. Knowledge doubles itself faster than the capacity of an average person. Human understanding of the area gets outdated within 2-5 years if this has not been refreshed continuously.

Thus, the advantage of ODL to Ethiopia is obvious. In the face of limited resources and time, distance education seems the only alternative for bridging the knowledge gap of the workforce that has limited time and convenience. But Private ODL in Ethiopia has several problems, some of the most serious ones are:

- The higher education bill gave inadequate coverage of ODL,
- Lack of institutional collaboration among concerned bodies at all levels,
- Ethiopian investment Office (2007). Investment opportunities guide. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
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- Insufficient awareness of the public and institutions about ODL,

- Limited application of ODL instruments and modalities in a way to support the government efforts,

- Inadequate financial, infrastructural and human resources for ODL, and

- Strict entrance standards

Recommendations

The problem of the gap of quantity and quality in supply of education service is common in most African countries (Lishan Adam 1999). Some African countries, South Africa for example has chosen the following strategies to deal with declining of quality education.

- Placing premium on lifelong and continuing education that enables continuous production and dissemination of knowledge,

- Promoting the roles of public and private organizations to share in knowledge production with institutions of higher education, and

- shifting from closed knowledge systems to more open knowledge systems that interacts with interests of 'consumer' or 'client' demands,

One of the best alternatives to solve the problem is to encourage and expand ODL. Strategic approaches of South Africa would be of high value for

Ethiopia to be critically examined and implemented. As noted above Ethiopia like other African countries faces a sociopolitical demand for access from larger cohorts of school leavers, and a large population groups and social classes largely excluded from higher education while high socioeconomic demand for highly trained human resources with wider ranges of skills and competencies exists presently and the time to come.

The government bodies must at private ODL institutions by giving access to human capacity building, granting land for infrastructure building, relief from tax duties on textbooks, computers, software and teaching equipment that must be imported. All these are available in theory, but when one comes into practice they are less feasible. Lishan Adam (1999) in his article on 'Information and Communication Technologies for Education' states that…'Problems facing the spread of distance education in developing countries are not technical but rather political and administrative"

The first remedy must come from the government,

- First and foremost the government should establish an institutional body at the higher level that takes care of ODL,
- Use the mass media to promote ODL
- Allow dropout students from different levels to enlist in ODL. Such practice is not unique to Ethiopia other countries give their dropouts second chance through ODL, in fact the well known ODL, institution like The United Kingdom's Open University have flexible criterion to register students, and
- Facilitate financial and capacity building programs for private ODL

Individual ODL institutions have their part to play:

- Give much emphasize on quality and relevance than profit,

- Invest more on R&D,

- Do much more internal self-evaluation to address the issue of quality education provision,

- Try their best to apply modern ODL mechanisms such as e-learning and

- Develop more interactive student-centered teaching and learning.

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