
UNIT 5 REGIONAL ISSUES

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5.1 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the variety and diversity of the education systems that prevail generally across a group of states that comprise each of the five major regional formations designed to foster cooperation in economic and social development;
- explain how the legacy systems influence the linguistic and cultural environments that are so crucial to the development of education; and
- analyse the common issues and challenges before the countries in all the regions and examine how Pan-African cooperation and collaboration can lead to significant growth and development in education.

5.0 INTRODUCTION

While discussing the problems and challenges in distance education in Africa, we did draw attention to the diversity of cultures, languages and the historical inheritance of the countries that comprise the continent and how these variations could influence their policies, programmes and indeed their development itself. The African Union and the African Economic Community have created Regional Economic Communities for North, West, South, Central and East Africa to promote cooperation and collaboration among them. These efforts extend to all development sectors including education. The linguistic diversity, reflected mainly by three major European language groups, namely, English, French and Portuguese/Spanish can be found across the regional formations and add a complex dimension to regional development initiatives, particularly in education and training.

It is not our intention to discuss the regional issues in great detail or to focus on the problems and concerns in each country in each region. What we intend to do is to make a broad survey of the regional situation in the context of the present provision for distance education, and what the

future holds for them. In doing so, we shall not go into the micro level details, and shall exclude specific cases that have been discussed already.

We shall try to focus our discussion on regional issues around the following broad issues:

- A brief survey of the existing provisions for distance education in the region;
- The nature of the existing collaborative projects in the region and the ways in which cooperation and collaboration can strengthen the distance education provision in the region; and
- The strategies for the future.

The discussion in the previous Units on the nature, role, challenges and strategies pertaining to distance education in Africa, in fact, reflects in general terms the position across all the regions. Therefore, we now turn to some issues that are specific to each region.

5.2 NORTH AFRICA

The six countries on the Mediterranean coast on the continent are influenced more by their Arab neighbours across the Gulf in language, customs and ways of life. Thanks to the impact of the oil economy, there is no noticeable evidence of poverty though the rural areas of Egypt and Morocco are not as good as the rest of the region. The region as a whole has better completion ratios in primary education than the rest of Africa, close to 70%, and the transition rates from primary to secondary education is about 50%. Secondary enrolments have not caught up with the primary school output, leaving major gaps in some cases. Egypt and Algeria have better higher education systems as well though they are still way behind in the age participation ratios among the developing countries. There are many universities too though the age participation ratios vary significantly.

Education systems in the region comprise both modern education as well as religious education. Modern education is patterned mainly after the European model, with the French influence more noticeable than any other.

There is no major institutional presence of distance education in this region. Nevertheless, distance education is practiced in isolated pockets, mainly focusing on higher education and teacher development in rural areas. There are cases of limited use of the mass media. United by a common language, the Arab countries across the Mediterranean are working together and sharing expertise. Formal collaborative initiatives have been limited to the development of a “Joint Arab Plan of Action” for the use of ICT in education, including distance education. The Pan African e-Network Project is likely to join the countries in the region with the rest of Africa, and might draw them into a potentially powerful distance education network as well.

Under a recent initiative jointly taken by the European Union and the UNESCO in 2002, a large project called Avicenna Virtual Campus (AVC) was launched in the Mediterranean region to create capacity for open distance learning delivery. In four years, the eLearning knowledge network in the region has emerged as a model for quality teacher training and education, in general, for students. Under this project, Avicenna learning centres were set up in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and

Egypt. Universidad Nacional de Educacion a Distancia (UNED), the National Public Distance University in Spain played a key role in the project by providing its expertise in blended learning methodologies and developing pilot online courses. The UNED pedagogical experts designed the Avicenna pedagogic model and its software experts provided the leadership in developing the software for creating the web course catalogue and Avicenna virtual library.

The project has facilitated the development of online courses, involving the development of curricula in an innovative form for a multi-lingual and multi-cultural environment. During the four years of the project (2002-06), 80 seminars were organised to train 981 teachers and tutors in online course production technology. 206 online modules (each teaching 20 hours) were produced to teach over 140,000 students. On termination of the project, Algeria, Egypt and Morocco took over the responsibility of running the learning centres as they turned out to be self-supporting. Egypt has added 27 more centres for training secondary school teachers, Algeria established its own network for secondary and higher education and Morocco has shown how these innovative approaches could help integration of students with disabilities into mainstream education (Morocco trained 1000 blind students under the project).

The success of the project has prompted UNESCO to replicate the model for the entire continent. UNESCO is now leading the establishment of an African Virtual Campus (AVC) as an extension of the Avicenna model. The new project aims to increase the capacity of all 54 member states of the African Union to train teachers of science, engineering and technology through eLearning by implementing sub-regional integrated scientific and technological programmes through an African Virtual Campus Network or an eLearning network. The project aims at building sub-regional and regional capacities and developing human resources in the Regional Economic Communities and specialised regional institutions (Rodrigo, Covadonga: 2009; ICDE 2009 papers).

5.3 SOUTHERN AFRICA

The southern region of the continent is way ahead in educational attainments. We had discussed in different contexts how the region has pioneered several new initiatives and established models of distance education theory and practices that could become models for others. Open schooling in Botswana and Namibia, TVET in South Africa and community education in Zimbabwe are all lessons for others to emulate.

Within the region, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) provides a political umbrella for collaboration throughout the region. The Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA) is a long-standing vehicle for collaboration in the SADC region. The South African Institute of Distance Education (SAIDE), an Educational Trust established in 1992 with support from the European Union, has emerged as a rich resource centre for capacity building, sharing information and mobilising learning programmes in the region. The SAIDE is also deeply involved in research and studies in distance education theories and practices, as well as in the quality assurance systems in distance education.

There are a number of collaborative ventures across borders and between institutions. For instance, UNESCO and the Ford Foundation had supported a project for the development of materials to be utilised

by DEASA members; another supported by DFID (UK) for sharing of materials, expertise and research between NAMCOL and its counterpart in Botswana; and an arrangement by which students doing UNISA courses are supported by the University of Namibia.

Southern Africa provides a major source for expertise, materials and study opportunities within the region that has developed as a viable alternative to looking beyond African shores for partners. UNISA (after merger of Technikon SA and Vista) and NAMCOL are two other major resource institutions. The reorganised UNISA drawing on its own pioneering experience in distance education and the expertise of TSA in the vocational education and training sector is quite a formidable presence. Quite a few other institutions based in Southern Africa are also active in the rest of Africa. More importantly, South Africa has emerged as a reliable provider of good education to African nationals in both forms, contact and distance. Small countries like Seychelles with a population of about 80,000, and cannot afford the luxury of establishing and running its own universities (because it will not have a viable student strength to sustain its own university though Seychelles ranks higher than Saudi Arabia in the Human Development Index, 2008).

5.4 EAST AFRICA

The East African Community comprises the pre-independent colonies of Kenya, Tanganyika and Uganda. Ethiopia is also a part of this Community. All of them had reasonably good record of educational provision till the collapse of their economies in the 1970s. Efforts at economic revival and educational reconstruction in the 1980s and later witnessed vigorous initiatives in rebuilding institutions, strengthening and sustaining school systems including teacher and tertiary education sectors. The region has a good record of application of distance education modes and tools like radio, audio and video cassettes along with print in teacher education and adult basic education and community education. At the higher education level, Makerere University in Uganda is a dual mode institution and Tanzania has its own open university. Kenya is the new home of the African Virtual University that uses ICTs for delivery of its programmes across the continent.

There are numerous examples of collaborative ventures functioning across the region and the continent. These include:

- The African Virtual University draws almost 75% of its content from universities within the continent and has collaboration with several universities in the continent to deliver its programmes;
- Joint development of materials both within the sub-region by the University of Nairobi, the OU of Tanzania; and the International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA)) and beyond (e.g. with UNISA);
- The collaborative training of staff for distance education, with an emphasis on materials design and development (e.g. The IICBA)
- The Virtual Institute for Higher Education in Africa supported by UNESCO in association with several specialised agencies in Africa is an example of cross-regional collaboration in which 12 countries from all regions (excluding the North) are participating primarily to promote initiatives for prevention and eradication of HIV/AIDS through education.

There have been suggestions coming from various forums in the region and outside for transforming the Open University of Tanzania into a central facility for coordination and development of distance education delivery in the region, and to expand the role of IICBA in the development of human capital for distance education in the region. Other areas of possible cooperation among countries within the region that are often talked about are mapping of resources for distance education in the region including ICT facilities, expansion of TVET programmes through distance education and a regional qualifications framework for recognition of qualifications within the region.

5.5 WEST AFRICA

The West Africa region, in many ways, reflects the diversity of the continent. It comprises all the major linguistic formations, the English, French and Portuguese speaking countries. It is home to some of the poorest countries in Africa; Mali and Niger, for example. The region's education systems are also as varied in structures and patterns of organisation as their linguistic background. The region is home to the largest country on the continent (Nigeria) with a large system of education comprising schools and universities. It has a very large teacher education programme (we discussed it in the section on 'Teacher Education') and a major open university that also has a regional resource centre for training in distance education (discussed in the section on 'Tertiary Education'). We have also taken note of the efforts to organise and develop distance learning programmes in the French speaking countries in West Africa.

Cooperation among countries in this region is focused on capacity building. The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) has set up a Regional Training Institute in Distance and Open Learning, as we had noted earlier, with support from the Commonwealth of Learning. COL has been supporting teacher development initiatives in West Africa (Cameroon, The Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone) by organising training programmes in course design and curriculum development, eLearning, situated learning design, learner support and audio and video script writing and production. It has been conducting workshops and training programmes for distance education personnel in course writing, instructional design and such other specialised areas.

Similarly, the National Teachers' Institute is a major resource centre for teacher education in the region. The NTI trains teachers from the neighbouring countries like The Gambia, for example, and also offers its reasonably equipped media production facilities both for training and production of media packages for use in other countries in the region.

Another project led by Nigeria and supported by UNESCO-BREDA focuses on teacher training in which other Anglophone countries in the region, namely, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Cameroon are also involved. The training resources for this project are provided by the NTI, Kaduna in Nigeria. Another project, also supported by UNESCO, facilitates exchange of teachers and training materials between The Gambia and Nigeria for the development of capacity of teachers in The Gambia. UNESCO has established a Chair in ODL at the Open University of Nigeria for the benefit of all West Africa.

A major impediment to collaboration in this region is its linguistic diversity. They use one of the three languages; English, French or

Portuguese. The countries need to adopt measures to overcome the language barriers to establish meaningful cooperation. An instrument to bring the countries together in addressing the problems in distance education was the establishment of the West African Distance Education Association (WADEA) in 1998. However, it remained dormant for several years. Efforts have been initiated in the recent past to revive the Association with the Francophone countries also joining them. Meanwhile, the Portuguese speaking countries aligned themselves with Mozambique and Angola.

5.6 CENTRAL AFRICA

The Central Africa region presents a picture of recurring political instability, civil strife, poverty and poor education. The language barriers add to the problems of the countries in the region. Though there is a growing awareness that distance education would be of immense value to the region, the political leadership is yet to address this issue with any degree of seriousness. As late as in early 2004, when the All African Education Ministers met in South Africa to consider how the potential of open learning and distance education could be harnessed to address Africa's development concerns, the Central African leaders were thinking of getting together in 2005 to consider a complete survey of the current distance learning provisions in their countries to assess the availability of learning materials, human resources and infrastructure for distance education. Apparently, the region and its member states lack the political will and leadership to commit themselves to the use of distance education methods to address the grave deficits in their educational provision.

The African Virtual Campus Project of the UNESCO that we discussed earlier in this Unit will be the platform for launching sustainable development of science and technology in 10 member states of this region comprising Burundi, Angola, Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sao Tom and Principe and Chad. The principal aim of the AVC project is to train teachers especially in science and hopefully it would provide the necessary impetus to the region to use distance education methods in a big way.

Check Your Progress 1

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

The African Union hopes to develop Africa, reduce poverty, improve health and enhance the quality of life of people on the continent. It has launched initiatives like NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development). Education and ICT development are major components of this initiative. Please describe what distance education can do to further this objective. (Answer in about 150 words.)

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5.7 LET US SUM UP

In this Block, we have made a broad overview of the current status of open learning and distance education in the African continent, the problems and challenges that all the nations in the continent confront and the ways in which they should respond to meet the challenges effectively. We have discussed in detail the many constraints and limitations that stifle the whole continent's efforts to move forward and ensure for its people a life free from hunger and disease. There is a broad measure of consensus that education is the key to economic and social development and the provision of educational opportunities to the impoverished millions in the continent is the only way to make them earn their livelihood, improve their health, reduce poverty and make them responsible citizens in their countries.

Given the enormity of the problem and the urgency of addressing them effectively and quickly, we have come to the conclusion that distance education methods provide the best means to meet the challenges posed by the accumulated deficits in educational provision in every country in the continent. In this context, we have briefly surveyed the efforts that have been made so far, and have also examined why some attempts succeeded while many did not. In this context, we have looked at the initiatives taken by several international agencies and organisations including governments and other agencies at some length, to establish and develop distance education systems in many countries.

As we said during the course of our discussion, it is not our intention to prescribe or recommend a set of measures for the countries to follow. Our purpose is to draw attention to the many problems and challenges that distance education planners and managers in the African continent will have to grapple with, and to help you think about the manner in which you, as a potential distance educator in Africa, would go about in responding to them.

We do hope that what we have presented here will help deepen your understanding of the African situation and will help you meet those challenges substantially, if not fully.

5.8 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

The only answer to the problems of the African people is the development of their human and social capital without which they cannot participate in the creation and sharing of their national wealth. Centuries of exploitation have left them impoverished; most countries do not still have the social infrastructure on which new development initiatives can be built. Schools, universities and hospitals are not adequate to serve the needs of all the people. Since education is the basic building block on which all social development initiatives have to be built, nearly every country in the continent has to augment opportunities for education at all levels. Conventional means of educational provision cannot meet this challenge. Massive distance education on massive scales is the answer. Africa has to adopt and deploy modern technologies on a large scale to meet this challenge. There is considerable experience within Africa in open learning and distance education methods and practices. This experience

has to be shared and applied across the continent and strengthened with such international collaboration and cooperation that are now available. Ultimately, it is for the national governments to make a decisive beginning and move on the path of development quickly and resolutely.

Acknowledgements

In the preparation of this Block, we have drawn heavily from the several papers presented at the All African Ministers' Conference on Open Learning and Distance Education (AAMCOLDE), held at Cape Town, South Africa on February 1-4, 2004. These papers were posted in the website of the conference www.africaodl.org/conference. Some of the materials we have used were taken from the following presentations:

Asmal, Kader. Prospects, possibilities and perils. Distance education responds to Africa's development.

Christensen, Phil. Is technical and vocational education possible through distance education?

Daniel, John. Distance Education: Is it still relevant in 2004?

Dhanarajan, Gajaraj. Distance Education for Development.

Dzvimbo, Peter. The challenges and potential of distance teaching and Open learning in Africa: Experiences from the African Virtual University
 Ensor, Robert. Government information and communication technologies policy to facilitate the development of open, distance and flexible learning.

Glennie, Jenny and Welch, Tessa. Beyond the wish list: strategies for assuring the quality of distance education in South Africa.

Gourley, Brenda. Will bridging the digital divide resolve our education needs?

Isaacs, Shafika. Information and communication technologies applications: What is new and what is working in Africa?

Jegede, O. The National Open University of Nigeria.

Kinyanjui, Peter. NEPAD initiatives in information and communication technologies and associated capacity building.

Limozi, John. Teacher education in Kenya: Improving teaching and learning through open and distance education.

Mohammed, A. Modibbo and Ismaila, Unwaha Y. Training teachers through distance education: The Nigerian Experience.

Moore, Dermot. Sustainability, quality and balance – an integrated systems approach to the delivery of vocational education and training through open and distance learning.

Perlman, Harriet. Challenges in AIDS communication and distance education work across eight countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Lessons from Soul City Regional Project.

Pityana, Barney. Open distance education in Africa: Quality, access and success.

Pontefract, Caroline. Teacher education in Kenya: Improving teaching and learning through open and distance education.

Siaciwena, Richard. Community education through distance education.

Taylor, James. Increasing access to higher education through the application of appropriate models of distance education.

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