OPEN LEARNING FOR DEVELOPMENT, EMPOWERMENT AND TRANSFORMATION
Open Learning for Development: Towards Empowerment and Transformation

Keynote Address delivered by Professor Olugbemiro Jegede
Secretary to the Government of Kogi State, Nigeria

The 7th Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF7)

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The 7th Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF7) was held in Abuja, Nigeria, from Monday 4th to Wednesday 6th December 2017. The theme for the forum was “Open Learning for Development: Towards Empowerment and Transformation.”

Professor Jegede, who was the former vice-chancellor of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOU), and the immediate past chief executive officer of Association of African Universities (AAU), delivered the keynote address. The forum aimed to explore the potential of open learning as a tool for societal development, empowerment and transformation. Below is the full text of his presentation.

Let me join others in welcoming you all to Nigeria for the 7th Pan Commonwealth Forum (PCF7) taking place in our Federal Capital City of Abuja. Knowing that the decision to host it in Nigeria was almost named by security threats and challenges that have bedevilled some parts of our country. I am more excited that it has turned such a large attendance from all over the world, especially from the Commonwealth.

Personally, it is an honour for me to be asked the Organizing Committee to deliver the inaugural keynote address at my own belt - a familiar term. I want to express my immense gratitude to my sister, friend and colleague, Professor Asisatokun, the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Pan Commonwealth Forum for accepting the invitation by the Organizing Committee to deliver this inaugural keynote address. I have watched with admiration and pride as you have achieved the outstanding accomplishments of ODL, the exceptionally successful manner in which even now, the skyline persists in some circles and unexpectedly even within academia. But of course, not all of it could be attributed to ODL. The success of the ODL, I believe, is due to the strong foundation laid in establishing the PCF, its growth and strength through successive holding of the PCF. The other PCFs have indeed held in Durban, South Africa 2002 (PCF2); Dushan, New Zealand 2004 (PCF3); Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 2006 (PCF4), London, UK 2008 (PCF5), Kochi, Kerala, India 2010 (PCF6). Today, the Pan Commonwealth Forum has come of age with the Seventieth holding in Nigeria, and making it the second on the African continent.

The success of the 2017 PCF and the huge impact it made in the Commonwealth and indeed in the ODL world today, were the strong foundation laid in establishing the PCF and its growth and strength through successive holding of the PCF. Five other PCFs have indeed held in Durban, South Africa 2002 (PCF2); Dushan, New Zealand 2004 (PCF3); Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 2006 (PCF4), London, UK 2008 (PCF5), Kochi, Kerala, India 2010 (PCF6). Today, the Pan Commonwealth Forum has come of age with the Seventieth holding in Nigeria, and making it the second on the African continent.

I am humbled by the fact that, like a few of the big bridges of the ODL stalwarts, we have in this room. I have been fortunate to have attended all of the Pan Commonwealth Forums, PCF1, made ODL more global and internationalize, reach all sections, all levels and all groups and communities to participate in our ODL. It shows ODL’s, an immeasurable force moving to communicate the world of education. It also laid the foundation for two major issues; Empowerment and Technology which we have become more visible through the world. And when we have辽ished through all these once our PCFs and have dealt with in my life as well. I have suggest that on these issues later in this conversation plan to hold with the ODL world through the presentation.

Focus and Theme for PCF7

As has been announced and published, this Forum will focus on Open Learning for Development: Towards Empowerment and Transformation through five themes: “Gym and Women’s Education,” “Skills Development,” “Promoting Open Educational Resources (OER),” “Innovation and Technology,” and “Institutional Development.” The inaugural keynote speaker, who is expected to lead the forum through the provocation on open learning for development, will identify major issues of concern. We hope other keynote speakers and the various theme presenters would address issues that I am unable to. I am also of the view that this is the world is experiencing significant and novel developments in open and distance learning, the emerging issues in innovation and technology will be highlighted for further conversation and debate with a view to galvanizing and creating demand.

Open Learning for Development: Towards Empowerment and Transformation

The main agenda for this session was to address the need for a more inclusive, equitable, and accessible education system. The session aimed to highlight the potential of open learning as a tool for social development. It further addressed the issue by focusing on its use for empowerment and transformation. Please recall my reference earlier to the 7th Pan Commonwealth Forum. When we examine this alongside the agenda for PCF7, one question that comes to mind is “What is the role of education in today’s world?”

Dr. Vincent Orteson worked very hard to convince the world that it was time to celebrate ODL, and should it from the top, ensuring that those that had no access, but instead we asked that ODL should be in every continent of the world; Africa, Europe, Asia, Oceania, the Americas, and ODL is the only continent that looks like a whole. We are almost 80 years of age now, and no continent is without ODL.

The Advent of ODL

The advent of ODL began an education experience with the use of print technology and the postal service to reach learners far removed from the teacher. Directed towards adult learners who were unable to attend traditional schools, correspondence education offered a way to access education. ODL offered world-wide access to distance education. It has been and can be used to transform society, community, teaching and learning, curriculum, institution, knowledge, information and learning support services to meet the needs of learners, the learner and the society.

Innovations in ODL

Innovations in ODL have led to the development of e-learning. The advent of the Internet in the late 1980s and early 1990s marked a significant shift in the way distance education was delivered. It introduced new opportunities for learners, particularly in remote and rural areas. The Internet allowed learners to access educational resources and communicate with their instructors and fellow students from anywhere in the world.

Nevertheless, there is no denying that the challenges of technology, such as access to technology and the digital divide, persist. It is essential that we continue to explore and implement innovative solutions to overcome these challenges.

The Future of ODL

The future of ODL is bright. As technology continues to evolve, it will become easier to provide high-quality education to learners worldwide. The potential of distance education is enormous, and it is essential that we continue to invest in its development.

In conclusion, the Pan Commonwealth Forum, PCF7 in Abuja, Nigeria, was a successful event that brought together thought leaders from across the globe to discuss the future of open learning and its potential to transform societies and economies. With the implementation of innovative solutions, we can continue to expand access to education and ensure that all learners have the opportunity to achieve their full potential.
The 7th Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF7)

The continuing global educational and economic realities have also fostered changes in the way nations view education. For instance, the emerging concepts of ‘OER’ have changed from an elitist based to more higher education-focused with exponential growth in knowledge with reduced life-time-waste, entrenched the shift from the institution-based to information-based global education.

The OER Commons, now with over 50,000 members, tools and training opportunities, has emerged as a worldwide learning network of shared teaching, learning, and research materials made freely available. What is commendable about OER is its subject area, grade level and type. OER Commons began in 2007 as a coalition of research and education institutions that offered open education content and practices, as a way to aggregate, share, and promote open educational resources to educators, administrators, parents, and students. What is commendable about OER is its quality and accessibility for use in ensuring that providers and developers of OER is as such available software to common standards.

Issues of concern about OER

Like any other innovative activity, the OER had come under criticism. There are issues about OER, for instance: open, access and related materials are even more expensive than open education resources, as the providers are the people who are producing these resources.

The Emergence of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)

If OERs have opened the gate of public education to the world, the recently born MOOCs have exploded the educational frenzy of the open education and the free education to the masses. They have been described as the first experiments in large-scale, open, and competitive education for people of all ages and abilities. These Open and distributed learning initiatives are the people who are producing these resources.

MOOCs, which is a type of OER, is also labelled as Distributed Open Learning. The MOOCs that were first launched in 2012, have been followed by hundreds of other universities across the globe. The MOOCs are also called as MOOCs for short, or a more technical education, the Massive Open Online Courses.

The MOOCs are characterised by the following:

1. They provide open content-encouraging educators to share their high-quality learning materials with other learners.

2. They change the mode of assessment in higher education.

3. They are emerging issues for MOOCs and MOOCs such as @MOOCs and the MOOCs are also known as MOOCs for short. A MOOC is a massive open online course. It is an open course that any student around the world can access and participate.

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Taylor (1990, 2001) has noted a new paradigm of accessibility and use of these technologies in ODL into generation modes as shown in Table 1 below.

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