

Promoting Open Educational Resources (OER) in Theological/Religious Education in Nigeria

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Abstract—One of the biggest challenges facing Theological/Religious Education in Nigeria is access to quality learning materials. For instance at the Trinity (Union) Theological College, Umuahia, it was difficult for lecturers to access suitable and qualitative materials for instruction especially the ones that would suit the African context and stimulate a deep rooted interest among the students. Some textbooks written by foreign authors were readily available in the School Library, but were lacking in the College bookshops for students to own copies. Even when the College was able to order some of the books from abroad, it did not usher in the needed enthusiasm expected from the students because they were either very expensive or very difficult to understand during private studies. So it became necessary to develop contextual materials which were affordable and understandable, though with little success. The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)'s innovation in the development and sharing of learning resources through its Open Courseware is a welcome development and of great assistance to students. Apart from NOUN students who could easily access the materials, many others from various theological/religious institutes across the nation have benefited immensely. So, the thesis of this paper is that the promotion of open educational resources in theological/religious education in Nigeria would facilitate a better informed/equipped religious leadership, which would in turn impact its adherents for a healthier society and national development. Adopting a narrative and historical approach within the context of Nigeria's educational system, the paper discusses: educational traditions in Nigeria; challenges facing theological/religious education in Nigeria; and benefits of open educational resources. The study goes further to making recommendations on how OER could positively influence theological/religious education in Nigeria. It is expected that theologians, religious educators, and ODL practitioners would find this work very useful.

Keywords—Nigeria, OER, religious education, theological education.

I. INTRODUCTION

ACCESS to quality learning materials remains one of the biggest challenges facing Theological/Religious Education in Nigeria. For instance at the Trinity (Union) Theological College, Umuahia, it was difficult for lecturers to access suitable and qualitative materials for instruction especially the ones that would suit the African context and stimulate a deep rooted interest among the students. Some textbooks written by foreign authors were readily available in the School Library, but were lacking in the College bookshops for students to own copies. Even when the College was able to order some of the books from abroad, it did not usher in the

needed enthusiasm expected from the students because they were either very expensive or very difficult to understand during private studies. So it became necessary to develop contextual materials which would be affordable and understandable, though with little success. The innovation of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) in the development and sharing of learning resources through its Open Courseware became a welcome development and of great assistance to students. Apart from NOUN students who could easily access the materials, many others from various theological/religious institutes across the nation have benefited immensely.

The aim of this paper is to show how the promotion of open educational resources in theological/religious education in Nigeria would facilitate a better informed/equipped religious leadership, who would in turn impact their adherents for a healthier society and national development. The paper adopts a narrative and historical approach within the context of Nigeria's educational system. It discusses: educational traditions in Nigeria; challenges facing theological/religious education in Nigeria; benefits of open educational resources; and making recommendations on how Open Educational Resources (OER) could impact theological/religious education in Nigeria.

A document of Commonwealth of Learning [1] defined OER as teaching, learning and research materials in any medium that reside in the public domain and have been released under an open license that permits access, use, repurposing, reuse and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions. The use of open technical standards improves access and reuse potential. OER can include full courses/programmes, course materials, modules, student guides, teaching notes, textbooks, research articles, videos, assessment tools and instruments, interactive materials such as simulations and role plays, databases, software, apps (including mobile apps) and any other educationally useful materials [2]. A similar term to OER is Open Course Ware (OCW), which is an initiative of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to put all educational materials from undergraduate and graduate-level courses online, partly free and openly available to anyone, anywhere. Accordingly, OER act as enablers to achieving the universal right to education.

II. THREE EDUCATIONAL TRADITIONS IN NIGERIA

Nigeria has experienced three types of educational traditions namely, indigenous, Islamic and Western. Prior to the advent of colonialism, and the 19th Century missionary enterprise, there existed a type of education which was not

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orchestrated by any outside agency: indigenous education [3]. This earliest type of education was offered in the pre-literate era, within families and the community, by family and community members who possessed specialised skills or abilities in various fields of human endeavour. Thus, boys were mentored by their fathers, and/or other masters in learning various vocations and etiquette like farming, trading, craftwork, fishing, cattle rearing, wine tapping, traditional medicine and black-smiting, etc. While girls were expected to stay back at home to learn domestic and other chores such as cooking, sweeping, weeding the farmlands, hair weaving, decorations of the body, dye production; and the like from their mothers [3]. As it were, this type of education, which was traditional in nature from African Traditional Religion (ATR) was accessible to everyone, and the case of unemployment was absent, unless if the person in question was lazy and did not follow the societal tradition of the time.

The second type of educational tradition, Islamic learning had been established in Nigeria before the arrival of the Western type of education in the 19th Century [4]. In the early 14th Century, Islam was brought into Hausa land by traders and scholars who came from Wangarawa to Kano in the reign of Ali Yaji (1349 - 1385). Before long, most of what later became the Northern Nigeria was Islamised. Islamic education brought along with it Arabic learning, since Arabic is the language of the Quran and was therefore perceived as having great spiritual value. Arabic and Islam were taught simultaneously in primary schools. As a result of the political and social advantage which Islam and Qur'anic learning conferred on those who possessed it, many rulers employed Islamic scholars as administrators. The efforts of 'Uthman Dan Fodio helped to revive, spread and consolidate Islamic studies and extend access to education also to women. Islamic studies also penetrated the Western parts of Nigeria following this time. Support for Islamic education came from some Northern Nigerian leaders, especially Abdullahi Bayero (Emir of Kano), who, on his return from Mecca in 1934, introduced new ideas by building a Law School for training teachers of Islamic subjects and Arabic as well as English and Arithmetic [3].

Western-style education was the third educational tradition that came to Nigeria championed by the Christian missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century [5], [6]. Wesleyan Methodist missionaries arrived Nigerian 1842, establishing a mission, and in 1878, the first boys' school at Lagos and in 1895, a girls' school. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) established schools at Abeokuta, Badagry, Lagos and Ibadan between 1846 and 1949. The Holy Ghost Fathers of the Catholic Mission opened schools at Onitsha on the east of the Niger and convent schools at Abeokuta between 1886 and 1892. The United Free Church of Scotland Mission (CSM – Presbyterian) founded the famous Hope Waddell Training Institute at Calabar in 1895 in the south east. They also had extensive educational system that covered most of the middle and lower Cross River valley in the 1900s [5]. In 1904 the Sudan United Mission (SUM) operated along Benue River in the north, the longest tributary of the Niger [6].

III. CHALLENGES FACING THEOLOGICAL/RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Following the advent of Western missionaries and the Western style of education in 19th century came to the establishment of theological and religious education in Nigeria. Since then, the proliferation of religious groups and sects have heralded the founding of multiple theological seminaries or institutions aimed at meeting the needs of the groups that founded them. A random search for list of the theological schools in Nigeria on *VCONNECT.com* website returned over 276 data on religious and theological institutions belonging to various religious groups in Nigeria [7]. This number excludes the numerous theological schools that are not registered with *VCONNECT.com* database. Furthermore, The National Universities Commission's (NUC) statistics show, as at January 2013, that Nigeria has (128) Universities, including 40 federal universities, 38 state universities, and 50 private universities [8]. Most of these universities, including those owned by religious groups in Nigeria, have religious departments.

One of the challenges, however, hinges on quality assurance of what is offered in these schools, and which body regulates the curriculum and other pedagogical issues. Thus the study advises that the general template offered by the first United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE) in 1998 on quality of higher education at UNESCO level should be explored by theological colleges and their regulating bodies. In the "World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty First Century: Vision and Action" [9], it was stated that "Developing quality in higher education and mechanisms for its assurance is crucial for the future of education in the 21st century". The definition given here was: "Quality in higher education is a multidimensional concept, which should embrace all its functions, and activities: teaching and academic programs, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, facilities, equipment, services to the community and the academic environment, internal self/evaluation and external review, conducted openly by independent specialists, if possible with international expertise, are vital for enhancing quality" [10].

D. Boers [11] outlined three notable trends in theological/religious education in Africa over the decades, namely: (1) the proliferation of theological schools, (2) the Africanisation of staffing, and (3) the persisting academic upgrading of programmes. From the Directory of the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA) of 1990s, it was noted that over 1200 institutions had been identified in Africa. This data gives an idea of the general trend in Africa of which Nigeria is a microcosm. The second trend, which was Africanisation of administrative and teaching staff placed autonomy and funding of these institutions squarely in the hands of the African people with their attendant challenges. A third trend had been the pattern of academic upgrading. Some of the founding religious groups had seen the need of providing higher academic qualities to its leadership for an enhanced performance [12].

As a result of these notable trends, certain challenges facing theological/religious education in Nigeria became obvious, namely:

- 1) Training for specialized roles became necessary; examples: for youth work, evangelization, journalism and communication, distance education, etc. Some religious bodies do not place much emphasis on formal theological education, how much more enlisting for advanced studies.
- 2) Striking a balance between the issues of faith and praxis in the face of poverty, diseases, tribal unrest and social justice became a critical issue.
- 3) Funding problem. While the early missionary schools were managed with little or no costs to the indigenous communities, because they were financed by foreign bodies that brought them, funding theological education in recent times has not been easy. Infrastructural developments, staff salaries and welfare, and other administrative costs pose a huge challenge to the religious groups that instituted them.
- 4) The dearth of library resources is a big challenge due to their expensive nature because most of them are imported from abroad or because of the inability of local staff to fund the publication of contextualized materials. It is a common practice for the majority of students to depend on photocopied materials for the rest of their studies without owning at least one quality text book.
- 5) In an era when innovations in technology are impacting the delivery of quality education, and making attempts to provide access to the geometrical population growth of the world, Nigeria's educational institutions generally, and theological/religious schools in particular are still struggling to extricate themselves from the old traditional ways of providing education.

Consequently, promoting OER in Nigeria's theological/religious institutions as a way of overcoming the above challenges becomes necessary.

IV. BENEFITS OF OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

The National Open University of Nigeria is the foremost and the only institution in Nigeria that offers a single mode Open and Distance Learning (ODL). The NOUN Open Courseware published on NOUN Website has not only generated much benefits for NOUN students, but has become a resource material for students in other institutions in Nigeria, who readily find access to the courseware provided they have an internet access [13]. What remains is a survey on the level of usage of NOUN Open Courseware by staff and students of both NOUN and other educational institutions in Nigeria, to ascertain the level of acceptance and the benefits thereof. According to a report on a recent survey on MIT OCW, which returned an overwhelming acceptance and appreciation by both staff, students and administrators, OER remains a veritable tool in providing access to quality and affordable education [14].

Some of the highlights of the benefits of OER are summarized as follows:

TABLE I
BENEFITS OF OER

Beneficiary	Benefit
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advancing knowledge by unlocking information for the benefit of all. • Widening participation in higher education by expanding access to non-traditional learners.
Institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The public image of the institution may be enhanced & new students attracted. • Improving recruitment by helping the right students find the right programmes.
Educators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing teachers with high quality resources with open licensing. • Fosters pedagogical innovation and relevance that avoids teaching from the textbook.
Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An independent learner who has access to the Internet can access material from some of the best universities in the world. • Study for personal development is enhanced.
Improvement in quality of materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The key quality assurance issues that emerge suggest that while it might be too early to judge quality improvement there is some evidence that OER may improve educational practices, coherence across courses, technical quality and research into pedagogy
Reduction in costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OER may increase number of registrations thereby increase tuition fees; • lower some of the marketing costs;
Ease of Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be accessed from all locations in different formats, electronically or otherwise.

Summarized from Prof Cheryl Hodgkinson [15]

Apart from the numerous benefits of OER in providing access to quality and affordable education, as with any other institutional initiative, the challenge of financial sustainability and quality assurance are major issues. According to Martin Weller, financial sustainability of OER is 'the daddy of all the arguments'. A range of potential OER sustainability models have been suggested in the seminal works of Downes and Wiley [16]. Furthermore, it is observed that people remain suspicious about the quality of free resources and seek reassurance about how the materials have been peer-reviewed [17]. So, Theological institutions in Nigeria can adapt some of the suggested models in promoting OER in terms of sustainability and quality assurance.

V. POSSIBLE WAYS OF PROMOTING OER IN THEOLOGICAL/RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Theological/Religious education in Nigeria can benefit immensely from the gains of open educational resources, including adapting the models for financial sustainability and quality assurance. In this light, the following recommendations are presented as possible ways of promoting Open Educational Resources (OER) in theological/religious education:

- 1) Religious institutions can undertake or collaborate with Government institutions that have embraced and implemented Open and Distance Learning (ODL) like National Open University of Nigeria. Among other things to learn would include: Organization and Management of ODL; Operational Structures/Issues in ODL; Course Planning and Development; Course Delivery and Learner Support; Quality, Research, and Evaluation; etc. [18].

- 2) In order to ensure adequate financial sustainability for OER, different theological/religious institutions can pool their resources together and form Open Courseware Consortium or Connexions Consortium; Donations or Voluntary support from different alumni association of the schools, and Sponsorship or contributions from corporate bodies, religious groups and government are possible ways. Downes describes a number of financial models that can be used to help sustain OCW projects [19]. These include a sponsorship model, support from governmental agencies, donations, endowments, and other potential models. Insuring the sustainability of these projects moving forward is of critical importance.
- 3) Quality Assurance can be promoted by adhering to NUC policy [20] and collaborating with international accrediting agencies for theological education like Accrediting Council of Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA), and the Theological Education by Extension (TEE).
- 4) Even though the Nigerian Government does not extend grants to schools owned by private and religious groups, it should initiate enabling environment and policies that promote participation in ODL by private institutions, example, provisions of basic amenities like: power, good roads, water, and effective telecommunication.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper concludes that the promotion of open educational resources in theological/religious education in Nigeria would facilitate an improved access to quality and affordable learning for theological and religious leadership in Nigeria. It is expected that this enterprise would benefit the religious adherents and contribute towards a healthier society and national development.

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