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## **Comparing and Contrasting Distance Education Institutions in Developed and Underdeveloped Countries**

### **Introduction**

Several types of distance education organizations have come into existence. These establishments have surfaced in industrialized and underdeveloped countries. Each of these organizations can vary based on various dimensions. These different dimensions include mission and population served, inherent values, history and reason for existence, technology used, systems of operations, and model of teaching and learning. Many of these educational institutions are frequently used as models in various contexts in distance learning. This paper will thoughtfully compare and contrast the British Open University and the African Virtual University based upon these various dimensions, in an effort to address how the context of each institution influences their particular distance education practice.

### **History and Reason for Existence**

The first dimension that will be discussed is the history and reason for existence. The African Virtual University opened up in 1997 as a World Bank project, which is headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya. This is not a conventional educational institution, rather it is a consortium. The consortium structure is an institutional cooperative that provides all its affiliates with a pool of information and educational resources to help create a new organizational arrangement. This type of institutional arrangement assures that all the affiliated organizations' needs, goals, and interests are being met (Dzvisombo

& Kariuki, n.d.). The African Virtual University has partnered with educational organizations in Africa and other countries, to provide distance education courses to students in an electronic and open learning format. This organization wants to augment access to their curriculum by making various forms of teaching and learning available to everyone. Therefore, the African Virtual University capitalized on higher education by focusing on the international market (Dzvismbo & Kariuki, n.d.).

The British Open University was constituted in 1969, and it is the largest educational organization in the United Kingdom. The purpose of this institution was to give the people in the United Kingdom a second chance at obtaining a secondary education by taking distance learning courses. This establishment has an open arrangement, which means that there are no affiliated schools or colleges under its control. In addition, the British Open University does not require their students to have any formal academic qualifications, in order for them to register with this distance education organization (Richardson, 2010).

### **Mission and Population Served**

The second element that will be compared is mission and population served. The mission of the African Virtual University is to collaborate with educational organizations in Africa and other countries for the advancement of knowledge and quality instruction, to perpetually change the way teaching and learning is disseminated in the future, and to make education inexpensive, economical, fair, reasonable, and pliable by making use of communication technologies and systematic educational structures (Dzvismbo & Kariuki, n.d.). Moreover, the African Virtual University's vision is to be the head African university that supports a distance learning environment that is inclusive and unclosed in

a consortium partnership (Juma, 2003).

The British Open University's mission is to have an open door policy when it comes to various techniques, concepts, people, and locations. Hence, this organization is opening their doors to everyone despite their educational situation or geographical location. Furthermore, the Open University of the United Kingdom's vision is not only to offer people a second chance at obtaining a quality education, but to foster social equitableness by offering a high quality education to all those who want to succeed and reach their full potential (Dzvismbo & Kariuki, n.d.).

Nevertheless, these institutions serve different populations in their countries. The African Virtual University benefits the people in Sub-Saharan Africa who are educationally and economically disadvantaged. This organization wants to use new information technologies to help augment the access to education throughout this region (Dzvismbo & Kariuki, n.d.). The British Open University serves students in the United Kingdom and other parts of the world. The students are composed of those who are disabled, who work full-time and have families, study part-time, and people who are 21 years of age and older. It is considered an educational organization for the working or middle class. Their open admission policy welcomes people from all ages, ethnicities, races, and backgrounds (Dzvismbo & Kariuki, n.d.).

### **Inherent Values**

The third constituent that will be evaluated is inherent values. The African Virtual University's values are to promote accessibility to tertiary education in Africa through a joint effort with other partner organizations; and to foster candidness, dependableness, and courteousness with their faculty (Juma, 2003). The British Open

University's inherent values are to be open to all, creative with their teaching and methods of learning, encourage lifelong learning, and to be receptive to the needs of the students, societies, and organizations (Dzvismbo & Kariuki, n.d.).

### **System of Operations**

The fourth dimension that will be analyzed is system of operations. The African Virtual University is composed of several organizational levels. The first level is the faculty and departments, which are located in the Australian organizations; the second level is positioned at the universities in Africa; the third level is at the African Virtual University's learning centers; and the fourth level is at native universities in Africa with the faculty and educators. Their system of operations uses a network of universities and institutions from different countries to disseminate educational materials to distant learners in Africa (Dzvismbo & Kariuki, n.d.).

The Open University of the United Kingdom has an intricate infrastructure. It is split up into thirteen centers. Each of these centers has a local administrator, who is in charge of setting up the regional study centers. These study centers offer the learners a place where they can interact with one another. In addition, these places allow the students to talk with their counselors and tutors face-to-face. Each center is managed by a counselor who counsels and direct group lectures after instructional broadcasts (Brennan, Holloway, & Shah, n.d.). The facilities at the University's central base are all controlled from one administrative center. It is located in Milton Keynes, London. This institution also has centers located in Ireland and Europe (Brennan, Holloway, & Shah, n.d.).

## **Model of Teaching and Learning**

The fifth component that will be examined is the institutions' models of teaching and learning. The African Virtual University uses a mixed-mode approach, which is a combination of blended and online learning. This technique uses emails and chat sessions in an e-learning environment, which takes place in real time. This aids in providing their distant learners with a new approach to learning (Juma, 2003). Furthermore, they use a learning center approach. The students must sign up at one of the institution's learning centers, where they will attend synchronous meetings. This ensures that the learners are exposed to the organization's technologies and they obtain an effectual learning experience (Juma, 2003).

The Open University of the United Kingdom's models of teaching and learning are the transmission and open learning models. The transmission model deals with finding ways to effectually exchange information or knowledge. Since we are in a knowledge-based society, more weight needs to be given to meeting the needs and demands of widening the access to obtaining a higher education. The transmission model uses technologies such as the computer and internet, to disseminate information to their students in order to make a more progressive teaching model (Dzvismbo & Kariuki, n.d.). The open learning model gives the students the ability to access a distance learning environment through computerized technologies such as the internet. This offers the educators and distant learners' flexibility and convenience in an inclusive environment. This model employs different technologies to empower learning and the building of intellectual capital (Dzvismbo & Kariuki, n.d.).

## **Technology Used**

The final dimension to be considered is the types of technology used. The African Virtual University uses a form of technical media called Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). An example of this form of media is asynchronous videoconferencing. Further, they use open source software and courseware to help lessen the duplication of instructional material (Dzvismbo & Kariuki, n.d.). This organization uses other forms of technology as well. The university relies on satellites to transmit information from one location to another. These technologies allow the educators and lecturers from partner institutions the ability to teach their course material to the students at the African Virtual University (Juma, 2003).

However, the British Open University uses computer-based technologies to disseminate their instruction material to people in the United Kingdom. Examples of these technologies include websites, online conferencing, digital resources, and CD-ROMs. They also rely on written, audio, and television broadcasts as well (Dzvismbo & Kariuki, n.d.).

## **How Distance Learning is Influenced by the Institutional Context of These Organizations**

The institutional contexts of the African Virtual University and British Open University have influenced their distance education practices in Africa and Great Britain. The Open University of the United Kingdom is located in a developed country, and it has brought about a new form of teaching and learning as compared to conventional schools and universities. This institution has made a substantial contribution to the development of distance education in the United Kingdom. It emancipated distance education by

incorporating technology into their educational regime. The British Open University helped to industrialize distance learning by mass producing and distributing education in Great Britain. This allowed teaching and learning to be disseminated to a large group of people in this region. Therefore, this made obtaining a quality education inexpensive, convenient, and affordable. In essence, this permitted everyone to have equal and quality access to obtaining a secondary education (Dzvismbo & Kariuki, n.d.).

To the contrary, the African Virtual University is located in a developing country. This institution has made huge strides in distance education. In Sub-Saharan Africa, this region is the most undeveloped place in the world when it comes to education. This region faces many obstacles, which ranges from inadequate access to having inferiority in education. Sub-Saharan Africa is not equipped with an adequate educational infrastructure, deficient in trained instructors, and scarce in educational resources (Cyranek, 2000). The African Virtual University has augmented the access to obtaining a tertiary education, and it has aided in advancing higher education initiatives in Africa (Juma, 2003). This was accomplished by facilitating knowledge across Africa, and by closing the digital divide between Africa and the rest of the world through the use of technology. By making use of the partnership institutions, blended and open learning programs, and embracing student-centered learning; this has helped this institution to facilitate the globalization and dissemination of information in a knowledge-based society (Juma, 2003).

## **Conclusion**

The Open University of the United Kingdom and the African Virtual University are two distinct types of educational institutions that exist in two different countries.

They vary based on mission and population served, inherent values, history and reason for existence, technology used, systems of operations, and model of teaching and learning. These organizations learned how to reduce costs, augment quality, and widen the access to obtaining a higher education. Moreover, these institutions focused on using the latest technology and pedagogical principles to drive the industrialization and globalization of distance education. Technology helped to mass produce and disseminate information to people in Africa and the United Kingdom. The distance education practices of these specialized institutions are helping their countries to meet the huge demand for higher education.



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