Management of Distance Learning Programmes for Effective Achievement of Objectives in the 21st Century – Nigeria Aas a Case Study

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Abstract

It is obvious that no country, anywhere, will be able to respond adequately to the demands for increased educational opportunity, or improve its quality of education by relying on conventional systems only. It is equally obvious that the application of distance education will help in accelerating human resource development by widening access to education in Nigeria. Many tertiary institutions in the country have embarked on distance education programmes, not because of the economic gains alone; but also in response to the increasing demand for further education by those new knowledge and skills in their areas of interest. This paper focused on ways to improve distance education administration, with particular reference to course development and production, students' supportive services and educators roles. In addition, the concept of distance education and its place in the National Policy on Education were discussed.

Key words: Distance Education, Management, Achievement of objectives and Effectiveness

1. **Introduction**

Education system the world over has witnessed tremendous structural changes and expansion. The role which education plays in national development is quite immense. The immensity of the role has prompted the successive governments in Nigeria since independence to accord it a high priority in the national discourse. The budgetary allocation, which is not commensurate with the demand for education, has caused severe setback in manpower development, hence, the imperativeness of distance education.

Adeyemi (2010), while cross-examining the issues affecting further development of education in the world today and Nigeria inclusive notes the following:
- Private demand for all types of education has far exceeded the provision of education services in the country.
- Educational system has not succeeded in adjusting teaching/learning conditions to the fast changing social environment. In other words, there has been disequilibrium between the educational output and the nation's manpower needs.
- The gap between the supply of and demand for the financial resources required to sustain the educational system is becoming wider and deeper.
    Distance education programmes are adequate when placed within the backdrop of an undeveloped economy lacking in skilled personnel. To this extent therefore, distance education (part-time) programmes are supplements to the conventional full-time education programmes.

In order to realize fully the potentials of the contributions of education to the achievement of the national goals and values, distance education has to be in operation, in view of the dwindling economy, organizations (private and public) hardly offer study-leave with pay, employees are only encouraged to improve their skills by registering for part-time training programmes, if they want to be abreast of new technologies and retain their jobs. Though numerous advantages accrue from distance education in Nigeria and other countries of the world, the administrative structure/ operational strategies in running it need special attention for desired results.

2.   **Concept of Distance Education**

The term "distance education" or "distance learning" has been applied interchangeable my many different researchers to a great variety of programmes, providers, audience and media. Its hallmarks are the separation of training learner in space and/or time (Perraton 1988), the volitional control of learning by the student rather than the distance instructor (Jonasser 1992), and non contiguous communication between standard and training, mediated by print or some form of technology (Abdullah, 2003; Jurich, 2003; Garrison & Shale, 1987 & Keegan, 1986).

In today's world, "Education off the main campus is known by many names: distance education, distance learning, virtual courses, Internet courses, satellite courses, cyber courses, and extended studies" Hoyle (2002). Adeyemi (2011), Oguntimehin and Adeyemi (2005),Abdullah (2003), Jurich (2003), Fagbamiye (2002) and Holmberg (1977) defines distance education as forms of study that are not led or controlled by teacher's present in classrooms or similar localities but nevertheless benefit from planning guidance and teaching of tutors. Distance Education in most cases implies that the students are responsible for the pace and completion of their studies.

Distance education is one of the greatest innovations in education industry the worldover. Adeyemi (2011) citing Fagbamiye (2002)and Merriam (2002) states that

> *…distance education has become popular because it has made it possible for large number of people in many countries, who might have been denied the opportunity of formal education to have access to quality education in spite of constraints of time and location. etc. pp 337-338.*

Nakabayashi (2003), Merriam (2002), and Keegan (1990) describes Distance education as a generic term that includes the range of teaching/learning strategies referred to as 'correspondence education' or 'correspondence study' as further education level in the United Kingdom. As 'home study' as 'further education level' and 'independent study' at higher educational level in the United States. As 'external studies' in Australia; and as 'distance teaching' or 'teaching at a distance' by the Open University of the United Kingdom. In French it is referred to as 'tele-enseignement'; fernstudium/fermunterricht in German; 'educationa distancia' in Spanish and 'teleducacao' in Portuguese.

Adeyemi (2011), Nakabayashi (2003) and Dodds (1991) opines that distance education is any form of organized educational experience in which teaching and learning take place, with the teachers at a distance from the learners most of the time. It is a form of education that enables a limited number of teachers to reach a very large number of learners, which could pave ways to cost reduction.

At its simplest form, distance education can comprise a single teacher who develops and writes lessons or instructions and sends them to some students with questions, which the students answer once they have completed the lesson. The teacher sends back the corrections with comments to the students. While in its purest form, distance education requires no face-to-face interaction between the learner and the tutor and those involved in the general administration of learning. In principle, it thus means that the learner does not only have no face-to-face involvement with the tutor, but also that "the learner can be registered to undertake the learning, and, if appropriate, awarded a qualification without being in the same building as anyone associated with the organization offering the learning" (Chivers, 1999)

Perhaps, the most comprehensive general definition of distance education is that first proposed by Keegan (1980) and subsequently modified in 1986. Rumble (1991) quoting Keegan (1986) lists some principal characteristics of which he regarded as being essential for the definition of distance education as follows:
-        the influence of an education organization which distinguishes it from private study;

- the use of technical media, mainly print to unite teachers and students and carry the educational content;
- the provision of two-way communication so that students may benefit from or even initiate dialogue participation;
- participation in the most individualized form of education;
- the separation of teacher and student which distinguishes it from the traditional face-to-face lecturing;
- the possibility of occasional meeting of both didactic and socialization process; and
- the privatization of learning (in that learning occurs away from group).

3.   **Distance Education and Nigeria Philosophy of Education**

Formal education, popularly called western education dated back to 1842 in Nigeria. Since then, western education has been very costly and unbearable for an average Nigerianand with rising social demand for education. It is noteworthy that the Federal Government of Nigeria with time came to realize that formal education should not be an individual or private enterprise. This thought gave rise to a seminar of experts in education and other interest groups in 1973, under the chairmanship of Chief Adebo, S. O. The National curriculum conference of 1969 was a prelude to experts' seminer of 1973. Their recommendations gave birth to the much-valued document known as National policy on Education (NPE) of 1977, and revised in 1981, 1998 and another new edition in 2004 respectively. As a National Policy on Education, it also served as a vehicle for achieving government's national objectives through the medium of education.

The five main national goals of Nigeria, which have been endorsed as the necessary foundation for the National Policy on Education, are the building of
- a free and democratic society;
- a just and egalitarian society;
- a united, strong and self-reliant nation;
- a great and dynamic economy; and
- a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens.
  Naturally, everyone need education, either for its theoretical values or for its practical and economic values, even for both reasons. As a result of this realization, the Nigeria National Policy on Education, which is hinged on the philosophy of life-long education, stipulates the following as the objectives of adult and continuing education (as form of distance education).
(a)   to provide functional literacy education for adults who have never had the advantages
(b)   to provide functional and remedial education for those young people who prematurely dropped out of the formal school system.
(c)   to provide further education for different categories of completers of the formal education system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills.
(d)   to provide in-service on-the job, vocational and the practical training for the professionals in order to improve their skills; and
(e)   to give the adult citizens of the country necessary aesthetic, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment

The Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) which also has the national objectives as its substratum, placed emphasis on the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and equal educational opportunities for all citizens of the nation. In addition, the NPE (2004) stated that "government will implement the policy by encouraging the use of modern educational techniques and encouraging individuals in combing work with study" or "embarking on full-time employment without including the prospect of resuming studies later on". In response to the philosophical basic of the National Policy on Education and to ensure equal educational opportunity for all citizens, distance education has to exist.

Adeyemi (2011), Jurich (2003) and Okike (1997) identifies the aims of distance education in contemporary society as follows:

- to encourage and widen the dimension of research;
- to advance the frontiers of learning;
- to promote the expansion of knowledge;
- to enhance people's right to education at all levels, according to UNESCO Declaration of Human Right in Education;
- to assist both illiterate and semi-illiterate youths and adults realize their educational potentials.
- to create consciousness and awareness needed to mobilize the people for giving collaborative action through learning and doing; and
- to bring about a change of system that will benefit the individual as well as the collectivity.

Nwanchukwu (1991) opines that

> ... ... by rational extension, national development
> Presupposes personal development of the individuals which
> Connotes intellectual, moral and physical development of
> a person, based on the theoretical and practical reason
> for education pp. 33.

Oguntimehin and Adeyemi (2005) and Nwosu (1997) summarizes the objectives of Distance Education in Nigeria as follows:

i.   To enrich and develop the individual mentally and physically.
ii.   To satisfy the national desire to educate every citizen as persons of worth both inside and outside the formal school system.
iii. To satisfy personal desire for education inspite of out-of-school constraints.
iv.   To build a strong united and egalitarian democratic and just society of successful people through Distance Education learning
v.   To supply the needed high level and middle level and educated manpower for social reconstructions and national development through distance education.
vi.   To break the myth of remoteness of education based on full-time educational techniques and compliment the government in the encouragement of self-learning through extra moral and distance education.

In line with the philosophy of National Policy on Education (2004) distance education is expected to develop the individual who should contribute to national development.

A few of these distance education programmes include:

(a)   The Correspondence and Open Studies unit (COSIT) of the University of Lagos, which handles both diploma and first-degree courses.
(b)   The National Teachers' Institute, Kaduna, which handles Grade Two Teachers' Certificate (Gr.II) and Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) programmes.
(c)   The centre for Sandwich Progrmmes (CESAP) of Olabisi Onabanjo University, which handles diploma and first-degree courses.
(d)   The Abia State University's Institute for Distance Education, which runs first degree courses by distance learning.
(e)   The Distance Learning Centre of University of Abuja.
(f)   The University of Ibadan's External Studies' Degree Progrmme.

4. Managing and Improving Distance Education for the Achievement of Objectives

In any distance education system, the following areas must exist

- Central academic faculties, schools, and departments, responsible for curriculum development and the development of materials. The may be assisted by specialists in educational technology.
- A Department organizing the tutorial and other local services provided to students and enquiries. This usually consists of a small central co-ordinating section and decentralized offices at local level;
- A production department, covering print, audio, video, etc (including editing designing and production);
- A distribution department (warehouses mailing facilities, etc);
- An administration unit, covering finance, personnel, data processing, estates and buildings, secretariat, and student administration (Rumble, 1992).

Fagbamiye (2000) observes that:

> *The organizational structure of the Open University is similar to that of the traditional university. It is usually governed by Council Senate and various committees. Nevertheless, there are some far reaching difference in the actual administration of single mode distance education institution partly because open universities have regional units which coordinate the activities of study centers and perform some of the functions of the headquarters and partly because cooperative work group are more in evidence in the single mode distance education institution. Teamwork is certainly more evident in distance learning institution pp 339-340*

The success of any organized programme depends solely on the management strategies. Management is the process of planning, organizing, leading and controlling the efforts of organizational members and the use of other organizational resources in order to achieve stated objectives. Organizational resources in this context encompass, within the armpit of men, money machines and materials. These resources must by combined and utilized in a given way by people in order to achieve set goals.

In managing distance education therefore, the following functions have to be planned, implemented and assessed: course development, course presentation, teacher-student contact, student evaluation, motivation and counseling. These functions, to some extent, determine the structure of administration in distance education institutions.

4.1. Course Development and Production

Wills (1992) identifies four parts of instructional development for distance education, these are design, development, evaluation and revision.

With regards to these, special attention must be paid to:

- Range of courses available: This should be made relevant to the needs and demands of the students and the society at large.
- Quality of academic staff involved must be competent in terms of qualifications required and the display of professional competence at all times.
- There should be ontext compliance with curriculum, in reference to coverage and objectivity. This should be such that will affect positively what is to be taught in the course programme.
- Printing-legibility: Materials that will serve the purpose of instruction should be bold enough for average readers to use. Also, attention must be paid to colour separation, paper durability, design layout (which will appeal to the students) and binding style.

- Presentation-sequence of the chapters and topics, brevity, clarity of expression, easy comprehension and relevant illustrationare the various aspects of the content of the course materials that due cognisance must be given.
- Self evaluation-statement of behavioural objectives exercise and solutions to problems. These will enable the students prepare for lessons on their own and also do self evaluation as effectively as possible.
- Availability and affordability relative cost and external production facilities and delivery of material to schedule.
- Editing of use of English (grammar\tenses) avoidance of typographical errors: These will make the materials to be used to be reader friendly.
- Dynamism-current information, ability to meet future challenges, educative and entertaining.
- Referencing: Copyright(originality)authenticity of referencing and aid to other sources msut be ensured

4.2. Students' Supportive Services

The main goal of education, whether through conventional or distance learning, is the production of "the total man" an individual who is not only useful to himself, but also useful to the society in which he\she lives. The 'Educational services' may be secondary in teaching-learning processes, but their absence could jeopardize the realization of the main goal of education. Education service, viewed from administrative perspective is the provision of the following service: guidance and counseling, library, health, co-curricular\recreational etc. Some of the under mentioned points as stated by Adeyemi (2011) citing Rumbles (1992), should be noted for consideration:

- range of services available relative to needs and demand
- proportion of clients aware of the services available;
- accurate comprehensive information in all handbooks circulars, etc. set
  to students.
- number of students taking up the services;
- rapid and courteous treatment of all enquiries whether by letter, telephone or in person;
- The accurate maintenance of student records, including courses statuses;
- analysis of student complaints on services;
- number of reason for detected administrative errors;
- the proportion of tutors and guidance counselors attending briefing, and training sessions; etc

The operators of distance education might concentrate on the quality of the learning materials alone, since these are the most visible part of the teaching learning activities. Rumble (1992), citing Sewart (1989), observes that "the production of a standard high class package of learning materials through a quasi-industrialized process in no way guarantee learning on the student … there is a need for interaction between students and or between students and teachers in order that the experience of the teaching package can be properly obtained". Sherry (1996) corroborating Sewart (1989), opines that successful distance education system involve interactivity between teacher and students, between students and learning environment and among student themselves, as well as active learning in the classroom. It is therefore imperative for distance education managers to design means of making the social interactions between students and those they meet or communicate with, such as the tutors, guidance counselors, administrative personnel.

4.3. The Distance Learning Educators

All the teachers involved in training the distance students must be certified for the appropriate grade level, knowledgeable in their areas of discipline and trained in effective distance education strategies. Jayeola-Omoyeni (2000) citing Race (1989) summarized the may which tutor can assist the distance learner, they are as follows

- Try to understand the feelings of the learners and the problems faced by them

- Be a good listener to their problems and help solve their individual problems and to guide them to study diligently and with less difficulty.
- Offer them whatever help that is required. Encourage them whenever possible, to ask for help so that they will not feel studying in isolation.
- Ask them to form study groups and the group members can mutually arrange to meet and help each other in their studies.
- Explain to them the role of the tutor is there to help them, not only to assess or grade their intellectual ability.
- Build their confidence in their studies by assuring them that the tutor is only a telephone call away and help can be obtained either over the telephone or during the contract session.
- Tutor should not fall into the trap of delivering lectures at tutorials. Scholosser and Anderson (1993) identify the new skills which teachers must learn as they assume the role of distance educators:
- Understanding the nature and philosophy of distance education
- Identifying learner characteristics at distance sites;
- Designing and developing interactive courseware to suit each new technology,
- Adapting teaching strategies to deliver instruction at a distance;
- Organizing instructional resources in a format suitable for independent study.
- Training and practice in the use of telecommunication systems.
- Becoming involved in organization, collaborative planning, and decision making
- Evaluating student achievement, attitudes, and perceptions at distance sites
- Dealing with copyrights issues
  The underlisted observed anomalous behaviours of some distance learning tutors should be discouraged if the desired results are to be achieved
- Compulsory asking the students to buy "handouts and or textbooks at exorbitant prices, these are in addition to the authorized materials provided by the respective institution.
- Irregular attendance at lectures
- Coming to read modules during tutorials
- Impolite \ derogatory speeches
- Sexual harassment

4.4. Students' Academic Assessment

The main purpose of learning is to have an expected outcome, therefore, learning cannot be said to have taken place if these outcomes are not, observed in the learners. In Nigeria education system, students are evaluated through 'continuous assessment' pattern, embracing marks, on class tests, practicals, assignments and examinations. The computations of these marks, with the examination having the lion portion of between 60-70%, are used for certification at the end of the progrmme.

This type of assessment was informed by the fact that a single sessional or terminal examination for students on the subjects\course cannot test the true knowledge of the subjects\courses of such students. Dada (1987) explains that teachers, lecturers, examination bodies, parents, sponsors, ministers and indeed learners, all base their judgments concerning the quality of educational outcomes most of the time on the performance of examinations. Students, both full-time and part-time consequent upon this strive to put in their best in examinations, including adopting unacceptable means to pass at all cost.

Distance education operators need to consider some factors militating against proper conduct of assessment\examinations. Chacko (1981), identifies a sitting pattern for conductive examination as:
- Understanding that students have to be tested under relaxed and conductive condition.
- Remembering that the purpose of testing was to collect data and not to instruct.
- Being thorough in the invigilation and marking

5.   **Summary and Conclusions**

Distance education has been in existence for many years. It involves obtaining knowledge outside the conventional learning institutions. The provision of distance education programmes in many Nigeria's tertiary institution is in pursuance of life-long education policy of the Federal Government. These opportunities are mainly to remove deficiencies and to keep abreast of the technological advancement, so as to transform individuals' life.

Any learning institution that aims to operate without the regular face-to-face contact between the students and tutors will have to be well thought out and structured. Many matters relating to organization of the distance learning system have to be explained clearly, especially when writing the course contents. The learning materials will have to be well designed and presented logically, because, the learners and the tutors are not in regular dialogue with each other. The tutors, in addition to being effective and efficient in teaching strategies of instructions at a distance should be motivators and of sound human relations practitioners.

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