The Multi-Tasking Role of Non-Teaching Staff in an E-Learning Programme of a Dual Mode Institution- Babcock University

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ABSTRACT

The success of any dual mode institutions cannot be permutated without the supporting role of non-teaching staff. Today, millions of people are enrolled as students in dual mode institutions all over the world and Nigeria is not left out. The number of qualified candidates who cannot be absorbed into the Nigerian tertiary institutions keeps soaring yearly. This paper examines the multitasking role of non-teaching staff in dual mode institutions, benchmarks for dual mode instutions, and why Babcock University is keying into it and made robust recommendations which include making available training and retraining of staff, stable power upply and High-Speed Internet services which will make for an excellent e-Learning experience(Dual Mode).

Keyword: Multitasking Role, E-Learning, Dual Mode Institutions

INTRODUCTION

Coursera to Edx, MIT Open ware down to the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), learning, education, instruction, training and knowledge is now accessible, affordable (sometimes at no financial cost like in the case of Coursera and other openware courses) flexible and without barrier. This is electronic learning (e-learning), also referred to as **enhanced** learning. Electronic-learning is not learning about electronics but learning about any subject that can be studied (including elect/elect) via electronic platforms like laptops, tablets, mobile devices, smart-phones, etc. Again we can see e-learning simply as Information and Communication Technology (ICT) based learning. It is education coming to you right where you are in your homes, in your offices and at any point in the world most of the time via the Internet (Okonkwo, 2012).

The multi-tasking role of non-teaching staff in a dual mode institution-the Babcock experience is a topic that in itself has classified Babcock mode of e-learning delivery. Dual mode e-learning delivery is a flexible form of electronic learning where conventional campus-based universities offer opportunities for distance learners to take the same courses as on-campus learners and earn the same qualification. This mode as opposed to dedicated benefit is much and will be discussed in detail.

Non-teaching staffs are members of staff whose services are indispensable but they do not teach. Multitasking role on the other hand implies that they have many tasks to carry out which are critical to the survival and thriving of the institution. So in brief in a dual mode institution, like Babcock University, non-teaching staffs have many tasks to carry out in order to achieve and maintain excellence as a team.

WHY IS E-LEARNING IMPORTANT?

Today, millions of people are enrolled as students on Coursera, an e-learning platform where ivy league schools that may cost a fortune to attend such as Oxford, Yale, MIT are making courses available and accessible at no cost to all who care to learn. Today the world is a knowledge economy. It is what you are good at that gives you an edge (Nkuyubwatsi, 2014).

Many campuses are beginning to experience population explosion, some are simply trying to extend their services beyond the confines of the school walls or even continents, others want to engage in school to school collaborations, while many others have realized that ICT facilitated education is no longer an option. As such, for school proprietors, students, teachers and non-teaching staff, the answer is e-learning. To this end Babcock University, as an institution of verifiable repute, always blazing the trail in ICT based education is raising the horizon with the e-learning department.

TYPES OF INSTITUTIONS

- **Mono-Mode Institution:** A mono-mode institution is the institution that runs either only on-campus or distance learning.

On-Campus: the on-campus mode of learning involves a direct face-to-face interaction of both lecturers and students. This mode of learning involves little or no online presence. Lecturers sometimes use online presence to aid giving assessment to the students. It involves the student to be domiciled in the campus and use the facilities offered by the campus to learn. Most Federal Universities, all state universities, polytechnics and monotechnics in Nigeria all offer this mode of learning

Distance Learning: does not involve a face-to-face interaction of lecturers and students. The students are given lectures in printed form, CD, DVD or online and assessments are also given through the same means. They come face-to-face with the lecturers only if it's totally necessary especially when writing their examinations. Example of the institution running Distance Learning only is the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)

- **Dual Mode Institution:** is the institution that successfully combines both on-campus and distance learning. The dual mode helps cover up the disadvantages of either of the mono-modes of learning. Introduction of ICT to aid in supporting distance education has made learning more flexible and not to be limited to a particular place or venue. The use of ICT to aid learning is called 'virtual education', 'on-line education' or 'e-learning'.

  The distance learning part requires a lot of support from the library technologist, ICT experts in multimedia, Internet support, registry, bursary and other non-teaching staff. (Dence, 2009) For e-learning to work well in a dual mode institution the institution must take note of the following:
  - ➢ The students must have the right to choose if they want to do their programme on-campus or at distance and their learning experiences should not differ
  - ➢ Courses of the distance learning students should be tailored to their work needs and experiences. This will foster work-based learning
  - ➢ Students should be consulted and necessary feedbacks should be gotten from them to improve the learning experience of the students
  - ➢ The ICT services must be at their best to provide a rich e-learning experience for the students. Students should also be encouraged and advised on the IT tools they'll need to get optimum service. (Dence, 2009)

The University of Phoenix is one of the successful dual mode institutions that have been around for more than 15 years now. Courses run for a certain number of weeks with the first and last week involving face-to-face discussion while the remaining weeks involves online training (Hope, 2005). This helps the teacher to know the needs of the students at the beginning of the class and make modifications as needed. The face-to-face meetings at the end of each class also afford the teacher the opportunity to get feedback after the end of the course.

WHY DUAL MODE INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA?
The Vanguard of Thursday, July 3rd 2014 gave the 2013 figures of 520,000 students in 128 Nigerian universities. The total number of applications into these universities for that same year totaled 1.7 million applicants.

Tertiary institutions in Nigeria in past have had to admit more students beyond their quota going against the policy of the Nigeria University Commission (NUC) due to pressures from desperate applicants. This has also led to classroom over-crowding and inadequate facilities leading to falling standards of education in these universities (ADESULU, 2014).

The Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) encourages Nigerian tertiary institutions to explore the dual mode of content delivery. This will cater for those excess students who meet the entry requirements of the university and who also have their desired course of study but are deprived due to the large population. This will also meet the needs of those already working and desire to study at the same time (NUC, 2014).

Currently we have four institutions currently running the dual mode of education in Nigeria are:
- University of Ibadan
- University of Lagos
- Obafemi Awolowo University
- University of Abuja (Ipaye, 2014).

Although various other sources claim more than four institutions but till date there are no available comprehensive data on that. NUC notes that the above afore mentioned universities have not actively been using e-learning to help aid their teaching. Most of them run this programme just like the part-time/sandwich programme. NUC has advised that face-to-face interaction at the universities should be minimized to the barest minimum and online system should be greatly used to deliver contents to the students (NUC, 2014).

WHY DUAL MODE AT BABCOCK UNIVERSITY?

Babcock University started September 17th 1959 as Adventist College of West Africa. In May 1999 it received the charter to become a full-fledged university admitting 1006 students as the first intake. Since 1999 Babcock has grown considerably in student population course offerings and physical infrastructure. Babcock University has a student population of over 8000 students, which places a high demand on the university to maintain and upgrade the standard of the quality education (Babcock, 2014).

There is a lot of pressure to go beyond the NUC quota due to the high demand for some particular courses of study. For example, in 2014 there were over 300 applicants for the Medicine & Surgery degree programme but only 50 could be admitted even though almost all applicants met the requirements. (Babcock University Registry data)

Some eligible students do not get offered the desired programme of their choice at the time of admission. They are either offered another programme or are turned down from getting admission.

The suggested solution is to this is for Babcock University to move from its traditional on-campus mode of content delivery to a dual mode using online and ICT tools for effectiveness. The dual mode positions the university to:

- Cater for a large number of students without having to build additional classrooms
- Have access to a large wealth of knowledge from bank of research data from students' projects
- Lecture large number of students with fewer lecturers
- Increase its financial resources with the larger number of students enrolled and paying.
- Increase the wealth of knowledge available to the on-campus students through access to online courseware for distance learning students.
- Better preparation for classes because of online archived courseware.
- Become attractive to professionals in the marketplace given the opportunity for self-development without having to resign their jobs.

THE ROLE OF NON-TEACHING STAFF-BABCOCK UNIVERSITY

The non-teaching staff is responsible for the infrastructural setup and on-going maintenance of the dual mode system. Included in this cadre of staff are; ICT specialists, Registry staff, Librarians, Student Support services staff, academic counselors, course advisors, financial administrators and secretaries at the schools and departmental levels. The library technologists run and maintain the online library for the dual mode. ICT experts in multimedia are deployed to provide online support for the different formats of online delivery of courseware. Any chosen online learning platform, be it Module or Blackboard requires the presence of technicians to assist the lecturer in the analysis of contents of class discussion by students. Levels of individual participation by students for assessment points will also require constant monitoring by the lecturer and those who provide assistance in this area. Increased volume of the number of students will equally require additional attention from registry administrators to answer questions and meet other demands. The bursary or financial affairs unit of the university monitors the financial compliance of the students. Academic counselors and course advisors still function with the virtual university to provide guidance and support for the students during their stay in the university system.

In the case of Babcock University, the same non teaching staff that handles the on campus mode are also the ones required to handle the online distance learning mode. Hence the multi-tasking roles of the non-teaching staff are an administrative necessity that requires dedicated workers with great financial incentives. This implies the staff is dealing with physical as well as virtual transactions with different types of students. The university currently has an online university information management system (UMIS) for registration processes, results monitoring and lecturer grades inputting functions. The same non-teaching staff handling the on campus students are required to work with online students in the virtual university.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To effectively run this dual mode delivery system in Babcock University, we need to take note of the following:

- Uninterrupted power supply on the systems that hosts the contents to be delivered to students
- Availability of high-speed Internet services all around the institution to aid in content delivery and also accessing of content.
- A robust financial investment in e-learning, which will yield large returns at the long-run.
- Procurement of software packages and ICT equipment for servicing the e-learning programme.
- Proper training and re-training of non-teaching staff in current trends of e-learning
- Employing experts on e-learning to train new staff

- Creating an efficient database of all the students, their different mode of study and their financial standing at any given point in time
- Creating an efficient portal for registration, accessing of assessment and result uploading for students in the e-learning mode
- Quality assurance monitoring team to monitor the quality of service delivery to both modes of learning, ensuring that neither modes suffers as a result of undue attention paid to one to the detriment of the other.

CONCLUSION

A transition from a mono-mode to a dual-mode university will open many doors of opportunities for Babcock University. However, the university should be prepared to invest heavily on e-learning while the non-teaching as well as teaching staff should be prepared to take up additional responsibilities. The benefits of pursuing this line of action for content delivery by the university far outweigh the disadvantages. The dual mode is the way of the future if embarked upon with boldness and tenacity.

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