



CHALLENGES OF DISTANCE LEARNING: IMPLICATION FOR BUSINESS EDUCATION

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Abstract

Open and Distance Learning (ODL), also known as Distance Education (DE) is one of the most rapidly growing fields of education in recent time. Distance education has experienced remarkable growth in national and international scenes since the early 1980s. In spite of recent phenomenal developments in the world of electronic networks, especially the recent global attention to the Internet, which has provided the primary technological thrust, several other emerging technologies have also promised to change the landscape of business education in general, and distance education in particular drastically. The field of distance education is therefore, at the centre of dynamic growth and change. This paper focused on challenges of distance learning: implication for business education. It examined the concept of distance learning and its objectives, concept of business education and its goals and challenges encountered by business educators in distance learning. Conclusion was drawn and it was recommended amongst others that, the increase in the number of tutorial centers, allotment of enough time, enhancement of the promotion service offered, and well-organized learning modules are all necessary preconditions for launching any given distance education program.

Keywords: *Open, Distance, Learning, Business Education.*

Introduction

Distance learning has experienced remarkable growth both in national and international scenes since the early 1980s. It has transformed from early correspondence education status, using primarily print-based materials into a worldwide movement using various modern technologies. In spite of recent phenomenal developments in the world of electronic networks, especially the recent global attention to the Internet, which has provided the primary technological thrust, several other emerging technologies have also promised to change the landscape of education in general, and distance education in particular drastically. The field of distance education is therefore, at the centre of dynamic growth and change. McIsaac and Gunawardena (2001) further observed that the directions which distance education takes will depend on such factors as the development of new media and computing technologies, different methods of group learning and information gathering, and the development of government telecommunications policies.

As a force contributing to social and economic development, distance learning is today one of the most rapidly growing fields of education and training. It is fast becoming unaccepted and indispensable part of the mainstream of educational systems in both



developed and developing countries, with particular importance for the latter (UNESCO, 2000a). Immense attention is given to distance learning to meet the educational needs of the adult population, with a view to providing new and alternative learning opportunities for those who were initially deprived of them, or who, for one reason, or another, did not make use of them.

UNESCO (2005) continues to strengthen the role of open and distance learning in the diversification of educational delivery systems, remarkably, for technical and vocational education, encouraging co-operation and partnership between enterprises, professional bodies and distance teaching institutions. Support is also given to open and distance learning to meet the needs of the disabled, migrants, cultural and linguistic minorities, refugees, populations in crisis situations, who cannot be efficiently reached by traditional delivery systems.

The potential benefits of distance learning to the development of higher education is fully recognized and supported by UNESCO. In their efforts to make wider use of distance education to expand access to advanced learning and improve its efficiency, private institutions are assisted, among other things, by providing them with support in the initiation and development of open university schemes and other higher education programs making use of distance education.

Concept of Distance Learning

No definition has been found to be exhaustive in attempting to define open distance learning. Rather, there are several approaches to defining the term. According to UNESCO (2002), the term open and distance learning represents approaches that focus on opening access to education and training provision, freeing learners from the constraints of time and place and offering flexible learning opportunities to individuals and groups of learners. Creed (2011) defined distance education as an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone far removed in space and/or time from the learners. Thus, the concept of distance learning suggest an educational approach designed to reach learners in their homes/offices/shops and so on, provide learning resources for them to qualify without attending formal classes in person, or create opportunities for lifelong learning, no matter where or when they want to study. Hulsmann (2007) had approached the definition of the concept of distance learning from the characteristic point of view. He identified four crucial features of distance education as follows:

- a. The separation of the teacher and the learner in time or place, or in both time and place.
- b. Influence of an educational institution: necessity for institutional accreditation of programmes and courses.



- c. The use of technical media: involving mixed media courseware such as print, radio and television broadcasts, video and audiocassettes, computer band learning and telecommunications.
- d. The provision of two-way communication: allowing for interaction between learners and tutors either synchronously or asynchronously, as opposed to the passive receipt of broadcast signals.
- e. Possibility of face-to-face meetings for tutorials, learner-learner interaction (self-help study groups), library study, laboratory and practice sessions.
- f. Use of industrialized processes; that is, in large scale open and distance learning operations, labour is divided and tasks are assigned to various staff working together in course development teams.

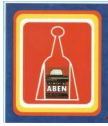
Objectives of Distance Learning

Aderinoye, (2008) outlined the following objectives of distance learning:

- a. To equip the adult with everything he needs for life in order to be relevant to his society by helping to solve some of its problems.
- b. To provide functional literacy education for adults who have never had the opportunity to any for education.
- c. To get the adult, either as individuals or as a group, to learn and through learning to change their attitude and behavior and improve personal lives.
- d. To help in reducing the level of ignorance and illiteracy which causes industrial labour shortage in the country?
- e. To help communities with lower literacy rate among their adult populations grow their general economies and reduce poverty in the country.
- f. To assist adults in attaining higher levels of literacy, so that they can find better paying jobs and improve overall community health and family lives.
- g. To give adult citizens of the country aesthetic, cultural and civil education for public enlightenment

Concept of Business Education

Business education is a component of vocational technical education programme that prepare individual for career in business and also to be an intelligent consumer of economic goods and services. Business education provides students with the needed competencies, skills, knowledge, understanding and attitudes to perform as workers in industries, civil service and also as proprietors of business. Nwachukwu (2012) saw business education as an umbrella name concerning those educational processes involving the study of techniques, related science and acquisition of practical skills attitudes and knowledge relating to occupation in vocational sectors of the economy and social life of people. Business education prepares beneficiaries for gainful employment



and sustainable livelihood. It is generally seen as education for and about business. Business education for business is that aspect of vocational education which provides instruction and preparation for office occupations such as secretary, shorthand-typist or stenographer, bookkeeper, data processor, word processor, computer analyst and accountant. On the other hand, education about business provides knowledge and understanding of the economic, financial, marketing, accounting, management system and other branches of business endeavour. In other words, education about business prepares students to function intelligently as consumers and citizens in a business economy.

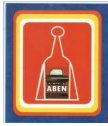
Amoor (2010) noted that business education plays a significant role in the economic development by providing knowledge and skills to the learners, thereby, enabling them to adequately impart knowledge into others, and handle sophisticated office technologies and information systems. The goal of business education is primarily to produce competent, skillful and dynamic business teachers, office administrators and businessmen and women that will effectively compete in the world of work. It has as its primary aim, the preparation of people for roles in enterprises such roles could be as employee, entrepreneur and employer or simply as self employed.

Goals of Business Education

Obi and Otamiri (2010) summarized the actual and operative goals of business education as enunciated in the handbook of various Department of Business Education to include:

- a. To produce efficient and effective management, secretarial, accounting and marketing managers
- b. To produce lecturers who will handle business and related courses in our universities and colleges.
- c. To propagate the development of the business thought and philosophy in business and management.
- d. To prepare people for self-employment in situations where there is no available paid employment..
- e. To develop in the student's requisite skills and expertise in management of both private and public enterprise and arm them with the analytical ability needed to meet the growing challenges of present and future Nigerian and international environment.
- f. To prepare and equip those who pass through the programme to be able to establish and run their own private business ventures as self-employed citizens of the society.

The stated objectives of business education in distance learning can only be achieved successfully when student of the programme are well taught on the ethics of the



profession. Since business education involves the study of the technologies and related science and the acquisitions of practical skills including teaching skills, the right attitude, understanding and knowledge related to the occupation in various sectors of the economy and social life in the global world, need to be taught.

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Challenges of Distance Learning

Distance learning in business education has come with it some challenges that must be met by business educators in order to achieve its general aims and objectives. Singh, (2012) posited that common problems identified in distance education include the need for face to- face tutorial support (which is expensive) and course material development (which is often unreliable and unsustainable). The challenges include:

Internet Issue

Poor internet connectivity constitutes a threat to the smooth operation of an online project. Though the university has made a significant breakthrough in this regard, occasional erratic functionality often creates dysfunction for the users. Moreover, while accessibility is not a major threat to the staff and faculty members, the same could not be said for the students.

Instructor incompetence in using online platform



Closely related to the internet issue is the instructor incompetence in using online platforms. Most practicing business educators are unaware of the existence of web facilities, and even fewer are efficient users. E-teaching platforms are unfamiliar to a large percentage of instructors who are already deeply entrenched in the traditional face-to-face delivery mode.

Technical Challenges

The availability of technicians to provide logistical support to faculty members is another challenge. Many business educators are still in the early stages of using a computer effectively. Even after some instructors have completed their content creation exercise, uploading the content to the drop box is a daunting task.

Lack of Face-to Face Interaction with fellow students,

The fear expressed by students concerning the lack of face-to-face interaction with fellow students shows the need for cooperative learning and peer group interaction among the students.

Lack of Face-to-Face Interaction with Lecturers

The students may have trouble in self-evaluation because of lack of face-to-face interaction with their lecturers. This could be likely attributed to ignorance of the elements involved in e-teaching and to the separation from teachers, who they are accustomed to seeing in traditional physical face-to-face instruction.

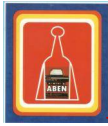
Inadequate Electrical power Supply

Ironically, erratic electrical power supply was ranked among the challenges. Power supply is a national challenge in Nigeria, and it was expected to be rated as a major challenge. The students' opinions may be related to the presence of an alternate power supply, which many students cannot afford.

Extremely High Operating Costs

Operating Distance Learning (DL) is a capital-intensive project. Funding is needed for many areas: purchasing technology such as Internet facilities and computer systems, both hardware and software; remuneration to instructors and supportive staff; and equipment, building, and resource centres. The instructors are paid both for content development and for actual teaching. The school fees for distance learning are higher than those for live classes because of additional costs incurred in the programme development process.

Low Quality



Another challenge is the development of an inferiority complex among the online students compared to face-to-face students. In general, Nigerians tend to perceive online products as being of lower quality than the product of a face-to-face programme. This is another area for further research.

Technology Barriers

Some students attempt to participate in distance education without proper training of the tools needed to be successful in the program. Students must be provided with training on each tool that is used throughout the program. The lack of advanced technology skills can lead to an unsuccessful experience. Schools have a responsibility to adopt a proactive policy for managing technology barriers.

Institutional Challenges'

There may also be institutional challenges. Distance learning is new enough that it may be a challenge to gain support for these programs in a traditional brick-and-mortar academic learning environment. Furthermore, it may be more difficult for business educators to organize and plan a distance learning program, especially since many are new programs and their organizational needs are different from a traditional learning program.

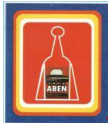
Implication on Business Education

The challenges of Open and Distance learning have some implications on Business Education in the following ways.

1. Poor Enrollment of Students into the programme: If ODL is not properly funded it will bring about poor or rather low enrollment of students into the programme.
2. Drop out of Students. Lack of equipments facilities to serve the entire population in the programme, erratic power supply, poor internet connectivity, instructional incompetence and so on will lead to student dropping out of the programme. Most of the students running this programme are working class student, if the programme is not meeting up to its objectives they will definitely drop out of the programme.

Conclusion

Open and distance learning in business education is important because it makes education accessible and reduces cost while maintaining quality. The use of distance education makes for equity of educational opportunities and services. It also improves the quality and variety of the resources and support available to learners while opening up new avenues to professional development. However, despite the innumerable advantages accruing from the aims and objective of ODL, achieving these can only be made possible when the problems of low teleDensity, electricity, inconsistency in programme and



policy implementation, poor economy, absence of trained teachers, poor postal system, bad public image, are no longer prevalent in the system.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

1. The government should subsidize ODL programmes and improve the electricity supply to the nation.
2. Management should admit students in line with the available resources on the ground and make the criteria for admission of students to be in line with conventional institutions.
3. Alongside the modes of delivery being used presently, course materials can be delivered through other interactive media like radio, TV etc which are more accessible to ODL learners.
4. Intensification of distance education units in business education and ensuring that students have a suitable educational background when they join the specific program would make distance education more effective. In addition to this, it is good to try to make the system more flexible and use different information and communication technologies to support the distance education program.
5. Distance learners though outreach geographically, situation should be appropriate to keep them closer at least by providing them with all possible facilities that the regular program/ learners have access to. That is, proper counseling, tutorials, continuous assessment, library service and the like need to be provided in time. Modules should be prepared and distributed at the appropriate time.
6. To seriously undertake the program in a well-organized manner, students should be evaluated appropriately, and the process of grading of students performance should be taken seriously. In general, proper policy, awareness raising, good organization and well-considered utilization of man power would make the distance education program effective and efficient.
7. The increase in the number of tutorial centers, allotment of enough time, enhancement of the promotion service offered, and well-organized learning modules are all necessary preconditions for launching any given distance education program. Attractive pay for tutors, as well as better awareness and support from education bureau would make distance education more successful and attractive.
8. There should be a transformation of methodology from a teacher-dominated formal lecture to a learner-centered pedagogical approach. Awareness creation on the program details to tutors is important, and fundamental principles of the methodology are, therefore urgently required.



9. Frequent and continuous evaluation, limiting overstretching of tutors with regard to workload and feedback on assignments would make the program more effective. It is indicated that the most important strategies are to plan, implement, monitor and update the way we offer the training.
10. To use various types of communication media to argument the effectiveness of distance education.
11. Devising procedures to force learners to do assignments by themselves would increase the academic performance of the learners and assure the quality of distance education.
12. Standardization of the learning modules should be given priority to safeguard the reputation of the distance education system.
13. In addition to this, the appointment of suitably qualified and trained business educators can raise the standard of the distance education system.

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