



WIDENING ACCESS TO BUSINESS EDUCATION PROGRAMME THROUGH DISTANCE LEARNING IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore ways of widening access to business education programme in Nigerian universities through distance learning. Specifically, the study presented some documentary evidence of access to university education from 2011 – 2013. The study also revealed access to business education programme by 2015 JAMB distribution with university of Nigeria having 189 candidates, University of Benin 104, university of Calabar 189, university of Ilorin 290, university of Lagos 305, University of Maiduguri 179, university of Uyo 89, Nnamdi Azikiwe University 217 and Ahmadu Bello University 173. The distribution confirmed the fact that the universities could not admit more than their carrying capacity in business education programme which was very discouraging. Therefore, the panacea to the problem is to widen access to business education programme in the universities through distance learning. The study further highlighted the relevance of distance learning education which includes access, social enhancement, and economic growth. It presented the strategies for widening access to business education programme in universities through distance learning synchronously and asynchronously. The study concluded that distance learning provides educational opportunities needed by anyone, anywhere and anytime and could be used for widening access to business education programme in universities in Nigeria. It was recommended among others that National Universities Commission (NUC), government, and other stakeholders should support the implementation of distance learning education in all universities as a means to widen accesses to university education in Nigeria.

KeyWords: *Access to University Education, Business Education Programme, Distance Learning*

Introduction

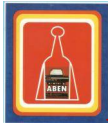
Globally, university education is seen as the apex institution of higher learning that provides training in all fields of human endeavours. University education refers to education given in universities to equip individuals with the necessary mental and intellectual skills that are useful in the society. Kyllonen (2012) stated that university education is important for any individual and also beneficial to economic development of any nation. In Nigeria, university education provides high-level skills and competences that are required for the labour market. These skills and competence from the universities produced trained manpower for the economy such as teachers, doctors, nurses, civil



servants, engineers, humanists, entrepreneurs, scientists, social scientists and other personnel. The trained manpower also develop the capacity and analytical skills that drive local or global economies, supports the civil society, teaches children, lead effective government services and make important decisions which affects the entire nation.

Research carried out revealed that university education provide the role of empowering domestic constituencies, building institutions and nurturing favourable regulatory frameworks and governance structures, which is critical to the individual's development as well as the socio-economic development of a country (Mbwette, 2013). There are other benefits of acquiring university education which include; better career opportunities, clear definition of career path, career advancements and enhancement of personal growth among others. The National Policy on Education reported that university education contributes to national development by intensifying and diversifying its programmes for the development of high level manpower within the context of the needs of the nation and making professional course content reflects the national requirements of the nation (FGN, 2013). Despite the numerous role of university education to the socio-economic development of Nigeria, access to it remains a challenge to the Nigerian populace. This is because the 41 Federal Universities, 25 States Universities, 61 Private Universities and 47 Approved affiliate University programme cannot provide admission to the huge population seeking admission into Nigerian universities. For instance, the National Universities Commission (NUC) reported that only four universities are offering distance learning programme in Nigeria, there are, University of Uyo, University of Sokoto, University of Maiduguri and National Open University of Nigeria.

Furthermore, there are many academic programmes in universities that provide skills and competence for economic development including business education that can be administered through distance learning. Business education is an educational programme offered in universities which prepares students for careers in business by inculcating skills, knowledge and competencies useful in the business world and the society at large. Business education programme empowers graduates with desired skills, knowledge and values that would make them to be self-employed or employable by others. Enang (2014) stated that business education is that part of vocational and technical education that provides knowledge, skills and competencies for a teaching career in academics, office occupation, business expertise and for self reliance. It is also geared towards facilitating graduate employment and is a relevant programme for human growth, development and sustainability of the Nigerian economy. However, access to business education programme in universities in Nigeria can be improved through distance learning. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore ways of widening access to business education programme through distance learning. Specifically, the study highlighted access to university education in Nigeria, distance learning as a



panacea to university education, relevance of distance learning to Nigerian education and strategies of widening access to business education programme through distance learning.

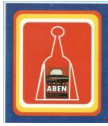
Access to University Education in Nigeria

Access to university education is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which prescribes that everyone has a right to education. It provides a guarantee for everyone entitled to university education to receive it. It is the right, opportunity or means of making education available within the reach of every citizen of a nation (Enaohwo, 2009). Okeke (2009) stated that access to university education means free unlimited, unhindered, and unfettered opportunities to university education to obtain knowledge, skills, and abilities available to optimally participate and contribute to development of the society. Okeke (2009) further maintained that this definition of access to education covers the threshold of access, enrolling, attending, completing and possibly transiting to the appropriate level of university education. Thus, lack of access to education means any of the following: failing to enrol in an educational institution; lack of opportunities to attend school regularly; does not complete the prescribed programme of study; does not have opportunities required to attain the deserved goals; and lacks opportunities to complete university education. According to Okebukola (2008), university education provides high level human resources for driving the economy and ensuring rapid societal transformation. That is, the greater the opportunity given to the citizenry for university education, the more expansive the horizon for rapid social and economic development. Okebukola (2008) further stated that this opportunity is the participation rate, which is defined as the proportion of 18-35 years age group that is enrolled in university education. It is also the carrying capacity of universities to the maximum number of students that the universities can sustain for quality education available based on human and material resources. In order to underscore the development that has taken place in university education in recent years, the picture of access in enrolment to university education in Nigeria is presented below:

Year	University Cumulative	Applicant	Carrying Capacity	Capacity Applicant
2010/11	112	1,493,611	450,000	30.13%
2011/12	117	1,503,933	500,000	33.25%
2012/13	128	1,735,729	520,000	29.96%

Source: Micaiah (2013)

From the above table, access to 112 Universities in 2010/2011 revealed carrying capacity of universities to 450,000 with 1,493,611 applicants. This means that only 30.13% of total applicants gained access to university education during that academic session. However, the percentage dropped to 29.96% in 2012/2013 academic session



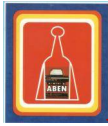
even though the carrying capacity increased to 520,000. It implied that even though applicants increased, the increase in university education capacity for the 2012/13 was insignificant which means limited access to university education.

Beyond the general access to university education, the distribution of business education programme for some selected universities in the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) of 2015 by Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) showed access to business education programme with university of Nigeria having 189 candidates, University of Benin 104, university of Calabar 189, university of Ilorin 290, university of Lagos 305, University of Maiduguri 179, university of Uyo 89, Nnamdi Azikiwe University 217 and Ahmadu Bello University 173. It is evidence that these universities cannot admit more than their carrying capacity in business education programme which is very discouraging. The solution to this problem is to widen access to business education programme in the universities through distance learning.

Distance Learning as a Panacea to University Education

Distance learning is the type of education that takes place where the teacher and students are separated by physical distance through the use of technological tools. The technological tools according to Koomson, (2009) include audio, video, text and print in conjunction with face-face communication used to bridge instructional gap. All over the world, access into university education remains a big issue and various governments have been trying to reduce this problem through distance learning. Distance learning is a channel for widening access to mass education. It is a field of education that focuses on teaching methods and technology with the aim of delivering teaching often on an individual basis, to students who are not physically present in a traditional setting such as the classroom. The National policy of education stated that distance learning is a mode of education delivery where learners and teachers are not in physical contact; enhances access to tertiary education and has the capacity to deliver variety of skills. It also uses a variety of media and technologies to provide quality education for large number of learners (FGN, 2013). The National Policy further reported that the goal of distance learning in Nigeria among others is to provide more access to quality education and equity in educational opportunity.

Distance learning includes the various forms of study at all levels which are not under the continuous, immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in lecture rooms or on the same premises, but which, nevertheless, benefits from the planning, guidance and tuition of a tutorial organisation. It could also refer to an educational approach in which there is a separation of the learner and the teacher in time and space. In distance learning, the instructor and the instructional strategy/methods are subsumed into the learning material popularly referred to as study materials that have been designed as a self-directed learning guide for the student. However, several authors



like Adebayo 2007; Alaezi 2005; Dodds 2005; Dhanarajan 2008; and Glen 2005 in their individual studies stated that distance learning is the type of education that takes place outside the conventional school system and an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone far removed in space or time from the learners. According to UNESCO (2002), distance learning is one of the most rapidly growing fields of education, and its potential impact on all education delivery systems has been greatly accentuated through the development of Internet-based information technologies, and in particular the World Wide Web. Distance learning focuses 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. In the context of this study, distance learning is that type of education that aims at increasing access to education for those who have difficulty in accessing it due to limited or carrying capacity of university admission. Distance learning is therefore, a means by which the teacher is taken literally to the student. It is a teaching and learning process in which students are separated from the teachers by a physical distance which is often bridged by communications technologies.

Generally, distance learning education courses are made up of a number of course components or learning materials which can include teaching texts, study guides, course guides, readers or anthologies, assignments, television broadcasts or videotapes, radio broadcasts or audiotapes, software or online information and data, CD-ROMS, textbooks and laboratory materials. Tuition materials are sent with questions to be answered, it could be recorded electronic materials and the students answered the questions at their spare time. In addition, some students support may be provided, either through personal communication at various universities centres or through online student tutors. However, the media used for distance learning and the student support arrangements affect the possible level of interaction in distance learning courses. Thus, distance learning serves as a panacea to widening access to university education.

Relevance of Distance Learning to University Education

According to Nwaocha and Iyama (2008) the relevance of distance learning to university education includes the following:

Access: Distance learning increases access to university education. People who would have found it impossible to attend the conventional school system benefit from distance learning. Many stakeholders in the education sector are interested in distance learning because it allows greater access to educational opportunities. This is in keeping with the stated objectives of the National Policy on Education that 'maximum efforts shall be made to enable those who can benefit from higher education to be given access to it. Such access may be through universities or correspondence courses or open universities or part time, e-learning and work study programmes (FGN, 2013).



Social Enhancement: Distance learning schemes hold a number of potential benefits for various stakeholders in the education and development process. Jimoh (2013) stated that distance learning means more freedom of access as well as a wider range of opportunities for learning and qualifications, thereby improving the social status of many offering the programme. It is often a cheaper means of attending school for the student since some people may not be able to leave their places of work to go to school full time. Men of the armed forces, security agencies and civil servants registered in large numbers for distance learning to enhance their employment growth and social status.

Economic Growth: Distance Learning is an avenue for institutions to improve their Internally Generated Revenue (IGR). It is also an avenue for many people to become learned and be better workers in any profession they choose or are currently engaged in. Students are allowed to read up to whatever level they want, hence contributing to the economical growth of the nation through better performance. For employers, distance learning offers the possibility of organising in-service training for their staff without necessarily releasing them for long periods of productive time. With sufficient number of employees being trained, distance learning is often the most cost-effective means. For the government and educational policy makers, the system is a panacea for the perennial problem of provision of equitable and accessible education in an affordable and cost effective way. Distance learning has also reduced poverty levels among teachers, since programmes are attended while at work. The government too incurs little cost on the training but develops the manpower to improve the economic situation of the nation. Jimoh (2013) asserted that distance learning helps extend the market for education to clientele who have not been previously served. The problem of unsatisfied demand for education versus actual supply of educational services contributed to the acceptance, growth, and implementation of distance education programme in Nigeria as a means to bridge the gap between demand and supply (Aderinoye and Ojokheta, 2004).

Strategies for Widening Access to Business Education Programme through Distance Learning

A wide range of technologies are available for the business educator to facilitate distance learning. Willis (2004) categorized them under voice, video, computer and print technology. Voice technology consists of instructional audio tools including interactive technologies of telephone, audio conferencing, and shortwave radio that can be used to facilitate the delivery of business education programme through distance learning. Passive technology includes one-way audio tools like tapes and radio that can also aid the delivery of business education programme through distance learning. Video technology include instructional video tools which include still images such as slides, pre-produced moving images (e.g., film, videotape), and real-time moving images combined with audio

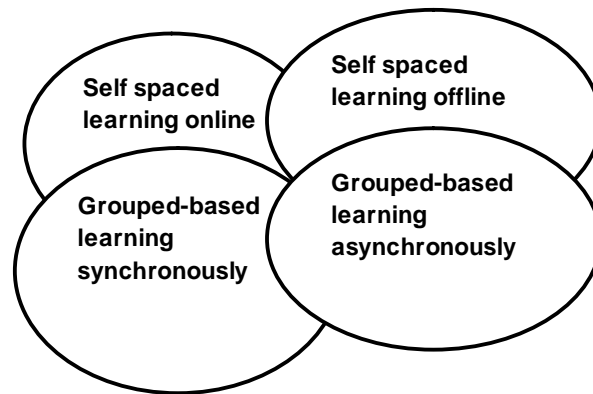
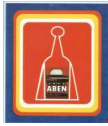


conferencing (one-way or two-way video with two-way audio). Computer applications for distance learning are varied and include Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) which uses the computer as a self contained teaching machine to present individual lessons; Computer Managed Instruction (CMI) that uses the computer to organize instruction and track student records and progress. The instruction itself need not be delivered via a computer, although CAI is often combined with CMI and Computer Mediated Education (CME) that facilitate the delivery of instruction and include electronic mail, fax, real-time computer conferencing, and World Wide Web applications. Print technology is also a foundational element of distance learning programme and the basis from which all other delivery systems have evolved. Various print formats are available including: textbooks, study guides, workbooks, course syllabi, and case studies that the business educator can use as a strategy to implement distance learning in the university system.

Generally, distance learning courses are made up of a number of course components or learning materials which can be used for business education programme and include teaching texts, study guides, course guides, readers or anthologies, assignments (with or without an accompanying tutor guide), television broadcasts or videotapes, radio broadcasts or audiotapes, software or online information and data, CD-ROMS, textbooks and laboratory materials. Tuition materials can be sent with questions to be answered, it could be recorded electronic materials and the business education students use it to practice at their spare time. In addition, some students support may be provided, either through personal communication at local universities or through online student tutors. Both the media used for distance learning and the student support arrangements affect the possible level of interaction in distance learning courses (Jimoh, 2013).

Furthermore, Wambugu and Kyalo (2013) observed that distance learning is changing the physical face of academic establishments in universities. Students can now learn from the comfort of their homes or offices with no need to commute to campuses. Cutting-edge data are easily accessible on compact discs (CDs), portable personal computers (PCs), and have taken the place of instantly obsolete books. Online classrooms and libraries are replacing traditional campus facilities. Rather than requiring students to travel to a specific physical classroom or library, the Internet has facilitated the delivery of unlimited learning resources to students. This too can be explored to facilitate the delivery of business education programme in universities through distance learning.

In modern times, other strategies for widening access to business education programme through distance learning can be carried out synchronously and asynchronously. The diagram below illustrates these strategies.



Source: Naidu (2008)

Synchronous and asynchronous communications are important strategies to use for widening access to business education programme through distance learning. This is especially critical for distance learners who are separated in time and place from their teachers, tutors and educational organisations. Greenhow, Robelia, and Hughes, (2009) stated that opportunities for communication and collaboration are not only uniquely important for distance learners but also important for full-time students in campus-based educational settings. Business education teachers may also find these attributes increasingly valuable in supporting their teaching strategies such as collaborative group work activities among their students. There is also now a substantial body of experience and literature according to Wenger (2007) which points to the role of online synchronous and asynchronous communication tools for building and promoting learning communities and communities of practice.

These attributes of synchronous and asynchronous tools can be organised and harnessed in a variety of ways and combinations to support learning and teaching formats. They include self-paced learning online and offline, and group-based learning synchronously and asynchronously (Naidu, 2008). These various modes of engagement and interaction oftentimes will also overlap and co-exist. Many of these learning and teaching opportunities are simply not possible in conventional campus-based learning arrangements, with large numbers and in distributed or distance education settings. Self-paced learning off line is possible with the help of CDs and DVDs, PDAs, and laptop computers which enable learners to readily access and use large amounts of information and rich data at their own time, place and pace, a lot more than what is possible via a printed resource. Self-paced learning online is possible with the help of a range of computer mediated communication technologies and networked resources such as online databases, the Internet and Web 2.0 technologies. These technologies allow users to engage and interact with subject matter content in a variety of ways and also at a pace that is convenient for individuals. The dynamics of learning are altered considerably



when learners are able to work in groups collaboratively. A wide range of technologies is becoming increasingly available to support group-based collaborative learning synchronously as well as asynchronously. Group-based learning in real time is possible with a range of audio, videoconferencing, and audio graphic technologies, and i-labs which facilitate remote control of laboratories over the Internet. Asynchronous group-based learning is possible through a plethora of online learning environments, discussion forums and Web 2.0 technologies which enable learners to work together from a place and time, and at a pace that is convenient for them (Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2009).

Conclusion

It can be concluded from this study that distance learning provides educational opportunities needed by anyone, anywhere and at anytime. It provides increased educational opportunities to a larger population in different situations and needs. Both students and employees with distance problems can benefit because it is more flexible in terms of time and can be delivered anywhere. Also with distance learning in universities, a larger number can have access to university education. Distance learning is important because it makes education accessible and reduces cost while maintaining quality. The use of distance learning education makes for equity of educational opportunities and services. It was based on this that this study explores ways of widening access to business education programme in Nigerian universities through distance learning.

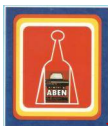
Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested:

1. In order to widen access to business education programme in universities through distance learning, there should be needs assessment concerning students' requirements for alternative courses and methods of instructional delivery of business education programme through distance learning.
2. Business education course content and delivery methods should also be evaluated to ensure that academic standards of regular business education programmes is comparable to courses in distance learning to ensure equal standards of delivery method.
3. National Universities Commission (NUC) should direct all universities that are running business education programme to commence distance learning to increase access in business education programme in the universities.
4. The government should subsidize distance learning programmes in all tertiary institutions in Nigeria as a way of widening access to business education to the institutions.

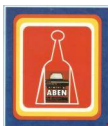


5. Other stakeholders like government, business groups, community leaders, teachers, students, and conventional institutions, UNESCO, and grassroots citizens should be involved in planning distance learning programme in universities as a way of increasing access to university education.
6. Access to educational opportunities for all is a major challenge facing many countries. Therefore, steps should be taken to implement distance learning which, no doubt, should be one of the means to increase and broaden access to university education and by extension business education programme.



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