



RESEARCH ARTICLE

DISTANCE EDUCATION AND HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper looked at Distance Education and Human Resource Development in Nigeria. It examined the history of distance education in Nigeria and its features. It also examined the benefits of distance education as well as its problems. It suggested various ways in which distance education can be improved in Nigeria in order to achieve a large quantum of human resource development, then the conclusions.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the bedrock of any nation or country, economically, socially and technologically. Education is the life wire of a nation. Time immemorial, education has been a means of human resources development, an instrument to enhance human capabilities; it enables individuals to make informed choice, expanding their horizons and opportunities and to have a voice in public decision making. Distance education is a field of education that focuses mostly on the pedagogy, technology and instructional system design that aim to deliver education to students who are not physical “on site” in a traditional classroom or campus. It is a process used to create and provide access to learn when the source of information and the learner are separated by time or distance or both. Distance education is the process of creating an education experience of equal quality for the learner to best suit their needs outside the classroom situation. Furthermore, the only current example of a dedicated distance education institution in Nigeria is the National Teachers Institute (NTI), which falls outside the universities system and colleges of education. Its entire institutional goals and infrastructure has been built up expressly to support delivery of distance education programmes to improve and upgrade the quality of the nation’s teaching force or education. Meanwhile, there are notable examples of distance education delivery forming part of a “dual-mode” institution. For instance, University of Port Harcourt distance education situated in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State; NwaforOrizu College of Education, Anambra State distance education; the Universities of Abuja and Lagos operate structured dual-mode distance education, etc. This kind of distance education is controlled by the institutions head: vice chancellor, provost, etc. However, this study suggest that distance education is a promising and practical dimension or strategy to address the challenge of widening access thus increasing the involvement of women, less

privileged ones, those in service in higher education, poverty reduction and empowerment.

History of distance education in Nigeria: The history of distance education can be traced from the first generation universities in Nigeria — University of Ibadan, Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), University of Nigeria Nsukka and the University of Lagos (UNILAG). Ahmadu Bello University, University of Ibadan provided courses in rural and agricultural extension to the large population of people in Nigeria who are mainly farmers in the early mid-1960s. However, the clientele of the University of Lagos was urban and extension courses, geared towards the attainment of university and professional courses. That university’s distance learning institute is an out-growth of earlier programmes supported variously and at different time by the international extension college in London, the Ford Foundation, UNESCO, and other donors. At ABU, the need to upgrade teacher’s qualifications and skill became a prime objective since, by the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was obvious that the northern part of Nigeria was lagging far behind the rest of Nigeria in the area. Thus, ABU’s institute of education introduced the Teacher In-service Education Programme (TISEP) to raise the quality and quantity of teachers in Northern Nigeria. At the end of TISEP studies, candidates sat for grade III or grade II teacher certificate. Later, when the National Council of Education ruled that the National Certificate of Education (NCE) to be minimum qualification for teaching at primary level, the institute started the NCE by correspondence programme. In 1974, the then head of state (Yakubu Gowon) announced government’s intention to introduce universal primary education. By 1976, it was clear that there was insufficient time to produce the estimated number of teachers to cope with demands of the programme. Distance education was considered the best means of supplying the required number of teachers.

Simultaneously, in the early 1970s to mid-1980s, distance education was gaining recognition internationally as a viable strategy for delivering large scale educational opportunity. In many countries, especially developing ones, it was seen as a panacea to the challenge of providing education at affordable costs. In Nigeria, this led to the establishment of the National Teacher's Institute (NTI) and recently the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). The NTI was the first institution specially established by Federal Government to provide distance education courses designed to upgrade under qualified and unqualified teachers. In line with the minimum qualification directive mentioned above, NTI also introduced the NCE by distance learning in 1990. Another historical step in Nigeria distance education was the initiative of Shehu Shagari to establish an open university, which was to be based in Abuja. However for various reasons and considerations, the scheme was scrapped by General Muhammadu Buhari. His government favoured a dual-mode set-up at the University of Abuja. The Centre for Distance Learning and Continuing Education (CDLCE) was mandated to provide a distance education component for every course that the University of Abuja would provide.

Features of distance education: The features of distance education can be seen or described in different approaches, dimension and operational pattern. The features are:

- **Outreach As Distance Education:**

- A strong trend amongst universities has been to establish "outreach" centres around the country, which have been generally described as distance education centres. These centres are established in towns that are far from main campuses. The major issue is to sub-contract tutors (part-time) organize face-to-face lectures and provide assessment of participants of learners after all, successful students are then awarded B. Ed., B. Sc., and NCE depending on the institution that set up the outreach.

- **Single-Mode Institution:**

- This can be described as dedicated Distance Education Institution; this kind of institution is set up by government (Federal) for example, National Teachers Institute, which falls, outside of the university or any institution of higher learning. Its entire institutional goal and infrastructure has been built up expressly to support delivery of distance education programmes to improve and upgrade the quality of the nation's teaching force.
- Distance education is predominantly for those in the labour force, women whose husbands may not allow them having direct education (schooling). It is imperative to note that distance education in Nigeria is majorly to cater for those who are not privileged or have limited access to the main campus education and the issue of upgrading of the existing workforce such as teachers with fewer certificates, however, this was the one issue that led to the establishment of National Teachers' Institute, Kaduna.

Mode of Administration: The administration of distance education in various centres is headed by centre managers in case of NTI, centre directors in case of National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). Some of the centre heads are not qualified to undertake such task thereby abusing the programmes. (Aguna 2006) stated that inadequate planning, recruitment of staff and non-utilization of experts to manage

the centres is affecting the proper implementation of the programmes.

Benefits of distance education in Nigeria: Some benefits of distance education are highlighted below:

- Distance education like National Teachers Institute (NTI) helps in upgrading under-qualified and untrained teachers.
- Organize workshop, seminar and conferences, which would assist in the improvement of teachers.
- Distance education such as National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), National Teachers Institute (NTI) and other distance learning programmes from various institutions of higher learning conduct examinations.
- Distance learning education programme such as NOUN and NTI and others carry out research in conjunction with other bodies on any matter relevant to education development in the country.
- Distance education focuses on the pedagogy, technology and instructional system design that aim to deliver education to students who are not physical "on-site" in a traditional classroom or campus.
- Distance education is beneficial in the sense that, it creates an enabling atmosphere for people especially women who ordinarily cannot find their way to campus, may be due to family understanding or traditions.
- Distance education helps in promoting and balancing our socio-economic situation, by providing useful training/education to people or classes of people in the society.
- In the context of Nigeria, women themselves allude to this benefit. Yet most women are not utilizing this window of opportunity to enhance their participation in the global economy, and to play a tangible role in their families and society. Kan War and Taplin, 2001, Olakulehin and Ojo, 2003; Aderinoye and Ojkheta, 2004 explained the potential of distance education in overcoming barriers. This means that distance education (NOUN) and (NTI) and other learning programmes are promissory and practical strategies to address the challenge of widening access, thus increasing the participation of women in higher education, power reduction and empowerment.
- Distance education (NTI and NOUN) help in formulating policies and initiate programmes at all levels of education designed to improve by way of research the quality and content of education in Nigeria.
- Distance education programmes among other things, help in creating part-time job opportunities for people especially those who are working currently as teachers in various schools, lecturers and those who have no job at all. Payment honorariums are made to part-time tutors or lecturers depending on the number of courses handled. This to an extent helps in augmenting their salaries in their respective primary assignment.

Problems of distance education: Mbonu F. O. and Ubaonu B. N. (2011) explained the problems of distance education to include the following:

- **Appointment of non-educational administrators as centre coordinators or directors in distance education centres:** As centre directors and

supervisors main duties are to get things done in a proper way from the workers, they are supposed to be experts in educational administration, planning and supervision. (Aguna, 2006) states that inadequate planning, recruitment of staff, course materials and non-utilization of experts in the field of educational administration and planning are affecting the proper implementation of the programmes.

- **Accommodation Problem:** All the centres used for distance education whether established by public or private institution are operating in either hired structure or hosted by already established institution. Buildings provided for offices and lecture rooms are inadequate, resulting to slow rate of work in the office as well as in teaching and learning. (Obasi, 2007) states that no effective work can be done in a congested environment. Nwaga (2007) pointed out that lack of space has affected students' guidance and counseling services. Moore (2005) stipulated that in the environment where human beings work, the interfaces between them and environment affect and determine the level of human performance and output (production) at the workplace.
- **Irregular payment and omission of some facilitators' honorarium:** This is a situation where the facilitators complain of irregular payment and omission of their names in the schedule for payment of their honorarium. When such happens sometimes no supplementary voucher is raised to pay them before the next semester runs out. For instance, such facilitators if not paid for two semesters' honorarium including those, whose names were omitted before, will result to negative motivation of the affected facilitators. They become frustrated and their rate of work will be drastically reduced.
- **Leadership style adopted by centre director or manager:** The success of distance education is largely depended on the quality of its leadership. The leadership style adopted by most centre managers could be branded as "medieval instrument". They tend to be autocratic in the way they manage their facilitators. The human side of management is a thing that "belongs to the other side of the fence," communication style between management and employees whether on payment or temporal basis is jaundiced.
- **Inadequate funding and lack of receptive to distance education:** Most people who are used to the traditional system of tertiary education are not receptive to distance education/learning resulting to low enrolment in most centres. Funds are not adequately released to them.
- **Inability of the administrators to identify and recruit committed facilitators:** Many facilitators recruited for this programme are not committed to duty. They do the work in line with their way and feeling outside what the organization determines should be done. Some only involve themselves in the programme because of their quest for an additional motivational gain and for the opportunity of available adhoc job. They pay rapt attention to their already gainful employment and view this as something to dangle and kick at random like a football.
- **High cost of technology to support distance education:** Institutions offering distance education

must consider the initial cost as well as the continuing cost of installing, maintaining using and upgrading technology to support distance education service.

- **Insufficient unequal distribution of course materials:** The centre manager's office in different centres is always invaded by students demanding their course materials or modules which are insufficient in number and unequally distributed to their centres.
- **Staff/Facilitators Disobedience:** Both the staff and facilitators are indisciplined. They do not take the rule and regulations of the organization seriously. This could be seen in the way they report to duty and attend to classes. They always feel that their involvement in this programme is not autonomous and so, it will be a wastage putting efforts that the programme does not deserve; they leave the programme in every pressure to bend them in obedience to the rules and regulations of the organization. The professional and administrative porousness of the administrators also trigger off their disobedience.
- **Course Allocation Conflict:** It is a conflict amongst the facilitators of the programme. Many of them feel that their courses in the institution they teach should be allocated to them or problem will ensue.
- Lack of supervisors or coordinators

Ways of ensuring effective distance education

- Employment of specialist in educational administration and planning as centre managers/coordinators
- There must be adequate accommodation for smooth running of distance education programmes
- There should be enough course materials to be produced and distributed to the students on registration to avoid delay in facilitation and encourage prompt completion of course content.
- Better and qualified facilitator should be recruited.
- There should be adequate funding.

CONCLUSION

Mujibul (2008) sees Distance Education as a situation in which learners are physically separated from the educational provider, and communicate in writing (using letters, e-mail, fax or computer conferencing), verbally (by telephone, audio-conferencing, video-conferencing) or in face tutorial session. Distance education in Nigeria has excelled in providing quality education to the people. Distance education has helped in increasing access to education which is significantly helpful in enhancing socio-economic development of the nation. Though, a lot of challenges in the advancement of distance education include lack of fund, poor leadership, irregular payment of honoraria, poor accommodation, etc. With the recent improvement, in modern information and communication technologies (ICT), distance learning has emerged as an inevitable form of education in the history of educational development while the formal system of education continues to be the mainstream of educational transaction.

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