



Strategies for Enhancing Effective Implementation of Distance Learning In Business Education In Nigerian Universities

OKORO, James (Ph.D)

Institute of Education, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This study assessed the strategies for enhancing effective implementation of distance learning in business education in Nigerian universities. Two research questions guided the study. A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population of the study which also served as sample comprises 124 business education students who are currently doing their degree programme in National Open University of Nigeria, located at Asaba and Emevor study centres in Delta State and Benin Study Centre in Edo State. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.94. The instrument was validated by 5 experts in Business Education Department and 5 experts in Measurement and Evaluation Department, all from Delta State University, Abraka. The data obtained was analysed using mean and standard deviation. The finding showed that the challenges facing the successful implementation of distance learning in business education programme include inadequate funding, inadequate internet facilities, etc. The study also revealed some strategies that could enhance the implementation of distance learning in business education programme to include appointment of suitable qualified business educators, among others. It was recommended among others, that adequate funding should be provided by the school authorities to procure more teaching facilities to enhance effective implementation of distance learning, that more classrooms should be constructed to accommodate more candidates during examination.

Keywords: Strategies, distance learning, business education, universities

INTRODUCTION

Business Education is a branch of vocational education that deals with skill acquisition by the students that will enable them set up their own businesses, after the completion of their degree programme or their NCE programme. Business education provides the students with the required competencies, skills, knowledge, understanding, and attitude to perform in the world of work. Nwachukwu (2012) as cited by Ezeonwrie (2016) sees business education as an umbrella name concerning those educational processes involving the study of techniques, related science and acquisition of practical skills, attitude and knowledge relating to occupation in vocational sectors of the economy and social life of people. It 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. Nedum-Ogbede (2016) sees the objectives of business education to create employment either self or paid for young Nigerians who are roaming the streets, majority of who are into negative influences as a result of lack of jobs and lack of appropriate skills, knowledge and attitude which would enable them secure and progress in a job or be self-employed. If graduates of business education programme are not fully employed, they can cause social vices in the society. This can be manifested in the form of rape, cultism, and armed robbery. In is important that graduate of business education should be manfully engaged in setting up their own businesses, in order to reduce poverty and create employment for themselves. This will also help to reduce the rate of social vices in the society.

In Business education programme, courses such as type writing, keyboarding, office practice, principles of economics, business law, taxation and ICT are offered. The purpose of these courses is to expose the graduates for gainful employment, both at NCE and degree level. The goal of business education as enumerated by Ekpenyong et al. (2012) includes the following:

- 1 Develop individuals who will be properly equipped with the pre-requisite knowledge and skills for productive work life
- 2 Develop a pool for competent and reliable technical manpower, capable of being mobilised in times of national economic emergency
- 3 Develop individuals who will be capable of meeting the modern business and technological challenges
- 4 Develop in the youth the right attitudes and skills towards work
- 5 Equip the youth with the requisite knowledge and skills for paid or self-employment
- 6 Prepare the youth for meeting community, state and national economic aspirations
- 7 Enable the youth to choose and perfect on those areas of business education for which they have interests and aptitudes
- 8 Equip the learners to develop skills for making rational economic decision in various areas of business
- 9 Provide the vocational and technical knowledge
- 10 Enable the learners to relate their experience to the needs of their communities
- 11 Prepare business and industrial managers who will be capable of meeting technological and managerial complexities of modern industry and to provide the vocational and technical knowledge in various areas of business

Business education is one of the courses that have been introduced into distance learning in education, this is education that is being offered through the use of internet facilities without physical touch with the lecturer or teacher.

Distance learning according to UNESCO (2002) as approaches that 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. Creed (2011) defines distance learning 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. Hulsman (2007) approached the definition of the concept of distance learning from the characteristics 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 based 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 industrialised 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.

The objectives of Distance learning, according to Aderinoye (2008) include the following:

- 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 form of education
- c. To get the adult, either as individuals or as a group, to learn and through learning to change their attitude and behaviour 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.

Ezeonwurie (2016) study reveal some of the challenges of distance learning as follows: internet issue, instructor incompetence in using online platform, technical challenges, lack of face-to-face interaction with fellow students, lack of face-to-face interaction with lecturers, inadequate electrical power supply, extremely high operating costs, low quality, technology barrier and institutional challenges.

Ezeonwurie (2016) also suggested the following as strategies for improving distance learning:

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 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 counselling, 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 well-organized manner, students should be evaluated appropriately, and the process of grading of students performances should be taken seriously, in general, proper policy, awareness raising, good organisation and well-considered utilization of man power would make the distance education program effective and efficient.
7. The increase in the number of tutorial centres, 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 detail 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.

Statement of the Problem

Business education is education for and about business and training in business skills necessary to set up private businesses rather than depending on government for white collar paid jobs. Business education has been introduced into distance learning where the students can gain sellable skills without physical touch with the teachers. Unfortunately, the programme has been characterised by poor enrolment of students into the programme, drop out of students, inadequate facilities, erratic power supply, poor internet connectivity and instructional incompetence.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to assess strategies for enhancing effective implementation of distance learning in business education. Specifically, the study will:

- 1 Assess the challenges facing the successful implementation of distance learning in business education
- 2 Assess the strategies for enhancing the implementation of distance learning in business education

Research Questions

The following research questions are raised to guide the study;

- 1 What are the challenges facing the successful implementation of distance learning as perceived by business education students?
- 2 What are the strategies for enhancing the implementation of distance learning as perceived by business education students?

METHOD

The descriptive survey research method is adopted for this study, which assessed the strategies for enhancing effective implementation of distance learning in business education. The population of the study comprises 124 business education students who are currently doing their degree programme in National Open University of Nigeria, located at Asaba and Emevor study centres in Delta State and Benin Study Centre in Edo State. There was no sampling, since the population was manageable. The instrument used for data collection is questionnaire which was structured in a 4-point scale of strongly agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The questionnaire comprised two sections, section A deals with the personal variable of the respondents while section B comprised 35 items based on the research questions. The instrument was validated by 5 experts in Business Education Department and 5 experts in Measurement and Evaluation Department, all from Delta State University, Abraka. In order to establish the reliability of the instrument 20 copies of the questionnaire was administered to 20 students in Port-Harcourt study centre. The data obtained was subjected to A Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient, which yielded a coefficient of 0.94. The data obtained was analysed using mean. The decision rule was 2.50, meaning any item that is less than 2.50 was rejected while any item that is greater than or equal to 2.50 was accepted.

RESULT

Research Question 1: *What are the challenges facing the successful implementation of distance learning as perceived by business education students?*

Table 1: Mean rating of the challenges facing the successful implementation of distance learning as perceived by business education students N=124

S/N	Challenges facing the successful implementation of distance learning	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Inadequate funding	3.01	0.90	Accepted
2	Inadequate internet facilities	2.84	0.76	Accepted
3	Poor school policies	2.64	0.62	Accepted
4	lack of face-to-face interaction with students	2.78	0.77	Accepted
5	low quality of teaching facilities	2.64	0.68	Accepted
6	Inadequate computer	3.34	0.96	Accepted
7	technical challenges	2.94	0.76	Accepted
8	Inadequate manpower	2.93	0.71	Accepted
9	High operating costs	2.80	0.82	Accepted
10	inadequate electrical power supply	2.67	0.78	Accepted
11	lack of face-to-face interaction with lecturers	2.77	0.88	Accepted
12	Inadequate teaching charts	2.78	0.91	Accepted
13	Inadequate demonstration chalk board	2.68	0.78	Accepted
14	Absence of classroom for examination	2.89	0.99	Accepted
Total		2.84	0.81	Accepted

The table show the challenges facing the successful implementation of distance learning. The mean rating for the items ranges from 2.64 to 3.34, which indicate that all the items are accepted as the challenges facing the successful implementation of distance learning in business education programme.

Research Question 2: *What are the strategies for enhancing the implementation of distance learning as perceived by business education students?*

Table 2: Mean rating of the strategies for enhancing the implementation of distance learning as perceived by business education students N=124

S/N	Strategies for Enhancing the Implementation of Distance Learning	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Suitably qualified and trained business educators should be appointed	2.75	0.86	Accepted
2	Standardization of the learning modules should be given priority	2.68	0.69	Accepted
3	Learners should be encouraged to do assignments by themselves	2.76	0.87	Accepted
4	Learner-centered pedagogical approach should be adopted	2.67	0.76	Accepted
5	More awareness should be promoted	2.87	0.89	Accepted
6	The tutors should be adequately paid	2.65	0.96	Accepted
7	Well-organized learning modules should be provided	3.24	0.76	Accepted
8	Enough time should be allotted for the programme	2.64	0.68	Accepted
9	The number of tutorial centres should be increased	2.84	0.94	Accepted
10	The process of grading of students performances should be taken seriously	2.73	0.85	Accepted
11	Students should be evaluated appropriately	2.82	0.74	Accepted
12	Different communication technologies should be used to support the distance education program.	2.72	0.62	Accepted
13	Different information technologies should be used to support the distance education program.	2.60	0.70	Accepted
14	The system should be more flexible	2.68	0.64	Accepted
15	Distance education units in business education should be intensified	2.76	0.75	Accepted
16	Course materials should be delivered through television	2.81	0.68	Accepted
17	Course materials should be delivered through radio	2.84	0.84	Accepted
18	The criteria for admission of students should be in line with conventional institutions	2.61	0.51	Accepted
19	Management should admit students in line with the available resources	2.58	0.58	Accepted
20	Government should improve the electricity supply to the nation	2.92	0.68	Accepted
21	Government should subsidize Distance learning programmes	2.70	0.64	Accepted
Total		2.76	0.74	Accepted

The mean rating for the items in table 2 ranges from 2.60 to 3.24. This means that they are accepted as possible strategies for enhancing the implementation of distance learning in business education programme.

DISCUSSION

From the findings of the study, it was revealed that the challenges facing the successful implementation of distance learning in business education programme include inadequate funding, inadequate internet facilities, poor school policies, lack of face to face interaction with student, inadequate computers,

technical challenges, inadequate manpower, etc. This finding is in line with the study of Ezeonwurie (2016), who describe similar challenges of distance learning in business education programme.

The study also revealed that the strategies that could enhance the implementation of distance learning in business education programme include appointment of suitable qualified business educators, adoption of learner-centered pedagogical approach, etc. This finding is consistent with the study of Ezeonwurie (2016), who describe similar strategies for enhancing the implementation of distance learning in business education programme.

CONCLUSION

Business education is a programme that has to do with skill acquisition through constant practical that are expected from the students. In order to enhance successful implementation of distance learning programme in business education, adequate teaching facilities, supervision and funding by the government is required for the programme to survive in developing countries like Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made:

- 1 Adequate funding should be provided by the school authorities to procure more teaching facilities to enhance effective implementation of distance learning
- 2 The lecturers should be properly trained to handle internet facilities for enhancing effective implementation of distance learning
- 3 Adequate power supply should be provided by the school authorities for enhancing effective implementation of distance learning
- 4 Good policies should be formulated to promote distance learning
- 5 More classrooms should be constructed to accommodate more candidates during examination

REFERENCES

- Aderinoye, R. (2008). *Literacy and Communication Technologies: Distance Education strategies for literacy delivery in international review of education*. Kalman Judith, 2005, Discovering literacy WESCO, Hamburg.
- Creed, C. (2011). *The use of distance education for teachers*. Cambridge: International Research Foundation for Open and Distance Learning (report to Department for International Department).
- Ekpenyong, L.E., Imiemohon, G. & Owenvbuigie, R.O. (2012). Emerging challenges in ICT in business education, Association of Business Education Book of Readings.
- Ezeonwrie, O.A. (2016). Challenges of distance learning: implication for business education. *Nigerian Journal of Business Education*, 3(1), 268-276.
- Hulsman, T. (2007). Literature review on cost effectiveness in ODL systems: working document, Cambridge: International Research Foundation for Open Learning.
- Nedum-Ogbede, P.O. (2016). New technologies in business education: challenges and the way forward. *Nigerian Journal of Business Education*, 3(2), 99-106.
- Nwachukwu, C.L. (2012). Administration and supervision in business education: challenges and way forward. *Book of Readings (ABEN)*, 2(1), 66-73.
- UNESCO (2002). Open and Distance learning: Trends, policy and strategy consideration. Paris: UNESCO.