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Challenges and Coping Strategies for Enhancing the Effectiveness of Distance Learning in Achieving Business Education Objectives

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Abstract

The study investigated the challenges and coping strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of distance learning in achieving the objectives of Business Education in Delta State, Nigeria. The descriptive survey research design was employed. A total of 73 lecturers participated in the study. All the 73 lecturers participated in the study because of their manageable size. The medium of data collection was a 35-item structured questionnaire, which was validated by experts in Measurement and Evaluation and Business Education. The instrument had a reliability index of 0.81. Mean, standard deviation and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to analyse the data collected for the study. The study identified 10 administrative challenges, 10 technology-based challenges and 13 strategies for achieving the objectives of the Business Education programme under the distance learning education system. The study recommended adequate funding, recruitment of qualified facilitators, production and distribution of course materials to students and lecturers, the appointment of educational administrators and planners as Directors of Centres and regular in-service training for the facilitators in the use of ICT in instructional delivery.

Keywords: Ameliorate; Configuration; Congested; Conventional; Environment; Honorarium; Institution; Internationalization

1. Introduction

The provision of quality education at various levels has become a struggle facing developing countries such as Nigeria. With regard to higher education, the Nigerian educational policy encourages distance learning that can be accessed outside the environment of tertiary institutions. Distance learning is a form of education in which learners are physically separated from the educational provider, and can communicate electronically (Mujibul, 2008). Distance learning is also a form of education separated from the regular school system. It can be accessed by students without personally interacting with teachers (Jimoh, 2013). In distance learning form of education, Kaufman, Watkins and Guerra (2000) stated that useful learning opportunities are presented at places and times that continent for learners, irrespective of distance and institution. Distance learning can be described as one of the most emerging models of education, which have the capability of exerting great influence on the system of education delivery in the country (UNESCO, 2002).

The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004:145) detailed that the goals of distance learning to include "the provision of access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied and meeting the peculiar needs of employers by mounting special certificate courses for their employees at their workplace." Others are encouraging internationalization of the curriculum of higher educational institutions and ameliorating the effects

of brain drain in tertiary institutions by using experts in Nigeria as teachers irrespective of their places of work. In open and distance learning, the bulk of all educational programmes in conventional universities are equally provided to the registered distance learners. These include programmes in law, management, social sciences, science and technology, agriculture, arts, general education and vocational and technical education such as Home Economics and Business Education.

Business Education is a programme of education which equips individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills for a successful venture in the world of business (Abdullahi, 2002). Osuala (2004:182) viewed Business Education as "a discipline which deals with the economic system of a nation by identifying and providing an explanation to the rate of business satisfaction and experience that prepare people for effective contribution as citizens, workers and consumers." Gidado and Akaeze (2014) noted that Business Education offers its recipients the opportunity to make contributions to the economic system of their country and equips them with lifelong skills that aid their judgement as producers (entrepreneurs), employees or consumers. Aliyu (2013) observed that some of the objectives of Business Education include the need for preparation of students for a vocation in business.

Unfortunately, the achievement of these laudable objectives of effective Business Education programme under distance learning appears to be bedevilled by notable challenges that range from a poor power supply, epileptic internet connection and inadequate funding to poor implementation of curriculum that is generally associated with the Nigerian education system, among others. According to Yusuf (2006), to achieve the objectives of distance learning, the Nigerian government promised to make sure that distance education programmes are comparable into those offered by the conventional mode of education in tertiary institutions. Therefore, to reverse the challenges of distance learning and ensure equivalence in structure between a conventional institution and distance learning form of higher education, the use of appropriate strategies is inevitable.

A strategy is an action plan, without which achieving a goal will be difficult. Riley (2015) sees strategy as the direction and focus of an organization or institution over a long-term through its formation of resources within a stimulating environment to meet the institutional needs and expectations. A strategy is a sophisticated plan to actualize goals under certain conditions (Freedman, 2013). A strategy involves formulating goals, planning for ways of achieving the goals and gathering resources to execute the plans. The report of Business Dictionary (2015) suggested that strategy is a method or chosen plan to bring about the desired improvement in future such as achievement of a goal or solution to an institutional problem through the effectiveness of the plan.

Effectiveness as defined by Ohakwe (1999), is the condition where desired outcomes or results are attained with minimal expenditure of resources when an activity is performed. Olaitan, Nwachukwu, Igbo, Onyemachi and Ekong (1999) stated that effectiveness is an impact of a group of activities performed on the attainment of intended learning outcomes. Therefore, the present problems undermining the achievement of the goals of distance learning in Nigeria education must be addressed using effective strategies. Hence, to avert the continuation of the associated problems of the distance learning programme in the Nigerian education system, this study was carried out to diagnose the challenges of distance learning in Nigeria and identify the possible coping strategies for achieving the objectives of Business Education programme under the distance learning education system in Delta State.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

This study aimed specifically to identify the:
1. administrative challenges undermining the effectiveness of distance learning in achieving the objectives of Business Education.
2. technology-related challenges undermining the effectiveness of distance learning in achieving the objectives of Business Education; and
3. strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of distance learning in achieving the objectives of Business Education.

1.2 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:
1. What are the administrative challenges undermining the effectiveness of distance learning in achieving the objectives of Business Education?
2. What are the technology-related challenges undermining the effectiveness of distance learning in achieving the objectives of Business Education?
3. What are the coping strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of distance learning in achieving the objectives of Business Education?

1.3 Hypotheses

Ho$_1$: Educational qualification of the respondents will not significantly influence their responses on the administrative challenges undermining the effectiveness of distance learning in achieving the objectives of Business Education.

Ho$_2$: Educational qualification of the respondents will not significantly influence their responses on the technology-related challenges undermining the effectiveness of distance learning in achieving the objectives of Business education.

Ho$_3$: Years of teaching experience of the respondents will not significantly influence their responses on the coping strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of distance learning in achieving the objectives of Business Education.

2. Methodology

2.1 Design of the Study

The study was conducted in Delta State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive research design. Descriptive survey research design can be regarded as the one in which variables are studied by collecting and analyzing data (Nworgu, 2015).

2.2 Population of the Study

The population for the study consisted of all the 73 lecturers at the two open and distance learning centres in Delta State. These include 39 lecturers at Asaba Centre, Federal College of Education (Technical), Asaba and 34 lecturers at Emevor Centre, Isoko North Local Government Area, Delta State. As a result of the manageable size of the lecturers in the two centres, the entire population of 73 respondents were used for the study; therefore, there was no sampling.

2.3 Instrument of the Study

Data were collected with the aid of a 35-item survey, which was validated by three experts from the Business Education Unit, Department of Vocational, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State. Each of the experts was given a copy of the questionnaire to check the adequacy and correctness of the questionnaire items for the study. Their suggestions were implemented before the instrument was deployed to the field.

To obtain the reliability of the instrument, 10 copies of the questionnaire were trial-tested on 10 distance learning lecturers from Benin Study Centre, NOUN, Benin City, Edo State. The data collected from the trial testing was analysed using Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient and it yielded a coefficient of 0.81, suggesting high reliability. Data for the study were collected with the help of two research assistants.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data were analysed with the aid of mean and standard deviation for the research questions, at 2.50 benchmark while Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test the null hypotheses at .05 alpha level.

3. Results

Research Question One: What are the administrative challenges undermining the effectiveness of distance learning in achieving the objectives of Business Education?

Ho_1: Educational qualification of the respondents will not significantly influence their response on the administrative challenges undermining the effectiveness of distance learning in achieving the objectives of Business Education.

Table 1: Mean ratings and ANOVA of the responses of lecturers from open and distance learning centres in Delta State on the administrative challenges undermining the effectiveness of distance learning in achieving the objectives of Business Education (**N = 73**)

SN	Administrative challenges	Total Sum of Square	Mean Square	$\overline{X_G}$	SD	P-value	RQ	Ho
1	Appointment of non-specialists as directors of administration and planning at the centres	37.90	0.37	3.51	0.80	0.72	A	NS
2	Accommodation problem of staff offices and administrative activities	57.50	0.41	3.45	0.67	0.03	A	S*
3	Lack of facilitators in some courses at the centres	46.31	0.24	3.54	0.79	0.58	A	NS
4	Irregular payment and omission of some facilitators' honorarium	57.59	0.32	3.01	0.70	0.70	A	NS
5	Autocratic leadership style adopted by most centre directors	37.14	0.21	2.39	0.64	0.44	D	NS
6	Inadequate funding of some centres create administrative problems	36.45	0.45	3.54	0.93	0.56	A	NS
7	Lack of reception/acceptance of open and distance education by most Nigerians	64.11	0.23	3.57	0.68	0.49	A	NS
8	Inability of the directors of some centres to identify and recruit competent facilitators	36.62	0.22	3.42	0.44	0.42	A	NS
9	Insufficient and unequal distribution of course materials	49.37	0.32	3.60	0.46	0.15	A	NS
10	Staff disobedience to assigned duties and the authority of the system	55.66	0.41	2.44	0.46	0.01	D	S*
11	Inadequate competent hands in the system	41.14	0.15	2.78	0.63	0.44	A	NS
12	Lack of consistency in programme/policy implementation	38.70	0.24	3.40	0.43	0.56	A	NS

Note: *XG = Average mean; A = Agreed; D = Disagree; N= No of Respondents; S* = Significant;*
NS = Not Significant; Significant at 0.05.

The data presented in Table 1 showed that the average mean ratings ranged from 2.78 to 3.60 which are all greater than the criterion means of 2.50, which implies the identified items were administrative challenges affecting the achievement of the objectives of Business Education under the open and distance learning education system. The mean value of items 5 and 10 were 2.39 and 2.44 respectively which were less than the criterion means of 2.50 on a 4-point rating scale indicating that the respondents disagreed with items 5 and 10 as part of the administrative challenges affecting the achievement of the objectives of Business Education in open and distance learning education system.

The data presented in Table 1 on hypothesis one showed that the p-values ranged from 0.15 to 0.72, which are higher than .05 alpha level, which implies that no significant difference exists in the mean rating of the respondents on the administrative challenges based on their educational

qualification. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean ratings of the respondents was accepted on the 10 items. The p-values of the remaining two items were 0.03 and 0.01 respectively which were less than .05 alpha level. This implied that no significant difference exists in the mean rating of the respondents on the two items of administrative challenges based on their educational qualification. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean ratings of the respondents was rejected on the two items.

Research Question Two: What are technology-related challenges undermining the effectiveness of distance learning in achieving the objectives of Business Education?

Ho$_2$: Educational qualification of the respondents will not significantly influence their response to technology-related challenges undermining the effectiveness of distance learning in achieving the objectives of Business Education.

Table 2: Mean ratings and ANOVA of the responses of lecturers from open and distance learning centres in Delta State on technology-related challenges undermining the effectiveness of distance learning in achieving the objectives of Business Education (**N = 73**)

SN	Technology-related challenges	Total Sum of Square	Mean Square	$\overline{X_G}$	SD	P-value	Remarks RQ	Ho
1	High cost of technology to support the programme	30.66	0.57	3.53	0.56	0.73	A	NS
2	Inaccurate data for effective planning and development of distance learning system	50.32	0.21	3.49	0.54	0.33	A	NS
3	The epileptic power supply in the country is a major setback for students both in the cities and rural areas	43.33	0.34	3.50	0.39	0.48	A	NS
4	Facilitators' inadequate knowledge and skills in designing and delivering courses in electronic format	53.44	0.23	3.41	0.50	0.26	A	NS
5	Poverty and poor ICT penetration due to high cost of ICT facilities	35.32	0.11	3.45	0.65	0.22	A	NS
6	Low level of internet connectivity in Nigeria	33.43	0.34	3.56	0.73	0.36	A	NS
7	High level of technophobia among Nigerian adult learners.	62.32	0.25	3.53	0.65	0.44	A	NS
8	Ineffective telecommunication facilities in the distance learning system	36.86	0.23	2.75	0.64	0.54	A	NS
9	Poor postage and correspondence structures in Nigerian distance learning system	45.11	0.23	3.62	0.65	0.34	A	NS
10	Ineffective ICT capacity building programmes for both the facilitators and distance learners.	36.43	0.32	3.30	0.32	0.41	A	NS

Note: *XG = Average mean; A = Agreed; D = Disagree; N= No of Respondents; S* = Significant; NS = Not Significant; Significant at 0.05.*

From the data presented in Table 2, it was revealed that the average mean rating of the respondents ranged from 2.75 to 3.62 which are higher than the criterion mean of 2.50. This implied that the respondents agreed on the identified items as the technology-related challenges undermining the achievement of the objectives of Business Education under the open and distance learning education system.

The data presented in Table 2 on hypothesis two showed further that the p-values of the 10 items in the Table ranged between 0.22 and 0.73 which are in each case greater than 0.05 level of significance. This indicated that there was no significant difference in the mean rating of the respondents on the 10 identified items of technology-related challenges based on their educational qualification. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted on the 10 items in the table.

Research Question Three: What are the coping strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of distance learning in achieving the objectives of Business Education?

Ho$_3$: Years of teaching experience of the respondents will not significantly influence their response to the coping strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of distance learning in achieving the objectives of Business Education.

Table 3: Mean ratings and ANOVA of the responses of lecturers from open and distance learning centres in Delta State on coping strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of distance learning in achieving the objectives of Business Education (**N = 73**)

SN	Strategies for effectiveness	Total Sum of Square	Mean Square	$\overline{X_G}$	SD	P-value	Remarks RQ	Ho
1	Provision of adequate accommodation in all study centres (permanent structures)	43.40	0.25	3.53	0.62	0.80	A	NS
2	Provision of sufficient fund for the programme	41.98	0.25	3.24	0.52	0.33	A	NS
3	Recruitment of competent and qualified facilitators	59.02	0.31	3.52	0.60	0.97	A	NS
4	Capacity building of the lecturers or facilitators of distance learning in the use of ICT for teaching and learning	39.53	0.41	3.59	0.54	0.18	A	NS
5	Provision for enough course materials in all study centres	40.45	0.19	3.50	0.50	0.43	A	NS
6	Specialists in educational administration and planning should be employed as centre directors	56.16	0.25	3.43	0.52	0.43	A	NS
7	Improved internet connectivity in distance learning centres	46.16	0.31	3.45	0.53	0.96	A	NS
8	Improved electricity generation and distribution in the country	66.31	0.21	3.30	0.77	0.98	A	NS
9	Delivery of course materials through interactive media like radio and TV that are accessible to distance learning students	44.29	0.46	3.44	0.53	0.02	A	S*
10	Effective training of open and distance learning lecturers for improved efficiency.	53.73	0.31	3.58	0.58	0.50	A	NS
11	Bringing all the students to or very near the study centres	50.87	0.39	3.38	0.68	0.04	A	S*
12	Reading modules should be produced for the use of the students and staff.	52.16	0.11	3.53	0.44	0.76	A	NS
13	Adoption of more interactive instructional methods in distance learning will enhance achievement of objectives	49.48	0.36	3.54	0.46	0.25	A	NS

Note: *XG* = *Average mean;* ***A*** = *Agreed;* ***D*** = *Disagree;* ***N***= *No of Respondents;* ***S**** = *Significant;*
NS = *Not Significant; Significant at 0.05.*

The data presented in Table 3 revealed that the average mean rating ranged from 3.24 to 3.59 which are all greater than the criterion means of 2.50. This showed that the respondents agreed that all the 13 identified items in the table could be adopted as strategies for enhancing the achievement of the objectives of Business Education under the open and distance learning education system.

The data presented in Table 3 on hypothesis three showed further that the p-values ranged from 0.18 to 0.98 which are higher than .05 alpha level. This implied that no significant difference exists in the mean rating of the respondents on the 11 identified strategies based on their years of teaching experience. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted on the 11 items. The p-values of the remaining two items, specifically, Items 9 and 11 were 0.02 and 0.04 respectively which were less than 0.05 level of significance. This indicated that there was a significant difference in the mean rating of the respondents on the two strategies based on their years of teaching experience. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected on the two items.

4. Discussion

The study identified administrative challenges affecting the achievement of the objectives of Business Education under the distance learning education system to include the appointment of non-specialists as directors of administration and planning at the centres, accommodation problem of staff offices and administrative activities, lack of facilitators in some courses at the centres, irregular

payment and omission of some facilitators' honorarium. Others are inadequate funding of some centres thus, creating some administrative problems, lack of due reception to open and distance education by most Nigerians and insufficient and unequal distribution of course materials. The finding of this study agreed with that of Aguna (2006) which revealed that poor application of human resource management and inadequate materials resources, as well as poor manpower, are the bane of implementation of programmes in education. In addition, the findings agree with Obayi (2007) who found that lack of space and accommodation problem of staff offices and administrative activities constitute a problem as no effective work can be done in a congested environment.

The study also identified technology-related challenges undermining the achievement of the objectives of Business Education under the distance learning education system to include high cost of technology to support the programme, inaccurate data for effective planning and development of distance learning system, epileptic power supply in the country as a major setback for students both in the cities and rural areas. Others are poverty and poor ICT penetration due to high cost of ICT facilities, inadequate knowledge and skills in designing and delivering courses in electronic format, low level of internet connectivity in Nigeria, ineffective telecommunication facilities in the distance learning system and poor postage and correspondence structure in Nigerian distance learning system. The findings of this study corroborated that of Fakeye (2010) who found that the level of knowledge of ICT possessed by teachers was poor and as such, they rarely use ICT in English Language instruction. Similarly, Onasanya, Shehu, Ogunlade and Adefuye (2011) found that the level of computer literacy and utilization of ICT resources by science teachers were found to be very low which is supported by the findings of this study.

The study identified some strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of distance learning education system for achieving the objectives of Business Education such as the provision of adequate accommodation in all study centres, provision of adequate funding for the programme, recruitment of competent and qualified facilitators and provision of enough course materials in all study centres. Other findings are capacity building of the lecturers or facilitators of distance learning, improved internet connectivity in distance learning centres, improved electricity generation and distribution in the country, effective training of open and distance learning lecturers for improved efficiency and the production of adequate reading modules for use by students and staff. The findings of this study conforms with the findings of Mbonu and Ubbaonu (2014) who found that the provision of adequate accommodation in all study centres, sufficient funding, adequate and qualified facilitators as well as enough course materials should be provided in all study centres and that the utilization of adequate specialists in educational administration and planning will go a long way in solving the problems of open and distance learning education in Nigeria.

4.1 Conclusion

Distance learning education system is essential since it makes education accessible and reduces cost while maintaining quality as well as improving the variety of the resources and support available to learners. However, despite the various advantages of open and distance learning education system, the achievement of the objectives on the sustainable basis can only be made possible when the administrative and technological-related challenges are properly addressed, using appropriate strategies. This study, therefore, investigated the challenges and coping strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of distance learning education system in achieving the objectives of Business Education in Delta State, Nigeria. Based on the data analyzed, the study identified 10 administrative challenges, 10 technology-based challenges and 13 strategies for enhancing the achievement of the objectives of the Business Education programme under the distance learning education system.

4.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommended that:

1. Permanent structures for adequate accommodation should be provided to students and staff by institutions running open and distance education programmes.
2. The programme of distance learning should be adequately funded in order to achieve the objectives of the courses, including Business Education.
3. Adequate and qualified facilitators should be recruited.
4. Enough course materials should be produced and distributed to the students on registration to avoid delay in facilitation and thus, encourage prompt completion of course contents.
5. Experts in educational administration and planning should be appointed as Directors of Centres.
6. There should be regular in-service training for the facilitators in the use of ICT resources to enhance instructional delivery.

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