Management of Primary and Secondary Education in Nigeria

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Planning a Distance Education Programme (DEP.): A Proposal

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Abstract

This paper presents planning as a subset of management and, therefore, concludes that planning like management is a phenomenon that must be known by all managers of distance education progamme. This study suggests that planning a distance education programme involves taking cognizance of the following management elements: forecasting, organization, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the programme. It then gives an outline of the various components of the programme, which must be planned for. A systematic distance learning component planning model based on systematic planning of each of the components of D.E.P. is proposed.

Introduction

It is common knowledge that the Nigerian conventional university system and other forms of formal higher education cannot accommodate all those seeking University admission in Nigeria (Jegede, 2003a). Yet satellite campuses offering such courses have been equally abrogated. And in their stead, the National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja was established (Jegede, 2003a). However, the existing distance learning programmes of the Universities will continue to offer this alongside the service of feed by the National Open University of Nigeria. For effectiveness in the face of the likelihood of the escalation of the number of those who may seek to take the opportunity of distance education programmes of the various universities and particularly of those within their vicinity, without affecting the fortunes of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), there is the need for adequate planning. Optimization of these programmes also

demands for proper planning. Planning will enable the conventional community's DEP to keep afloat and be of benefit to the students in a competitive environment.

What is planning?

Planning, according to Keith and Gubellini (1975:287), is the function of management, which deals with developing a course of action or pattern of directives. It determines who, should do what, when and how. Furthermore, Steiner (1979) views 'planning as something that cannot be usefully distinguished from the rest of the management process...' Umoru –Onuka (1999) posits that the purpose of planning is to effect good management. He added that the basis for good and accurate planning is excellent forecasting. Bedeian and Glueck (1980) point out that planning is the process by which an organization tries to affect future uncertainty. Umoru-Onuka (1999) also opines that the planning process includes setting organizational goals\objectives, formulating the premises of the kind of environment that is conducive to accomplishing these objectives or goals, identifying the appropriate course of action for reaching the goals or objectives and the people who will do what, and initiating the necessary activities to realize them as well as evaluate the outcomes of the plan for its improvement.

This view implies that planner also needs to have an idea of budgeting, as the planning process has to be translated in terms of monetary value and time duration. Mgbodile (2001) defines planning as either: the continuous and collective exercise of foresight and taking informed decision about the future or as the formulation of basic organizational missions, purposes, objectives, policies and programme strategic to achieving stated objectives, which include the method necessary to ensure that plans\strategies are implemented. Roebert (1996) views planning as a process involving every one of us. He thus defines planning as predetermining a course of action and adds that lack of planning leads to confusion and frustration.

One may deduce from the definitions above that planning is a management process that systematically articulates the proposed goals and objectives of an organization, and the how and the means with which to achieve the stated goals. Planning, as a management tool, is multifarious in that it includes forecasting based on analysis of past trends, articulation of the order of events and the resources to prosecute them, organization, implementation and evaluation of the plan at every stage to ensure that deviation from planned sequence is minimal and is promptly remedied.

The remedy comes through a feedback from the evaluation of the plan. This, in turn, leads to programme improvement. Each of these planning components must be planned along with programme planning. It may, therefore, be necessary to briefly examine or describe each of these components of planning.

Forecasting

It is common that past trends are often used to predict future patterns of the same occurrences given the same circumstances, and this allows for the effect of the passage of time and making allowance for improvement upon the past. This is an assumption based on the fact of having rectified the error detected on the past occurrence and having incorporated a mechanism of the control and avoidance of such mistake. Umoru-Onuka (1999:6), while agreeing with Keith and Gubellini (1975:283), states that forecasting is: "the gathering of data, evaluating the data and then using them to make prediction of the future on the basis of their analysis. Forecasting is the best way of minimizing the impact of risk." In other words, forecasting is the prediction of the future based on the analysis of past occurrences/trends and possibly that of the current occurrences.

Forecasting may be about teacher requirement, prospective student population, equipment and instructional materials forecasting, as well as additional telecommunications, equipment, visual aids and other learning facilities that may be required to accomplish programme objectives and goals. Therefore, we cannot over-emphasize the need for forecasting as a prelude to planning.

Planning and Budgeting

Budget is a plan of action that deals with future allocation and utilization of various resources to different organizational or institutional activities over a definite period of time. Bedeian and Glueck (1980:528) define budget as "a collection of figures which shows such things as planned environment, recruitment, forecast cost and asset change".

Umoru-Onuka (1999:6-7) posits that budgeting is the process of making collection of figures relative to institutional proposed activities over a given period of time and matching the figures to the appropriate sub-head .He states further that budgeting can also be viewed as: "the process of articulating and presenting a formal and quantitative statement of

management plan for a definite period of time." Thus, the management of a distance-learning programme must take cognizance of the budgeting element in planning the programme and ensure that every proposed activity of the programme is appropriately budgeted for. This entails the fact that every department or unit has to prepare a budget according to the planned activity for the fiscal year. These various budgets are then centrally coordinated/synchronized and harmonized with the overall objective of the organization|programme.

Organization as an Element of Planning

Organization is the necessary transition of proposal (plan) to implementation. Otherwise the implementation will be tantamount to mirage. The items in the budget plan need to be properly harmonized and ordered for implementation. Keith and Gubellini (1975:285) posit that organization is the establishment of the formal structural line of authority and responsibility, which defines what is to be done, and by whom and the process of grouping of activities and responsibility and any other relationships necessary to achieving institutional goals. The implication of this view is that organization is the matching of plan/proposal with the reality on the ground. This corroborates the view of Umoru-Onuka (1999:7) that organization is the articulation of how to pool resources in terms of human and material, and of ordering of the activities or the sequencing of the activities as well as their assignment to the appropriate human resource for effective execution of the plan. Distance learning managers must not only make proposals. They must also order the sequence of the occurrence as well as assign them to the appropriate personnel, and also order appropriate course materials among others.

Implementation

A plan that is not implemented is as good as a dead plan or a plan that was never conceived. Thus, having organized the activities aimed at successful achievement of a plan, in this case, a distance learning programme, the management of a distance learning programme sets out to execute what has been largely paper work. Thus, implementation can be viewed as the translation of theory into practice. Invariably, therefore, the distance education programme manager translates all activities that have been envisaged in the plan and plan budget into action in order to bring about

the realization of the plan. This will lead to the expected impact on the students of the distance education programme as well as on society.

Evaluation

Those who manage a distance education programme must not only plan, forecast, budget, organize and implement. They must also master the discipline of evaluation, particularly programme evaluation so as to ensure that there is only a minimal deviation or no deviation at all from plan, as the implementation of the programme progresses. Umoru-Onuka (1999:8) observes that the essence of evaluation during the implementation of a programme plan is to provide information for feedback into the system for necessary adjustment and improvement to ensure that the ultimate execution of the plan complies with that which was desired at its conception or for better results.

What is Distance Education?

In the early 1970's when the present writer decided to furtehr his studies, he enrolled with the former School of Careers, a correspondence College based then in Lagos. There was also the Exams Success Correspondence College at Palm Groove, while there were several of such Colleges based in the United Kingdom offering courses to people in various stages of education as well as in professional courses. The common denominator was that each of these colleges was offering courses to students who did not even know their locations and who had never met any of the course writers. Then, the author did not know that it was described as distance education. However, there are different forms of distance education or open learning or distance learning. Formal definitions include the following:

Moore (1997:77) defines distance education as follows:

Distance education is a system based on selective use of instructional media both traditional and innovative that promote the self-teaching-learning process to achieve specific educational objective with potentially greater geographic coverage than traditional face-to-face system of education. For Egunyomi (2001:54) distance education is the organization and delivery of instructions to learners who do not have in site: physical, close and immediate interactions with their teachers. Distance education consists of the mixture of learning through print, correspondence, electronic media instruction. Umoru-Onuka (2002) states that distance education designs

appropriate courses, learning methods and delivery system identified for any target group. Thus, distance education is a programme designed to give educational opportunities to the less privileged, education-wise. This means that those who could not afford/access education due to one reason or another in the past are now opportune to do so through distance education. This is so because it is a type of education that allows one to study and work at the same time, because of the flexibility of its programme and timetable, which is amenable to remain the individual student's plan rather the rigid timetable used in the formal education setting. It is not hindered by space or time. In distance learning programme, there is separation between the learner and the instructor. Print and electronic media are usually the means of instruction in distance learning. One can both study with the distance-learning programme and yet work without each being a hindrance to the other.

In Nigeria, there is the re-establishment of Open University, which formally took off in 2003 as students had already commenced registration as implied by Jegede (2003b: 35). In 1983, the former President Shehu Shagari established an Open University which was to bring education closer to the people, but in 1984, Gen Muhammad Buhari suspended it. However in 2002 President Obasanjo reestablished a National Open University of Nigeria as stated by Bukola Olatunji in his preamble to an interview he had with the Director General of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). Jegede (2003a: 35) states that Open University is different from the face-to-face university where there are lecturers and students who undertake the teaching and learning activity. Jegede who added that NOUN took off informally in October, 2002, explained that 'Open distance learning' 'involves informing, motivating, re-orientating the public towards studying through distance learning and preparing their minds to several other aspects of learning including: regular assignment, examinations and receiving course materials'. (Interview of 35 of the final) This kind of system is a product of public enlightenment. Since the system entails that several things would be put in place and sustained, there is, therefore, need for proper planning: pre-take-off, on take-off and post-take-off for good beginning, sustenance and improvement. Invariably, therefore, planning distance education programme is an imperative and an on-going process, which we cannot afford to ignore, if the programme were to achieve its purpose.

Objective of the Study

This study is designed to propose a 'new' model for planning distance education programme so as to realize the objective of the programme in Nigeria. Therefore, it is not meant to answer any particular question but to

provide a model for planning a distance-learning programme. This paper is intended to provide alternative planning model or decision model for starting, prosecuting, sustaining and improving an open (distance) learning programme. In other words, the work is to provide leads on planning a sustainable and improved distance-learning programme.

Characteristics of some techniques in planning

There are various techniques or decision models used for management and planning – the latter being part of the former (Umoru-Onuka, 2001). These decision models/planning techniques include: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) decision model (Mgbodile, 2001) Decision trees, critical path analysis (CPA), project evaluation review techniques (PERT) programme planning budgeting system (PPBS). Steiner (1979) lists the entrepreneurial opportunistic planning strategy (EOP), the adaptive approach, the situation audit, the WOTS up analysis – an acronym for weakness, opportunities, threats and strengths analysis which is the same as SWOT in a different form.

However, Harding and Long (1998) give the elements of SWOT. Analysis as strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats stating that SWOT is based on the assumption that the internal positive and negative attributes of an organization in relation to its external environment are central to its success. They depict it diagrammatically as shown here:

SWOTS: Analysis

Strength	Weakness
Opportunities	Threats

Source: Harding, S. and Long, T (1998): Proven Management Models. 187.

Harding and Long also give other planning (Decision) models including M-O-S-T meaning Mission, Objective, Strategy and Tactics. This can be diagrammatized as follows:

M-O-S-T

Mission	What an institution (distance learning programme) is seeking to do.
Objectives	
Strategy	How an institution (distance learning programme) will achieve it
Tactics	

Source: Harding and Long (1998): Proven Management Models.163

This model portends that planning a distance education programme involves setting out its mission and objectives. Mission is the purpose and direction of the programme, objectives imply the institutional long-term goals, strategies are long term plans designed to achieve the mission and organizational objectives, while tactics are the short-term plans for implementing the strategies. The main thrust of the MOST for distance education programme (D.E.P.) is that all lower (sub-limit) activities should further the higher (corporate) purpose and direction.   Decision trees are techniques that make use of tree-like branches to depict the paths of alternatives, which are calculated in terms of time and cost and final decisions are made based on the outcome of the computation. It is akin to PERT/time and PERT/cost as well as critical path analysis, linear programming and other quantitative planning techniques. Thus, one's plan can be quantitative or simultaneously both quantitative and non-quantitative. However, the programme managers should be conversant with both quantitative and non-quantitative methods of planning, so as to be able to plan effectively such that they can move the programme forward and put it on the path of sustenance in a competitive market.

Planning A Distance Education Programme

In planning, which of course, is the preliminary stage of any programme/ project or of a review of an existing programme/project, we must pose certain questions for which the planning will seek to provide answers/ solutions. Umoru-Onuka (1999) posits that in planning, we seek to provide

answer to the question: What are the resources needed for the execution and sustenance of the proposed programme? If it is an existing programme, then we may ask the question as to whether or not more hands are needed for the execution of the programme for greater success or the present crop of staff would need a retraining programme for greater efficiency and effectiveness?

Other questions/problems to be posed will include: the calibre and proportion of human resource requirement, schedule of duties, expansion and nature of the expansion of the programme, the other resources needed and what proportion, in the case of distance learning programme, one would want to know the area of coverage, the estimated numerical strength of prospective students, proposed welfare package and the resource to meet. When matching planning items with monetary resources to meet them, then you dovetail into the realm of budgeting, an integral part of good planning. In fact, for Roebert (1996), lack of planning leads to confusion and frustration.

Planning involves setting out objectives, defining one's strategy, finding out how one's objectives can be reached. It also involves defining the steps that need to be taken in pursuit of these objectives. One needs to put in place a timetable for achieving the objectives. We then marshall our resources, in terms of manpower, money and material, and match them with our plan. Remember that a plan must be constantly reviewed and changed where and when necessary.

The Implications of Planning a DEP

The implications of planning a D.E.P. are itemized below:

1. Staffing
2. Equipment
3. Instructional Strategies
4. Instructional Materials
5. Implementation of Instructional Strategies
6. Natures and Extent of Programme
7. Quantities and Quality of Prospective Students
8. Curriculum Planning
9. Quality and number of Prospective Programme Executors

10. Expansion plan for an existing Capacity

11. Improvement (via evaluation and feedback mechanism)

12. The Financial Requirement

The above outline gives the implication as component planning a D.E.P. And based on this, a model being suggested; gives some details of the implications.

This Systematic Component Planning Model could be depicted in tabular form as follows:

Table 1:   Components of Distance Education Planning Model

Component	Plan items	Remarks
Staffing (Personnel)	Type of staff recruitment, training and development, staff welfare, staff promotion and retirement	Planning for each component must consider the funding requirement for each component and equally plan sources of the fund
Equipment	Type, quality and numbered each type of equipment and their provision	"
Instructional Strategies	Determination of suitable instructional strategies, taking cognizance of the environment	"
Instructional Materials	Types and quality of instructional materials, provision of these materials	"
Implementation instructional strategy	Trial testing, Research on effectiveness and desirability of the strategies active implementation and the orientation strategy etc.	"
Nature and extent of programme	What makes up the programme and scope of the programme of programme(constituents)	"
Quantity and quality of prospective students	Type and qualifications of prospective students as well as projected population	"
Curriculum Planning	Planning of the various curriculum components of the programme	"
Quality and number of prospective	Projecting future programme requirements and capacity	"

preparing executors		
Expansion plan for the existing programme capacity	Course writers, organizers and facilitators at study centres who are not full time staff of the programme	"
Programme improvement	Planning for programme improvement through feedback a arising from planned programme evaluation	"
The financial requirement	Aggregating the funding or financial requirement of the component	"

The Model being proposed is as follows.

Table 1 above depicts our purposed model for planning a DEP.

Thus, this study suggests the following as the components of DEP that need to be planned for, for effective running of the programme.

In planning for staffing, one should know the different categories of staff that are needed, the proportion of each category relative to the total requirement, the quality of each category, taking cognizance of the fact that distance education/ learning is a different form of education from other types of education provided for the populace. This is so because personal contact between the educand and the educator is minimal and in some cases non-existent. One will also have to consider the appropriate remuneration for the various categories of both academic and non-academic staff of the programme. Umoru-Onuka (1997) suggests the need to have some academic staff in distance education programme for the purpose of coordination and liaison between the programme and the bulk of the part-time resource persons, who are usually academics, employed by the programme for the sole purpose of writing courses or setting/marking examination papers. Only academic staff can do that effectively. The schedule of duties of such staff must be well planned and allocated to optimise benefits and minimize costs.

Planning for Distance Education Programme Equipment

In planning for instructional equipment, we must ask ourselves: what kind of learning method and equipment will be most effective in this kind of programme i.e. distance learning programme? One will also endeavour to

provide answer to the kind of equipment, its quality and appropriate type that may be effective in the circumstance we find ourselves. One may think of an alternative to electric powered equipment because of the eplectic nature of our power system.

Programme planner will also think about the centers you want to create for direct teaching through the electronic media. Having established the type, quality and number of each equipment required, one will have to cost them and also ask yourself where the funds will come from. The planner also has to plan for its maintenance and replacement cost and establish savings towards these by making provision for depreciation of the equipment must decide on the most suitable and effective instructional strategy/ strategies to adopt, in order to engender the objective of the distance-learning programme. These strategies should also include appropriate instructional technology.

Instructional materials: one plans for the materials know the number of the various printed course materials, the source of the right course writers, the cost of writing, printing and distribution and so on.

Course executors, facilitators: As a matter of fact one also needs to plan for their quality, number, how they are to function since they are not full-time staff of the programme. Decide when and where the writing is to be done so as to ensure that there is quality, and that things are turned in, in time. The programme executors' are namely: Course writers, organizers and facilitators.

It is also necessary to decide on how to organize, implement and improve instruction for efficiency and effectiveness, having chosen the right instructional strategy

There is the need to plan the extent and nature of the programme vide the various courses to be run, the coverage of the prospective student population, the quality of the prospective students in terms of entry behaviour (qualification) among others.

Another component that needs to be planned for is the curriculum: what is to be taught, the objective of the curriculum and the means of imparting the knowledge and the quality of those to impart the knowledge.

Programme Expansion: The planner may have to plan for the expansion of both existing programme capacity also embrace and programme capacity new one at the planning stage by creating room for expansion through

phasing of the programme.

One has to plan how to improve the programme as it is implemented by building into it an evaluation process that ultimately provides feedback for improvement. This should be an on-going process for constant improvement of the programme so that it can stand in a competitive world. Everything about each part and stage of the programme should be constantly evaluated.

After all these, other components have been planned and their various costs ascertained. The need for sourcing for the funds and deciding the expected source of the funds also would arise. This gives rise to budgeting, which outlines the source of funds and their uses. The thrust of this proposed DEP planning model is that it emphasizes component needs analysis with a view to appropriately costing these needs and source the fund necessary for their procurement and implementation of the pragramme plan.

Conclusion

From the literature examined and our discussion so far, we may reach the following conclusion and also give some recommendations.

Planning, like its mother, management, is an every day phenomenon and an on-going process. It includes planning and evaluating every activity or item / component of a programme at every point in time. These proposed model sailed systematic component programme-planning models consist of both qualitative and quantitative analysis of programme components requirements, since the indented items. So in planning distance could be translated into monetary values for programme conception organization implementation evaluation and improvement etc. It can also be noted that one can plan the whole programme simultaneously. Any institution or programme that is well planned in advance and its plans are revised periodically is likely to stand the test of time. Therefore, planning is a necessity for distance education programme if it is to be sustained and improved.

Recommendations

A distance education programme must be well planned in advance, and the plan revised as may be found necessary during implementation both for programme revision and improvement, this is very important it the

programme is not to fail.

Evaluation of the plan and implementation of the plan of D.E.P must be inbuilt into the plan from the outset, so that its objectives may be realized. The evaluation of the plan must, in itself, be planned.

Planning of distance education programme should take cognizance of the fact that it is in a competitive market. It also must be noted that it derives its clientele from the labour market, which would provide the employment for the prospective student population. Thus, the student population also constitutes part of its clientele should plan for relevant courses that are in great demand in the labour market so that it can attract large student population for its sustenance.

Distance education planners must always be forward-looking and so plan ahead for programme expansion through projecting of new courses for the future, to keep afloat.

In planning a distance education programme, provision must be made for budgeting for every component of the programme, including advertisement and staff training. Finally, planning distance education must be systematic and chronological.

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