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DISTANCE EDUCATION: ITS ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Distance education is a means of bringing education to the door step of the people who, otherwise would not have been opportuned to have access to formal education. It thus remove the barriers to formal education and enables a lot of people access to learning while they were still keeping their jobs. But to be effective it must be properly planned, organised, implemented and well managed. This paper therefore outlines the process of properly conceiving, planning, organising, implementing and managing a result oriented distance learning programme. Since it covers a wider geographical area than the formal education, its planning, organisation and management differ substantially from the organisation and management of a formal education setting.

INTRODUCTION

The fact that all people of a nation are by right expected to be educated, and also the fact that all people do not have equal access to formal education inform the organisation of Distance Education. Distance Education is variously known as Non-formal Education, Correspondence Education, Open Studies/Learning, Distance Learning, Learning by Extent and Sandwich Programme or Part-time Education.

The major feature of distance education is programmed instruction mostly in printed but simplified form. However, in advanced countries, the use of the electronic media is also a major feature. Another characteristic that it possesses is the fact that the learner keeps his/her job while studying at his own pace with a minimum of contact sessions with his/her teachers.

Distance learning/education has been in operation in Nigeria for a long time but majorly in the form of correspondence colleges which offered various courses leading to the General Certificate of Education (both Ordinary and Advanced levels). Some of such correspondence colleges include School of Careers which also runs professional courses, Pacific Correspondence College, Exam. Success Correspondence College, City Correspondence among others. In fact, Adekanmbi (1992) states that the Nigerian University history of correspondence education in Nigeria dated back to (1967) when the University of London admitted its first set of Nigerians as external candidates. Omolewa (1978)

reports that the first Nigerian graduate was produced in 1927. Ajayi (1985) opines that the first time the Nigerian University made attempt was 1967 when Ahmadu Bello University started Teacher-in-Service' Education Programme (TISEP). University of Lagos started the Correspondence and Open Studies Unit (COSU) which later became Correspondence and Open Studies Institute (COSIT) in 1975.

WHAT THEN IS DISTANCE EDUCATION?

Teboh (1996) defines 'Distance Education as "the various forms of study in which students are not in direct physical services of tutorial organisation".

But Moore (1977) defines it as:

"A system based on the selective use of instructional media both traditional media and innovative that promotes the self teaching learning process to achieve specific educational objectives with a potentially greater geographic coverage than traditional face-to-face system of education."

It must be noted that distance learning system employs the use of both print and electronic media as earlier stated, hence it has a wider coverage both in terms of population and geographical expanse. It is therefore clear from the introduction that no single meaning can be given, given the variety of names by which distance education is known. It is known as Extra Mural, Home Study, Independent and Open Study, etc. depending on the way the user perceives distance education.

UNESCO (1982) describes it as the system designed to open opportunities for part-time study, for learning at a distance and for innovations in the curriculum. It redresses social or educational inequality and open up access to educational opportunities to a larger proportion of the adult population who may not be able to afford the formal or regular education with ease. It removes geographical inhibition to education. It is therefore, a system whereby instruction is provided to a well spread proportion of the population over a large geographical area without the necessity of the provider and the receiver having to meet on regular basis as is the case with the formal education.

THE ORGANISATION OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

There are various names for distance education as earlier indicated. Thus since most distance education programmes are run by regular institutions as units, then the organisation of distance learning would vary from one institution to another. Even where they are independently run they are not the same, because not two establishments are exactly the same, even where their nomenclatures are similar. Therefore, this article would not review the organisation of the distance learning

as they now exist but would suggest some forms of organisation of distance learning that could be effective.

Chambers English Dictionary states that organising implies "to form into organic whole or to coordinate and prepare for activity, to arrange to obtain". In this paper, organisation is used in the sense of arranging or putting together an appropriate structure aimed at achieving organisational goal with a minimum delay. Therefore, organising distance education (programme) depicts that an investigation of the education need of the target audience is carried out in order to understand the scope and the appropriate structure to cope with. This study aims at providing answers to the following questions:

Who are the target audience? What are the needs of these people? How can their needs be met? What are the necessary resources and what quantity of each is needed to meet these needs? What kind of organisational needs to be put in place to facilitate a successful implementation of the programme? What kind and level of human resources must be put in place to meet the organisational goals and to make the programme a success and break even?

It must be borne that one of the bases for Distance Education Programme is not only to break even but being kept afloat. Thus a distance education programme had more profit connotation than does the regular education programme which is essentially a social action programme with little or no profit undertone. With this perspective behind our minds, we can now proceed to planning the organisational structure for some types of distance education programme. This is only possible if the answers to the questions posed above give positive indication to social and economic feasibility of the proposed programme.

It must be pointed out that the idea of temporary organisation is also true of a distance education because it is a living organisation and as such its structure at anyone time is temporary. This is because such a programme is expected to grow if it is ably run. Thus, a programme which starts as a one department programme may with passage of time and attendant success grow to become a multidisciplinary programme. These perspectives enable the planner to plan for the structure that leads to effective organisation of a distance educational institute (Centre).

For a distance learning programme that is a sub-unit of a department, its organisation will to a large extent depend on the organisation of that department and its success will equally depend on the disposition of the head of the particular department to give some measure of free hand. He may decide to annex such a programme as part of the regular programme thus reducing its importance to infinitesimal level, such that it possesses no status of its own.

Organisation of a distance education also involves planning and organising the curriculum and its course contents. It involves course development, course writing, editing, publishing and marketing of the published course work and communication must be in the simplest language possible and easy to

understand.

However, organisation of a distance education programme portends that the learner who teaches him/herself from the course materials sent to him must be helped to organise for the task of self-teaching through course materials that are organised in a most easily understood chronological order and must be self-explanatory since it is sequential. The Institution for distance learning must therefore be broken into interactive components working together to activate the ultimate synergistic benefit where the sum total of results would be greater than the sum of the total of each as if they had worked as unrelated units.

The following order may then be observed in the organisation of External Studies (Distance Education). What are the courses that can be successfully run? Who are capable of developing and producing self 'learning materials', where only minimum of contact is required for the understanding of the contents of their assimilation thereof. Thus there is the need to organise the selection of good teachers who understand some bits of what distance education entails

Organisation of training for such teachers who could know that they are not presenting a research report or writing an article for a journal publication, but impartation knowledge to someone who sees him only on the pages of a printed work. Who by virtue of lack of visual contact could only ask the printed pages questions and also get answers from the same pages of the work. It is good training that can bring about excellent teaching.

The next stage is to organise other auxiliary services which will further facilitate the accomplishment of the objects of the Institution. Since much of its works are based on correspondence between it and its client, it arranges the unit that will organise and execute its programme.

Nomenclature may vary but the content of the work to be done is substantially the same. Define the number of units needed and the mode of doing the jobs and put together the required staff who should be giving orientation for effectiveness on their jobs.

The following Divisions are suggested for an external studies programme:

1. **The Directorate:** Which should have an academic staff from each of the major groups of disciplines e.g the Sciences, the Social Sciences, Education, and the Arts and the Professional to facilitate effective coordination of each group of disciplines of the distance learning. Each of the academic staff will liaise with the lecturers in the appropriate disciplines, for course development and writing, teaching practice supervision, contact session teaching and script marking and coordination of examination results.

It shall also consist of: (i) The Publishing Section (ii) The Marketing Section (iii) Store Section

The Publishing should have Editors for Science, Arts and Social Science with appropriate support staff for each section or unit. (The Director is assisted in this division by an Academic Coordinator/who heads the Directorate)

1. The Administrative Division headed by the Deputy Registrar/Secretary to the Centre should consist of the following units and sub-units

- (i) Examinations
- (ii) Records
- (iii) Admissions
- (iv) General Administration who should include (i) the Accounts sub-section, (ii) Audit, (iii) Personnel Sub-section, (iv) Security and General Administration.

It is noted that the Director is the chief executive officer of the programme. The programme's designated could be any of the following: The Centre for External Studies as the case of the University of Ibadan, Correspondence and Open Studies as the case of the University of Lagos, Institute of Distance & Continuing Education, Institute of Continuing Education, Part Time Education for Institutional Preferences and other variations.

ADMINISTRATION MANAGEMENT OF DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMME

Administration Management can be described as the harnessing of both human and material resources which is directed towards the realisation of the organisational goal. Thus, administration management includes organisation, planning, directing, coordinating and utilization of resources for the purpose of achieving a particular goal. It follows therefore that managing well requires a high level of intelligence and coordination of resources. For the manager of distance education programme to possess adequate knowledge of what he or she is managing he or she has to evaluate each component of the programme to decipher its working pattern, and whether it deviates and to know what action should be taken next. Evaluating those working there to discover the level of contribution each is making and how it may be enhanced. Arising from the evaluation of the programme is planning the sequence of the improvement to be carried out. The decision may be innovation oriented or developmental oriented. But whichever, it is, it has to be executed and very well too.

In planning, we may have to provide answer to the question, what are the resources needed? And what quantity of each is required? If the programme is already in existence, then do we require more hands to execute the programme with greater success? In what caliber and what proportion are the additional hands needed when appropriate answers have been found to those questions and similar ones that may arise, action follows. Hence the organisation comes to play, because it determines the pattern of management that will follow.

Allocation of functions are given to the appropriate officer within the organisation for follow up to the decisions and their proper execution. It may be noted that training of personnel may be part of the planning process to ensure that the programme is efficiently handled.

Management of distance education also involves budgeting especially as a follow up to planning which in itself is a follow -up to forecasting (that is projecting into the future of a thing). Each item on the plan is studied in terms of material implication, personnel implication, capital (fixed or working) implication and they are then translated into financial terms (monetary quantification). Then an appropriate budget provision is made for each category to facilitate prepared account for the execution of the part of the programme assigned to him or his unit.

At regular interval, appraisal is done to ensure that execution of the programme is according to plan. This is an evaluation of a type usually referred to as developmental evaluation. Management of distance education should also take cognisance of the need for monitoring of the progress being made by each unit so that deviation can be noticed in time and corrected immediately.

The management of Distance Learning must also give recognition to interaction. With its students on regular interval. It may be by way of regular correspondence or by way of occasional get together in order to have an appropriate level of feedback from them for programme improvement. Management of programme must also have a good rapport with course writers most of whom may not be on its staff. Management of the programme will involve carrying out the recruitment of regular staff who will be maintained to avoid frequent staff turn-over which in business parlance diminishes goodwill. This course writer must be recruited on the basis of efficiency and maintained consistency and continuity. Management involves therefore consultation with course writers, part-time teachers and the students. Students welfare must be given priority. Accommodation must be provided for them when in contact session. Their course materials must be taken to them regularly either by postage or through creation of collection Centres across the geographical area covered by the particular distance education institution in question. Either of the two systems, getting the printed course materials to the distance learners will reduce risks of accidents and roads hazards on the part of the students as well as minimise cost of travel. The cost of the services of course distribution is borne all the same by the students but at a reduced rate considering all the ramification involved.

CONCLUSION

Distance Education is known by various names such as education by extensions, Open Studies, Correspondence study, Home study etc. However, distance education is fundamentally a forum of education that provides instruction through either electronics or print media or both. It provides opportunity therefore for those who cannot afford formal education due to certain constraints in them. It also covers a wide geographical zone which the conventional education is

incapable of providing. Like any institution or organisation, the distance learning programme needs to be planned, organised and managed in order to achieve the objective for which it is it was set up. Organisation involves detailing communication pattern, the patterns of carrying out the functions of the organisation of a distance learning centre requires that cognisance be given to its peculiar nature which is teaching an unseen audience (unseen in terms of the instructor in case of electronic media is employed and unseen in terms of both learner and instructor if it is the print media only).

The management of distance education should ensure that all resources are harnessed to engender the realisation of the objective of distance learning. This involves financial management of irregular audience, distribution and accountability of the programme.

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