STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMME IN EVOLVING AFRICAN STATES

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Abstract

This paper examined some basic issues that are crucial to the management and organization of open and distance learning programme towards ensuring effective and efficient delivery of the programme. The paper began with the highlights of open and distance learning and its essence in developing economies. The main focus of the paper is that a proper organization and management can serve as a good catalyst for ensuring efficient and effective delivery of open and distance programme in Africa. The paper argued that a proper organization and management allows for a well programmed and directed coordination of the activities and ensure that the purposes for which they are designed are met. Finally, the paper offered some strategies considered germane in ensuring effective and efficient organization and management of open and distance learning programme in African nations.

Key words: Management, Organization, Open Learning, Distance Learning
Introduction

In the developed economics, distance education enjoys very rich culture and tradition. It has taken a very firm root as an alternative mode of education for their citizenry. In the case of developing countries or African nations, it is gradually emerging as a standard and alternative mode to the conventional mode of educating the people. Today, all over the world, it is becoming increasingly an important learning strategy for millions of students (Kayode, 2004). This is because it has come to be recognized as an important means of expanding access to education, especially in evolving African States.

In Nigeria, the ever increasing population and desire of the people have made available or existing higher institutions inadequate in absorbing our youths. This explains why it has become a major concern of successive government in our country to make education accessible to all Nigerians.

The development of modern technology according to Uyo (2004), has also assisted the advancement of distance and open learning. With the application of modern media techniques, it becomes possible to reach thousands of people across the country. In this regard, the Nigerian government has taken further steps of adding more value to higher education system through new initiatives, which include the open and distance learning system (The establishment of the National Open University of Nigeria, NOUN).

Therefore, the success of the programme is linked to proper and effective management and organization of the open and distance learning programme in order to ensure proper delivery.

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This paper proposes strategies that would help managers of the programme ensure effective management and organization of the programme so that the desired purpose can be achieved.

**Conceptualizing Management**

Management is a crucial and a central activity in any group, more so in distance learning programme. Management in relation to distance learning involves a variety of sequential and related activities designed and carried out so as to achieve the goal of the programme. It will enable managers of the programme allocate the various inputs (human and material or economic resources) by adequately planning, organizing, directing and controlling distance learning activities for the purpose of effectively and efficiently producing the outputs (it education or learning) desired by the clientele or the people in need of it.

The managerial function revolves around the acquisition of resources as well as the effectiveness and efficient utilization of the resources to attain the desired objectives. Managerial functions, therefore, focus on the effective and efficient utilization of human, material, financial and time resources to attain education objective (Ogonor, 2004).

To Agbaeze and Eyisi (2010), management is a problem solving process of efficiently and effectively determining, and achieving organizational goal(s) through the use of scarce human and non-human resources (money, machines, materials and methods) in a dynamic setting. The process therefore, is not only goal oriented but people focused and exerts influence. Management functions include planning, organization, directing, and controlling. These functions are like a chain, it is a continuum, one leads to other.
Management is considered the engine room of organization. This brings us to the issue of what organization is all about.

**Meaning of Organization**

Organization in its simplest form means the process of executive function aimed at ensuring that resources, activities and authority relationship for a learning programme are so coordinated to achieve specified goals. The rudiment of organization occurs when two or more people unite to achieve a common goal.

Organization can also be described as a system of consciously coordinated personal activities and forces of two or more persons. It is a system which must live with and meet the problem that arise when human being work together to achieve a common goal. It is also seen as an established structure and conscious planning in which people work and deal with one another in a coordinated and cooperative manner for the accomplishment of recognized goal. The emphasis here is on the network of human relationship formed to carry out planned activities to achieve desired goals.

According to Nwankwo, cited in Imhabekhai (2009), organization implies three things, namely:

A Group Of People Working Together For A Common Purpose;

A Network Of Relationships Among Individuals Or Persons And Activities (I.E. Persons, Positions And roles).
A Process Of Executive Functions Aimed At Ensuring That Resources, Activities And Authority relationship are so coordinated to achieve specific goals.

It therefore, means that organization involves the systematic arrangement of independent and interdependent parts into a working order, unity, whole, for the accomplishment of prescribed purpose. This then requires the determination of practices, duties, functions and their grouping into job practices.

**Challenges of Effective Organization and Management of Open and Distance Learning**

In the execution of any programme, the human factor is very important in harnessing other resources towards achieving the set goal. The manpower needed for effective distance education delivery at any level include subject experts, administrators, programme managers, ICT experts and designers, director who will help arrange, organize and utilize the materials, physical and financial resources meant for the purpose of ensuring that the target or end is accomplished. The likely problem that could hinder efforts in this direction is ineffective organization of the programme. This can occur if all those involved in the execution of the programme (managers, subjects experts, administrators etc) are not given the necessary encouragement and given the free hand to operate. According to Ehiametalor and Aderonmu (1985), the programme administrator is responsible for planning decision making, executing and appraising the activities of the open and distance learning, subject experts are responsible for organizing learning materials and experiences in the form of learning modules and preparing adequate teaching aid for a successful delivery of the teaching and learning. If these duties are not well coordinated, the aims and objectives of the programme will not be
achieved. Besides, inexperience on the part of the personnel can lead to ineffective organization and management of the programme. In the implementation of any programme, human factor is very important in harnessing resources/human and material, finance etc. towards actualizing the desired objectives.

**Strategies for effective organization and management of open and distance education programme**

Organization and management are crucial and indispensable input in open and distance learning programme. Effective planning must be put in respect of the implementation or execution of open and distance learning programme. The following strategies are proposed for ensuring proper management and implementation of the open and distance education programme.

**Proper information management:** It will be necessary to ensure proper information management and reliable statistical information. This is necessary in order to guarantee effective planning for policy making. Okolie (2001), alluded to this when he pointed out that neglect of information management and lack of reliable statistical information has been identified as the basis of effective planning for policy makers in any organization. In the same vein, Igbokwe (2001), observed that the programme of any organization depends on how well and quickly its members can convert data to information and information to knowledge and such information is expected to be complete, accurate and concise.

**Training and retraining of personnel involved in the programme:** There is the dire need for a definite policy on training and retraining of the personnel regularly on course design, production, administration supervision, financial management among others to enable them manage and organize effectively the implementation or delivery of the programme successfully.
In this regard, attention should be given to in-service training that will help address issue of specialization and other administrative function.

Application of Management Objective (MBO) Approach: This is a management tool that has gained widespread application in private and public sector organization, the educational industry inclusive. To Cole (2000), MBO is a system, which seeks to achieve a sense of common purpose and direction among the management of an organization in the fulfillment of business results. It is a system which involve turning the organization mission, needs to be a detailed set of supporting objective for each level of management, with each manager having objectives and responsibilities for their accomplishment. In the context of open and distance education the system will be beneficial in helping: focus on output rather than activity; provide logical development from the corporate planning process by translating corporate and departmental objectives into individual manager objectives and finally, continuous search will improve management performance (Famuyiwa, 2011).

On his part, Alugbo (2002), observed that it is capable of solving organization key sub-problems, benefit customers helped in the realization of organization, an even if it is challenging.

Ensuring total quality management: According to Okoli, (2001), total quality management is the continuous improvement of individuals, groups, departments and organization’s forms of meeting clientele’s requirements. It is also a strategic management tool for understanding the needs of customers. Then using it in open and distance education means seeking to produce maximum satisfaction in all the activities or provision of inputs for the programme.
Ensuring effective management and organization action of the curriculum design and instructional delivery: the implementers and managers of open and distance education must ensure that the instruction programme is well done properly by officers in charge and carried out as planned or organized. The programme should be done without compromising standard. To guarantee proper management of instruction delivery and curricular, the instructional programmes must be supervised very well by the various department officers in charge, there should be collaboration between the workers to ensure total and effective supervision of curriculum delivery aspect of the programme.

_Proper control and management of staff/personnel:_ the success of the programme depends largely on staff performance. This, therefore, demands that the staff (both teaching and non-teaching staff) should be monitored closely. There should be proper job specification to ensure that responsibilities are assigned properly based on qualification, area of specialization, attitude, experience and competence. Besides, according to Okemakinde, Okemakinde and Gbenro(2006), the issue of staff motivation and productivity are very essential. Appropriate stimulation and encouragement should be given to staff members as they work. Their performance should be evaluated periodically based on their assignments and responsibilities, rather than issues (Obilade, cited in Okemakinde, Okemakinde and Gbenro, 2006).

*Ensuring effective plant and facilities organization and management:* it has been established by experts that the quantity and quality of educational facilities available within an educational system have positive relationship with the standard and quality of the system. The school
plants include the study site and all the structures that have been provided to aid effective delivery of the programme (Ojedele, 1998).

The manager must not only ensure good physical planning but also adequate maintenance of such plants or facilities. The present economic situation demands that available resources and facilities should be properly maintained. This is because if allowed to deteriorate, they might be difficult to replace.

In addition, the provision of teaching facilities in the study units for the programme, books, instructional resources and study materials must be given adequate attention. Managers must, therefore, ensure sustained and continuous effort to provide and maintain infrastructural facilities at a tolerable level. In other words, maintenance culture must be instituted and sustained.

Provision and utilization of educational administration experts and planners: Okemakinde, Okemakinde and Gbenro (2006) argued that inadequate provision and under utilization of educational administrators and planners is one of the most serious constraints to effective organization and management in Nigeria. This, according to them is due to the fact that heads and principals of learning institutions are usually appointed based on years of experience without deep knowledge of educational management. Well trained and professionally skilled educational administrators, educationists, subject experts and planners should be recruited for the programme in order to ensure proper organization and effective management.
Conclusion and Recommendation

This paper examined the strategies considered appropriate for ensuring proper organization and management of open and distance learning programme with particular reference to African states. Open and Distance Learning in Africa is relatively new when compared with the developed economies or countries of the world. Consequently, it is expedient to evolve appropriate strategies that would help ensure effective and efficient organization and management of the programme so that the desired objective can be achieved. Besides, the organization and management of open and distance learning programme is no doubt complex and so, require careful planning and organization through the use of experts, very experienced and well trained personnel. Proper management will ensure proper design of educational programme, including acquisition and development of teaching and learning materials such as video and audio cassettes needed to ensure success of the programme. In the course of the discussion, the challenges facing open and distance learning programme were highlighted. The intension was to put under proper perspective the crucial and central role of effective organization and management. Expectedly, a number of strategies were proposed as means of ensuring effective organization and management of the programme. The planners and managers of the programme must work to meet the needs of the clientele or target audience, use effective teaching skill, improved interaction and feedback including contact with each site as regularly as possible. Efforts in this direction will help to reinforce management and successful implementation of the programme. It is my fervent believe that if careful and proper organization and management of the programme is diligently executed there will be a remarkable change in terms of the quality, quantity, the status and this will influence the effective delivery of the instructional programme.
References


