Management Issues in Emerging Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Driven Distance Education in Nigeria

Prof. Adeyeye M. O

Department of Local Government Studies Faculty of Administration, Obafemi Awolowo University

Oyeleke Oluniyi

Centre for Distance Learning, Obafemi Awolowo University

Abstract

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) driven distance education is gaining momentum in higher education in Nigeria. Likewise, the traditional face-to-face institutions are establishing a dual-mode form of instructional delivery system to drive some of their on-and-off campus programmes. The paper investigates the perception of stakeholders in two Nigerian universities; one dual-mode institution (Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife) and one open and distance institution (National Open University of Nigeria), on the best way open and distance education can be effectively managed with respect to funding, targeted audience, courses being offered, programme structure, technology adaptation, quality control and general administration. A descriptive survey method was adopted for the study. The sample consisted of 100 stakeholders drawn from the management, senior administrative staff and academic staff of the two institutions. A self-designed but validated questionnaire was used to obtain data from the respondents, and were analysed using simple percentage and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistical methods. Findings showed that open and distance education was practicable and achievable in Nigeria, if it could be effectively managed. Also, findings showed that stakeholders had a relatively positive perception about the administration of ODL in Nigeria, not minding the teething challenges. In conclusion, to achieve a realistic ODE, the paper recommends the separation of ODL staff from the traditional university administrators, and also that a formal strategy of constant training for management staff and other staff should be instituted.

Introduction

The frontier of education is expanding with the emergence of electronic form of learning in distance education (Cecilia, Wei-yuan, Jegede, Fowe, & Louise (2002). In Nigeria, the term distance education is amorphous. The operational practice till recent time is part-time studies where learners come to university location to receive lecture, either on weekly basis or termly basis during school holiday. To cater for the professional development of the existing workforce, absorb all the eligible and qualified applicants being denied access to higher education, a unimode distance education institution was established by Alhaji Sheu Shagari administration in early 80s, but was scraped by the succeeding General Muhammodu Buhari military government. In 2004, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo administration re-established National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). Alhaji Sheu Shagari, General Mohammodu Buhari and Chief Olusegun Obasanjo were successive Nigeria Presidents and military Head of State. To complement NOUN efforts in increasing access to higher education, some regular Nigerian universities embraced ICT-driven distance education.

Initially, every form of distance education employs face-to-face (F2F) method either within the university regular classroom, or at designated study centres. This practice is becoming outdated with the evolution of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The critical issues are how the new platform will be effectively managed. The current scenario is confronted with challenges such as limited number of applicants this arrangement can accommodate, hazards on the road as learners transit to institutions and inadequate instructional hours. In terms of management, there is dual-responsibilities by instructors who are main staff in the face-to-face regular university, who are also saddled with the responsibilities of providing instruction and tutoring for distance learners. In addition, ODL directors are seconded from regular university and usually as "political appointees" without a recourse to expertise in ODL model.

Managing higher education like any venture requires critical strategic management functions. In the management of online education, there is need to put in place a robust administrative system. This must be seen as an indispensable task. Management is a vital key to success in any

organizational set-up resources; human and material, and time has to be well managed for optimal productivity (Nakpodia, 2010). In education, management has two critical dimensions – managing the organization and classroom activities. The two has direct and remote bearing on learners' performance and ultimate educational achievement.

Cecilia et al (2002) highlights two critical areas that require management in open and distance education – designing and delivery of courses. The researchers pointed out that there are various operations of ODL that may render conventional method of management in traditional delivery mode irrelevant giving the background that in some ODL institutions are uni-mode, some are dual-mode, mixed-mode and consortia. Each of the modes may require different organizational structure. Managing distance learning requires strong personality with transformative slant who can navigate through uncertainty and risk that may be peculiar to open and distance education, which by virtue of platform is virtually non-existing in F2F (Ulukman, 2005).

E-learning environment is less stable and less predictable compare to traditional face-to-face and therefore requires fundamental changes in teaching and administration (Redmond, 2011). The technology seems to be constantly perpetually evolving and undergo constant changes. Before a significant number of users fully understand the use of the technology, e newer version would have emerged. This calls for leadership that is innovative. While introducing distance education in a University system, it is imperative for the institutional management to define their goals and critically analyse the driven force and arrive at a realistic expectation (Kelly, 2012). It also requires institutions to conduct "extensive managerial, organizational, technological, cultural, and financial review and reform" Transiting to online requires analysis of certain critical factors and development plans which include but not limited to the following: continuous funding and sustainability for the proposed projects; types of technology to be adopted in driven the e-teaching; the structure of the programme – is it profitable to start operating a blended approach, and at what percentage of online to face-to-face?; the institutional policies, mission, statement of vision, and goal of open and distance learning; the type of expected students – the working class, teenagers/adults of regular university age group, combination of the two groups of people; support sources and staff training programme, quality control mechanism. Apart from these broad views, there are countless

micro issues that will require managerial decisions (Keengwe & Georgina, 2011; Oyeleke, 2012).

Some critical questions must be raised and analysed. This is indispensable in a context when the regulatory body craft a policy that stimulate shifting from face-to-face delivery to technological driven open and distance learning. Do institutions have to join the train owing to a directive without adequate preparation? Do they have sufficient technology and technical know-how? Will existing learners who are admitted with the face-to-face orientation readily accept the new learning platform? What about the attitude of the faculty members? Embarking on such a gigantic, capital intensive programme will require a strategic planning and continuous strategic thinking and operation that is not born out of mere assumption. Institution would need to conduct empirical assessment through collection of data on how to obtain desire results among alternative means (Hashim, Bakare, & Hassan, 2015). The needs to appraise institutional goals, which according to Mintaberg (2007) occur in three ways- goals that are stable over time, those goals that previously sound good but presently with minimal utilities due to new discoveries, and those that emerge because of the depression of the current state. Regardless of where an institution is placed within the context of these goals classification, there is need to constantly be proactively responsive and adaptive (Wentling, Waight, Gallaher, Fleur, Wang, & Kanfer, 2000).

Assumption of needs as the motivating factors is not enough a reason to adopt distance education, even when such a venture potentially has capacity to solve pertinent educational problems. There is need to carry out "a needs assessment to justify the decision and prepare institutions to make the difficult decisions that follows (Watkins, Keyfn & Odunlami, 2013).

Watkings, Kaufman, &Odunlami, (2013) identify five steps to determine whether distance education is an option for an institution. They include; Identify and align the institutions vision and missions if there is no proper alignment, mission should be revised before any decision about distance education are made; identify the needs – needs is defined as differences between the current results and what is actually needed to attain the vision and mission of the institution; prioritise and select need (s) to be addressed; identify solution requirement and alternative solution. Is the distance education the solution to the institutional needs if not what are the other options available?

This is where leadership is highly essential. Simondon and Schlogger (2013) define distance education leader as a visionary capable of action, who guides an organization future to its vision, mission, goals and objective. The leader guides the organization and its people who have faith in the leader and have a clear understanding and acceptance of the organization share vision and goals. A distance learning leader has competence in knowing, designing, managing, leading and visioning distance education.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore the view of open and distance education stakeholders towards the management of the platform in Nigeria.

The objectives of the study are:
1. Determine the perception of stakeholders on managerial issues pertinent to Open and Distance Learning in Nigeria
2. Determine the perception of stakeholders on managing open and distance learning with respect to courses being offered, funding, staff policy, targeted audience, quality control and technology for delivery

Research Questions

1. What are the stakeholder's perceptions of the management of open and distance learning in Nigeria?
2. What are the perceptions of stakeholders on critical issues such as funding, staff policy, targeted audience. quality control and technology deployment in open and distance learning in Nigeria?

Methodology

The study employed a survey design. The study population consists of staff in the two institutions in Nigeria-Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife which is a dual–mode institution and National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja and Lagos. The university administration, senior faculty members, staff of ODL Centre, Senior Staff members of the university (Non-Academics) served as the respondents. The sample was made up of one hundred staff members randomly selected from National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja and Lagos and Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, both in Nigeria. For the research instrument, a self-designed questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. The questionnaire items consist of 30 items and respondents were to respond on modified Likert-scale of agree, disagree and undecided. Strongly agree and strongly disagree were removed. The two options were considered unnecessary for the purpose of research. The questionnaire items were validated by administering the questionnaire items

to the staff of Centre for Distance Learning, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. Split-half method of reliability was used to statically analyse the data, given co-efficient index of 0.72. This was considered reliable enough to be used for the study. For validity index, the items were subjected to Cronbach statistical analysis and a coefficient of 0.68 was obtained. It was considered valid enough given the limited size of respondents used for the validation exercise. The researchers personally administered the questionnaire over a period of three months. The data obtained were analysed with descriptive method of analysis (simple percentage) and inferential statistical analysis (ANOVA).

Findings and Discussion

Research Question 1

What are the stakeholder's perceptions of the management of open and distance learning in Nigeria?

Table 1

Perception of Stakeholders on Selected Indices in Managing ODL Programmes

Stakeholders' Perception	Frequency(f)	Percentage (%)
Unfavourable	24	24.7
Favourable	73	75.3
Total	97	100.0

Table 1 shows the perception of the stakeholders on some selected indices in Managing ODL Programmes such as types of courses, funding, staff policy, targeted audience, quality control and technology for delivery. It can be observed that 24.7% of the stakeholders had an unfavourable perception of the indices while 75.3% of them had a favourable perception toward it. There is an indication from this result that the majority of the stakeholders had a favourable perception on some selected indices in managing online education in Nigeria. Obinna and Ihekoronye (2011) findings revealed that teachers had a positive perception toward online education in Nigeria due to their perceived value of online education and a positive organizational facilitation toward online education usage

Research Question 2
What are the perceptions of stakeholders on critical issues such as funding, staff policy, targeted audience, quality control and technology deployment in open and distance learning in Nigeria?

Table 2
Stakeholders Responses on Management Decision on Courses to be offered in ODL

S/N	Items	Agree %	Disagree %	Undecided %
1	ODL to operate only course in the regular F2F Programme	88.7	8.2	3.1
2	ODL can innovate by designing a new course aside the university programmes	41.2	48.5	10.3
3	Course should be independent of department in regular F2F programme	79.4	10.3	10.3
4	Course should be conjunction with department in regular F2F	42.3	48.5	9.3

Table 2 shows the perception of stakeholders on managing online in terms of types of courses. The response from the table shows that majority of the stakeholders support the view that ODL Centre in the dual-mode institutions should offer courses being run in the regular face-to-face programme (88.7%), but should be run independent of department where such courses are run in the F2F (79.4%). Some of the stakeholders would desire ODL Centre to design separate courses aside those that exist in the regular programme (41.2%), though the percentage is lower than those who desire strict compliance (48.5 %). Experience among dual mode institution in Nigeria varies. At Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, it is the same programme, and the same set of instructors for both F2F and distance learners students (online). The weakness of this arrangement is the preponderance of instructors who are not computer savvy teaching online because of management decision! At the University of Lagos, ODL programmes are

domiciled in different department from F2F programme; however, lecturers in F2F programmes, adjunct instructors and ODL instructors are allowed to participate in teaching. At the University of Ibadan, it is the same courses and are taught by the same instructors, but ODL has dedicated instructors who support instructors in F2F mode.

Table 3
Stakeholders Responses on the recruitment and usage of staff in ODL

S/N	Items	Agree %	Disagree %	Undecided %
1	Open and Distance Education Centre staff	61.9	30.9	7.2
2	Non- University Staff	39.2	54.6	6.2
3	Only University Staff	10.3	84.5	5.2

Table 3 shows the perception of stakeholders on recruitment and usage of staff in ODL. Majority of the respondents support an arrangement where ODL Centers recruit their staff to teach ODL programmes (61.9%), a good percentage of the respondents (54, 6%) rejects the idea of engagement non-University staff as its usually practice by some institutions running part-time programmes, while 39.2% of the respondents support using such ad-hoc staff. (The part-time programmes eventually transformed to ODL programmes). Surprisingly, a high percentage of the respondents (84.5%) reject the idea of using existing staff teaching regular students. The qualification of the personnel should also be considered while taking responsibility in open and distance learning institution (Hashim, Bakare, & Hassan, 2015). This supports finding of Mbonu and Ubbaonu (2011) who observe that the most serious problem identified in Nigeria is the administration of the study centres by people who lack sufficient experience in the field of educational administration to develop, maintain and manage exemplary programs. Other challenges include inadequate funding and lack of receptive to open and distance education, inability of the administrators to identify and recruit committed facilitators, high cost of technology to support open and distance education.

Table 4

Stakeholders Responses on Management Issues in Funding of ODL Programmes

S/N	Items	Agree %	Disagree %	Undecided %
1	Federal Government Grant/Support	33	53.6	13.4
2	Parent University Support	67	27.8	5.2
3	Only ODL Centre Funding	93.8	4.1	2.1
4	Online Students Paying Higher Fees	64	25	8
5	Uniform fees across programme	68	19.6	12.4

Table 4 shows the perception of stakeholders on management issues in funding of ODL programmes. The response shows overwhelming supports for ODL centre to source for funding of their programme (93.8%). This is followed by support and funding by the parent institution (67%), whereas a low percentage of 33% supports funding by Federal Government. The respondents support a situation where ODL students are charges higher fees compare to regular students, however, the fees should be uniform for all ODL students irrespective of course of study. Opinion of the respondents was sought on the distribution of income accrue to ODL centres A greater percentages (60.8) of respondents rejects sharing among the ODL centres, parent institution and the department where the course is situated in the regular programme. On a related issue, respondents (68%) would want neither the university nor department to share from the proceeds, but only the instructors who engage in course facilitation should be remunerated. How to marry this position with the initial quest that prompts the University to embark on ODL programme is of great concern. It should be noted that some institutions embark on ODL programmes to increase their internally generated revenue in the face of dwindling government funding.

Ajadi (2013) observe challenges of funding open and distance education and recommends; increased in Government grant for distance education, donations from philanthropists/NGO's, review of fees paid by learners on yearly basis by distance learning institutions, special levies on distance learners, special levies on religious organizations, maintaining partnership

with Multinational Corporations, Education (DE) tax to be levied on every tax payers, local government to contribute certain percentage of their allocation to fund distance education, produce course materials in large quantities and sell to sister distance learning institutions in other countries.

Table 5

Stakeholders Responses on Management Decision on Targeted Audience

S/N	Items	Agree %	Disagree %	Undecided %
1	Working Class Only	80.4	15.5	4.1
2	Non-Working Class	74.2	13.4	12.4
3	Working Class and Non- Working Class	47.4	37.1	15.5
4	Changing from Face-to-Face to Online Platform	57.7	27.8	14.4
5	Face-to-Face Platform	53.6	30.9	15.5

Table 5 shows the perception of stakeholders on managing online in terms of targeted audience. The respondents' response shows their approval of working class (80.4%) and non-working class (74.2%) as targeted audience. However, the combination of the two groups (working class and non-working class) reveals some ambiguity in respondents' response, though greater percentage (47.4%) agreed as against those who disagreed (37.1%). This suggests need for further investigation on appropriate audience to be admitted to ODL programmes. Opinion of respondents was also sought on the possibility of face-to-face regular students changing to online platform and vice-versa. The results show that respondents were favourably disposed to such an idea as 57.7% supports changing from F2F to online and 53.6% supports changing from online to F2F.

Table 6
Stakeholders Responses on Management Choice of Technology for ODL

S/N	Items	Agree %	Disagree %	Undecided %
1	Synchronous Technology	69.1	21.6	9.3
2	Asynchronous Technology	82.5	6.2	11.3
3	Use of Learning Management system	22.7	56.7	20.6
4	Use of SMS	83.5	8.2	8.2
5	E-mail	59.8	23.7	16.5
6	Facebook	88.7	3.1	8.2
7	CD-ROMs	81.4	5.2	13.4
8	Audio/Video	74.2	16.5	9.3
9	Blog	90.7	6.2	3.1
10	All the Media above	88.7	6.2	5.2

Table 6 shows the perception of stakeholders on management decision on the choice of technology to be adopted in online delivery mode. As shown in their responses, 69.1% of the stakeholders agree that ODL programmes should adopt synchronous mode where instructors address all the students at a specific time, 21.6% of them disagree while 9.3% were undecided. Similarly, the vast majorities (82.5%) of them agree that asynchronous model where instruction is individualized should be adopted; however, 6.2% disagree while 20.6% were undecided. On should ODL use Learning Management System (LMS) for e-teaching, 22.7% of the stakeholders agree, 56.7% disagree and 20.6% of them were undecided. It is also indicated that ODL should make use of telephone such as SMS as 83.5% of the stakeholders were in support while 8.2% of them each disagree and undecided. Their responses further show that 59.8% of them were in agreement with the use of email in ODL whereas, 23.7% of them disagree while 16.5% were undecided. As also shown, 88.7% of them were in favour

of the use of Facebook for teaching in ODL while 3.1% and 8.2% of them respectively disagree and undecided. On the perception that if ODL can also make use of CD Rom also received the favour of 81.4% of the stakeholder while 5.2% and 13.4% of them respectively disagree and undecided. In addition, 74.2% of them agree that video capture or recorded teaching should be used for all the ODL courses while 16.5% and 9.3% of them respectively disagree and undecided. On technology/delivery mode, the vast majority (90.7%) of the stakeholders agree that ODL instructors can create blog for teaching while 6.2% and 3.1% of them respectively disagree and undecided. Finally, 88.7% of the stakeholders were in support that all the above media should be used in online programmes while 6.2% disagree and 5.2% of them were undecided. Of great concern is the response on the use of LMS which records a low support of 22.7%. LMS is the major technology in asynchronous ODL platform. The only explanation could be that respondents lack adequate knowledge of LMS for it to be rejected (56.7%) by respondents.

Table 7
Stakeholders Responses on Management Decision on Quality Control Unit (QCU)

S/N	Items	Agree	Disagree	Undecided
1	Constituted by ODL Centers	77.3	15.5	7.2
2	Constituted by the Parent University	38.1	53.6	8.2
3	Constituted by National Universities Commission	45.4	39.2	15.5

Table 7 shows the perception of stakeholders on managing online in terms of quality control unit. It shown that 77.3% of the stakeholders agree that ODL should establish a quality control unit while 15.5% of them shared contrary opinion and 7.2% of them could not pitch their tents either. However, the idea that university should be responsible for putting in place QCU does not go down well with the stakeholders as 38.1% of them agree with this while 53.6% disagree with 8.2% who were undecided. It was further indicated that 45.4% of the stakeholders were in agreement that quality control should be

the sole work of Nigeria University Commission while 39.2% and 15.5% respectively disagree and undecided.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Successful initiation and implementation of e-learning is directly related to efficient and effective management. The paper focuses on various management decisions that are germane to e-learning in emerging electronic driven distance education in Nigeria. The results give insight to various decisions on prospective audience for distance education, structure of the programme either to start with blended approach or full online, funding policy, quality control measures, and recruitment and staff. The findings will give some baseline information that can be found useful for institutions transiting from face-to-face to online delivery mode, also policy makers, and educational administrators.

On this background, the researchers recommend the use of specialists and experts in the field of education as managers of open and distance education centres in Nigeria. Also, there is need to shift from traditional means of administering regular university system to a more flexible and results-oriented style in distance education. The merging ICT driven distance education in Nigeria is a new paradigm and should be treated as such. Lastly, federal government should make capital available at the beginning of transition for initial take off. The initiatives should be viewed from social responsibility perspective and not a money-making ventures where institution see distance education as a major ways of acquiring internally generated fund.

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