

CHALLENGES OF DISTANCE LEARNING STRATEGIES IN NATIONAL TEACHERS INSTITUTE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract- Distance learning is an evolution in the process of learning which strives to accommodate those setbacks that would have otherwise discouraged aspiring learners from continuing. The NTI with its mandate on teaching preparation readily embraced distance learning in a number of programmes one of which is the Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE). This paper takes a look at the strategies used in the programme and the challenges they face as well as strategies not yet in use. Suggestions were made for the remediation of the situation and improvement of the status of the programme

Keywords- Distance learning, programme, challenges, strategies, National Teachers institute (NTI) Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE)

I. INTRODUCTION

The Nigerial national policy on education advocates "Education for all and has over the years recognized the role of open and distance learning in achieving lifelong education. It thus states that at any stage of the educational process after junior secondary education, every person has the liberty to opt for: continuing full-time studies; combining work with study or engaging in full time job and having the opportunity to resume studies later. The policy document thus stipulates that the goals of open and distance education are to:

1. Provide access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied.
2. Meet special needs of employers by mounting special certificate courses for their employees at their work place.
3. Encourage internationalization especially of tertiary education curricula
4. Ameliorate the effect of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing experts as teachers regardless of their locations or places of work (FME, 2008).

An appraisal of the scope of open and distance learning practice at any level of education in Nigeria shows that there is a gap between policy and practice. The National University commission (NUC) as the statutory quality assurance agency in the Nigerian University system had to contend with the task of streamlining the practice of distance learning and stipulating a code of good practice. It was not easy to resolve the associate challenges among many others and so it was imperative that the National Teachers Institute (NTI) should be set up.

The NTI was set up to serve as a Distance learning Educational Institution in order to address and proffer solutions to the challenges facing Teacher Education in Nigeria. The challenges are to:

1. Truly professionalize the teaching profession at all level;

2. Curb the worrisome shortages of professional teachers nation-wide;
3. Provide serving teachers the opportunity to further, upgrade/update their qualification and professional competence without necessarily leaving their jobs and provide all the above at minimum costs to both the students and the education authorities (www.ntinigeria.org)

It is gratifying to note that the NTI though still contending with some challenges has taken a big step in response to Act No 7 of 1978 which mandated the NTI to organize programmes for upgrading and updating practicing teachers at all level. Through the open distance learning, it had focused on the production of sub-degree certificates in education like Nigeria certificate in Education (NCE), post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE), Advance Diploma in Education (ADE), Pivotal Teachers Training programmes (PTTP) among others. Degree programmes in education have recently been started through open Distance learning.

For the purpose of this paper, particular interest is given to the Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) programme which is usually completed in a shorter period of time (between 12 and 15 months) and therefore has the task of transforming the learner within the short deviation amidst the numerous challenges. The concern is whether the objectives of the PGDE programme are actually attainable and effectively so given the circumstance of the programme and the distance learning strategies employed

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

The purpose of this paper is to:

1. identify the distance learning strategies employed in the NTI (PGDE) programme
2. identify the challenges of the distance learning strategies in use
3. highlight the distance learning strategies that are lacking (if any) and

4. suggest steps for the remediation of the ailing strategies

Conceptual background

A lot of challenges are posed by distance education with the result that the question that seems pertinent is why teach at a distance?

Many teachers feel that the opportunities offered by distance education outweigh the obstacles. The challenges posed by distance education are countered by opportunities to:

1. Reach a wider student audience
2. Meet the needs of students who are unable to attend on - campus classes
3. Involve outside speakers who would otherwise be unavailable
4. Link students from different socio, cultural economic and experiential backgrounds(<http://www.ntnigeria.org/>)

The next thing is the basis for grouping courses in distance education programme. Based on technology in use and the location of the programme, a distance education programme may fall under the following categories:

- i. Print based courses
- ii. Conferencing courses (video conferencing)
- ii. Computer based training (CBT)
- iv. Pre-recorded audio courses (tapes, podcasts)
- v. Radio broadcast courses
- vii. Television broadcast courses
- vii. Online courses using learning management systems (Willis, 1993)

Application of good practice strategies

Distance learning can be made as effective as traditional face-to- face learning through the use of seven principles of good practice as used in undergraduate education. The seven principles of good practice are:

1. Good practice encourages contact between students and instructors
2. Good practice encourage co-operation among students
3. Good practice uses active learning techniques
4. Good practice gives prompt feedback
5. Good practice emphasizes time on task
6. Good practice communicates light expectations
7. Good practice respects diverse talents and ways of learning (Willis, 1993)

III. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) IN DISTANCE LEARNING.

Technology makes easier to interact with students. The use of technology is thus an integral part of distance education. The internet service provider (ISP) and internet bandwidth call for discussion at this stage. Internet bandwidth is needed to access web-based student learning and support services. The amount of internet bandwidth required is directly

proportional to the number of uses who access the service(s) and is one of the parameters for easy access at shortest time. The internet service provides is an organization that provides internet bandwidth. (RaO & Murali, 2013)

Assessment strategies for programmes

Summative and formative assessment techniques are used. Data are sourced with interviews, surveys, documents, records gathered about various programmes, field reports and content analysis the assessment should both self-assessment and external assessment. Self-assessment to determine the objectives of various programmes and align with institutional mission statement while external assessment will help judge the validity and credibility of the programme. The institutional mission statement ensures that the distance learning fits into the institutions mission, that the institution has the resources to do so

Student learning and course assessment techniques

Courses assessment standards should aim at achieving learning outcomes comparable to traditional face- to – face programmes. Effective courses assessments should help institutions determine if the distance learning curriculum fits into the existing traditional programme of the institution. (Willis, 1993)

Use of Effective Teaching Skills

Effective distance teaching requires the enhancement of existing skills rather that development new abilities most of the time attention should be given to the following:

1. Realistically assess the content that can be effectively delivered in the course at the time available.
2. Take note of the individual differences un learning styles
3. Avoid long lectures diversify course activities
4. Focus on the students
5. Use print component to supplement non-print materials
6. Use short cohesive statements and also direct questions
7. Develop strategies for effective student's reinforcement

IV. METHODS

The data used was collected through library search and interview of course facilitators of the programme. Four course facilitators each were interviewed each from five study centres from three states in the country Delta, Anambra and Enugu were used out of the forty three (43) PGDE study centres spread across the nation

Results

The revelations from the study is that the strategies mainly in use in the PGDE programme are:

1. Online which is mainly used for registration
2. Modules (print-based) which is the major materials used for instruction by facilitators and consultation/study by the students
3. Computer-based assignments which are utilized at intervals
4. Face-to face lecture contacts which is done at a very high frequency
5. Pre-recorded materials which is used occasionally
6. Face to face project supervision (and defence project supervision)
7. Face to face teaching practice supervision

For each of these strategies in use, there is no doubt that a lot of improvements are being made but there are yet challenges that do hinder the attainment of the desired status.

The strategies that are not in use in the programme are:

1. Video conferencing
2. Television broadcasting
3. Radio broadcasting
4. Use of online for instruction

It is hoped that upon the attainment of a more sophisticated level of practice these strategies will be needed and utilized. The challenges facing both the learners and the facilitators are still much like

1. Sources of power
2. Availability of facilities and gadgets and
3. Cost which is still a – to many aspiring students and
4. Easy access to a functional internet

Suggestions

1. The problem of cost need to be addressed is it can be subsidized, a lot of impact will be made as the fees

the students have to pay is still a might make to so many who are “struggling to survive”

2. There is need for more improvement on power sources for facilitating the operation of vital gadgets needed for development.
3. The management of the NTI should not relent in their effort to catch up with the advanced nations in meeting the needs of the society.

CONCLUSIONS

Distance learning has a lot to offer to the society at a time like this when there are numerous roles to content with. Many people are compelled to develop themselves without compromising their job opportunities. The PGDE programme as one of the avenues for acquiring teacher competence within a short duration comes in handy though with a lot of challenges. To derive the lofty benefits that this programme can offer option at own disposal is to face and summit the challenges that constitute the hitches. A lot of efforts have been made and what is left to be done is obviously less than what is to be done the suggestions made in this paper if heeded will go a long way in salvaging the situation

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