

OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION: A STRATEGY FOR TRAINING INDUSTRIAL WORKERS IN NIGERIA

OLOWOLA TEMITAYO R.

Regional Training & Research Institute for Open and Distance Learning (RETRIDAL)

National Open University of Nigeria

14/16, Ahmadu Bello Way, Victoria Island, Lagos, Nigeria.

Abstract

Distance education mode of learning allows for the situation whereby learners are not enclosed in the four walls of the classroom. It is modern and flexible in terms of programmes, space and time. The learners include those who want to educate and equip themselves for the purpose of updating their knowledge, learn about modern and latest skills in order to perform better and maximally in their trade and professions; be it science, liberal arts, social sciences, technology and a host of others. Nigeria as a nation, has various types of industries whose human capital are made up of these categories of personnel. This paper therefore discusses the inherent potential of ODL institutions to organise and arrange for trainings in different areas of specialization with focus on high level performance for different categories of manpower in these industries in Nigeria in order to achieve their corporate goals and objectives in the global contemporary competitive world. It concludes with a functional framework for implementing strategic continuing professional development/training using ODL methodologies.

Introduction

World wide, Open and distance education is now being accepted as an alternative mode for teaching, learning and training. Although it had been in use for quite a long time, it had never enjoyed the acceptance observable in recent times. These days, it is quite popularly used for teaching and learning of different courses virtually in all areas of education be it Humanities, Social Sciences or Sciences. Also, the current state of distance education and the use of various types of Information, Communication and Technology devices has made the delivery of instructions to learners and also, communication between tutors and learners; between learners themselves to really underscore the target to effectively educate and/or train everybody who is interested in education and/or interested in whichever skills that require improvement and development. According to Nigam and Joshi (2007), it is for some people, a chance to get tertiary education, for some to de-tag the label of drop-outs or unskilled or semi-skilled workers. In all ramifications therefore, distance education and open learning system is one of the most feasible and viable alternative means for teaching-learning and training that has broadened areas of education to all those who by one or the other reason are not able to availed it. It has been found equally beneficial for the disadvantaged groups such as people living in rural, riverine and remote areas, women, socially, geographically and economically under-privileged groups. Additionally, it has proved to be cost effective in improving educational opportunities (Coulter, 1989; Ojo, Ogidan and Olakulehin, 2006). It is in consonance with the inherent potentialities that this mode of education possesses that this paper is showcasing it as a strategic means of training corporate workers on different courses be it very short time, short term or otherwise that can contribute to the human capital proficiency, development and performance with the sole aim of improving

the skills of the employed human capital of the corporate organization to achieve their corporate goals in the globalise world without jeopardising the time required for official tasks.

Training and Corporate (Industrial) Workers

Training in all ramifications is a critical ingredient of all successful corporate enterprises, whether local, national or global. Also, of focal importance is the potentiality of human resource of employees which now becomes more essential considering the rapid developments in technology, globalisation, knowledge-based organisations and the attendant emergent need for perfection, competition and sustenance and maintenance of corporate customership. Ensuring that employees acquire expertise in a range of complex tasks quickly and effectively is now an essential organisational objective in order to generate and maintain a flexible, competitive workforce. Achieving this objective in a cost effective manner is critical to sustainable economic, breaking even point and social development of all corporate bodies that are worth their salt in the emerging market world wide. As rightly observed by Schank (1994), incompetence is highly damaging industrial productivity and profitability. While interacting with the employees of airlines, rental car companies, hotels, restaurants, retail chains and a wide range of repair services, he deduced and remarked that problems of inefficiency and incompetence confront many workers on a regular basis. He therefore concluded that the conventional approach to training is largely ineffectual, and that employees are not provided with appropriate opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills that underpin the expertise necessary to perform their duties in an efficient and effective manner. As it is expected round the world, for human capital of an organization to perform optimally in the modern day environment, adequate training must be provided by the employer or better still, individual must be ready to undergo appropriate trainings regularly to keep self abreast of techniques required for good and better performance in his/her place of work in order not to be relegated to the background in his/her chosen career. This is a pointer to the fact that there is an increasing need for individuals to take charge of the development of their own learning and careers for a variety of reasons. These include the fact that there is increasing rate of change in various existing organisations and by extension, the knowledge and skills required to perform on available jobs and schedules in those organisations; Career ladders are rapidly shrinking or disappearing as reorganisations lead to flatter structures. There is therefore an ever-increasing need for workers to keep learning to keep up with the rapid growth in knowledge and the rate of change that comes up in modern day global workplace environments.

Open and Distance Education as Strategy

Recognising the paradigm shift brought about by Open and Distance Learning mode of educational institutions where-ever it operates in terms of flexibility, space and time; ICT infrastructures it allows for delivery of instructions during facilitations and also in particular the different kinds of courses that is always in tune with the needs of the societies industrial organization inclusive it floats for its teaming customers, ODE

possesses the wherewithal through which different trainings requires by human capital of various corporate organisation needed to perform effectively in the competitive marketing environment the global world is turning to. Considering the known Traditional approaches to training which has always been based primarily on face-to-face method of instruction, part of the deficiencies it harbours can be identified right from the cost effectiveness perspective among others. For example, in highlighting the costs associated with the human resource development industry in the USA, Romiszowski (1992) estimated that of the total cost of \$100 billion per year, only \$30 billion was actually spent on training, with indirect costs such as travel, accommodation and time off accounting for the remaining \$70 billion. He concluded that if the approximately 70% of training funds currently spent on indirect expenses could be allocated to the design, development and delivery of high quality , self-instructional courseware, there could be a quantum leap in the flexibility, efficacy and cost effectiveness of training programs. This vacuum ODE would bridge if all impetus require for its optimum performance are put in place where ever it is being adopted as a means of education and training. If this can be put in place, why, then, is so much money still being wasted on traditional face-to-face training programs?

Using Nigeria as an example to showcase the issue of Open and Distance Education being used as a strategy for training the Industrial/ Corporate Workers, the structure of an outlet named Centre for Continuing Education and Workplace Training (CCE&WT), National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) readily come to play. Through such outlets the Training arm of an Open and Distance Education Institution can be housed. It is this Centre that will be catering for whatever kind and type of training that is germane to skill acquisition and development of human capital of the industries knowing fully well that many workers who are of age and those who could not leave their jobs to attend full time schooling but require one type of training or the other would through this arrangement achieve their goals of becoming equipped with the needs of the industries where they work. The outlet apart from floating different types and kind of very short/short courses that may be certificated by Diploma (6 Months Courses) or Certificate (Weeks as the case may be) or Proficiency Trainings (Two/Three Day Courses) may be collaborating with particular Industry/Corporate organization to handle group training for their different categories of staff. To explore the potential of such group training there may be need to provide means for developing collaborative activities using asynchronous technology; if it can be arranged knowing fully well the interaction between Open and Distance learning and ICT infrastructures such as Audio-teleconferencing, Audiographic communication system, Video conferencing and broadcast television/radio with attendant audio-teleconferencing..

Given consideration to the above means that the Training Centre will be providing access for training to all those who desire and need to improve their qualifications, skills and competence. The learner is free to study at his/her pace and time his/her studies according to his/her convenience. The important features are: Relaxed entry qualifications for specified groups, Study according to learner's pace, place and convenience, Flexibility in selecting courses and the Use of modern and appropriate educational and communication technologies. The Training Centre would be expected to offer various unique courses and

programmes of studies that will adhere the industries/corporate bodies in the society to it. Such courses or programmes may include Certificate in Teaching Primary Mathematics, Diploma in Aquaculture, Diploma or Certificate In Intellectual Property Rights, Diploma In Environment And Sustainable Development, Awareness Course On Intellectual Property Rights, Appreciation Course on Environment and Proficiency courses for Front Office staff and others.

CONCLUSION

As the use of distance education mode for teaching and learning is becoming widely accepted day-in day-out, there is still lot of areas of human endeavour where its presence would be appreciated because it will satisfy the yearnings of the people in all societies of the world. The result of this paper therefore indicates that promotion of open and distance education for the training of industrial/corporate workers is the need of the hour. This paper is an expression of identified needs in the world of work. The belief is that this venture would strengthen the stand and prospect of Open and Distance Education mode of learning where Conventional Educational mode might have failed.

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