The Role of Business Educators in Distance Learning in the 21st Century: Challenges and Prospects in Education System in Nigeria

Ebele Okereke C.

Department of Business and Entrepreneurship Education, Kwara State University, Malete, Kwara State, Nigeria

Email address:
ebeleokereke@gmail.com

Abstract: The paper was on the role of business educators in distance learning in the 21st century: challenges and prospects. Education and technology plays significant role in the progress and development of a nation. Business educators cannot afford to be on the wrong side of the digital era that makes teaching and learning so enjoyable. Therefore, this paper discussed concept of distance learning education; types of ICTs tools used for distance learning; role of educators especially business educators in the 21st century education, challenges of distance education, as well as the prospects. However, the paper concludes with the recommendation which is based on the problems facing distance learning system of Nigeria.

Keywords: Educators, Business Education, Distance Learning, Challenges and Education System

1. Introduction

In the past, the conventional process of teaching has revolved around teachers planning and leading students through a series of instructional sequences to achieve a desired learning outcome. Typically, these forms of teaching have revolved around the planned transmission of a body of knowledge followed by some forms of interaction with the content as a means to consolidate the knowledge acquisition. Contemporary learning theory is based on the notion that learning is an active process of constructing knowledge rather than acquiring knowledge and that instruction is the process by which this knowledge construction is supported rather than a process of knowledge transmission (Duffy & Cunningham, 1996).

In the past, educational institutions have been providing little choices for students in terms of the method and manner in which programmes have been delivered. Students have typically been forced to accept what has been delivered and institutions have tended to be quite staid and traditional in terms of the delivery of their programmes, Presently, ICT applications have provided many options and choices and many institutions are now creating competitive edges for themselves through the choices they are offering students. These choices extend to from where students can choose to learn to where they learn. This paper therefore, discussed the concept of distance learning education, the role of educators especially business educators in the 21st century education, types of techniques used for distance learning, challenges of distance education, and advantages of business education as well as the prospects.

2. Concept of Distance Learning Education

The concept of flexibility in the delivery place of education programmes are not new (Moore & Kearsley 1996). Educational institutions have been offering programs at a distance for many years and there has been a vast amount of research and development associated with establishing effective practices and procedures in off-campus teaching and learning. Use of the technology, however, has extended the scope of this activity and where previously off-campus delivery was an option for students who were unable to attend campuses, today; many more students are able to make this choice through technology-facilitated learning settings.

In many instances, traditional classroom learning has given way to learning in work based settings where students are able to access courses and programmers for their work loads.

Sabrefencer (2014) defined distance learning as a mode of delivering education and information often on an individual basis, or collective to students who are not physically present in a traditional setting such as classroom. Distance learning is a process of providing access to learning when the teacher and the learners are separated by time and distance or both through online technologies; learning has become an activity that is no longer set within programmed schedules and sloths. Learners are free to participate in learning activities when time permits and this freedom have greatly increased the opportunities for many students to participate in formal programmes. The wide variety of technology that support learning are able to provide synchronous support for learning so that the need for real-time participation can be avoided while the advantage of communication and collaboration with other learners is retained.

3. ICT Tools and Facilities Used for Distance Learning

The term "generic tool" is used in this document to represent ICT tools useful in many different disciplines and that might be taught to most or all students. The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) and a number of other people and organizations have made recommendations about students learning to use generic tools (ICT in Education, 2000). For example, since 1980 the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics has supported use of calculators in the curriculum. ISTE believes that all students can and should develop a reasonable level of skill in use of all of the tools in the bulleted list--by the end of elementary school, or early into middle school. Continued use of these tools should be thoroughly integrated throughout the curriculum after students gain an initial functional level of expertise. Examples of these generic tools include;
- Word processor,
- Database,
- Spreadsheet,
- Graphics (both Paint and Draw),
- Graphing (of data and functions), using both computers and graphing calculators,
- Desktop publication systems,
- Desktop presentation systems,
- Multimedia and hypermedia systems
- Connectivity, including email, the Web, and groupware; and
- Calculators (the full range, from low-end 4-function calculators to high-end calculators that can solve equations, graph functions, and may be programmable).

ICT tools provide the means to allow access, reference, store, organize, manipulate, present, & communicate information by electronic and other automated means. These include hardware, software, & telecommunications in the form of personal computers, scanners, digital cameras, phones, faxes, modems, CD and DVD players, and recorders, digitized video, radio, and TV programmes & multimedia programmes (innlotech, 2000). An ICT teacher tends to know more than a typical classroom teacher about the generic application being taught, and he or she tends to be more experienced in teaching ICT. Since the same teacher may be teaching all students at a particular grade level, or all students in a school, or all students in a teacher education cohort, this helps to ensure a common base of student knowledge about the applications being taught. However, the instruction given by an ICT teacher in a computer lab often is not closely related to the curriculum that students are currently studying in their regular classroom. Transfer of learning to the regular classroom and the subjects being studied there may be weak, or may not occur. In addition, it often happens that the regular classroom teacher does not attend and participate in the instruction provided by the ICT teacher. Thus, the regular teacher does not know what his or her students are learning about ICT and does not gain any knowledge of how to teach this aspect of ICT (ICT in Education, 2000).

Furthermore, ICT tools used for distance education in the 21st century (ICT in Education, 2000):

4. Radio and TV Broadcasting Being Used in Education

Radio and television have been used widely as educational tools since the 1920s and the 1950s, respectively. There are three general approaches to the use of radio and TV broadcasting in education:
- Direct class teaching, where broadcast programming substitutes for teachers on a temporary basis;
- School broadcasting, where broadcast programming provides complementary teaching and learning resources not otherwise available; and
- General educational programming over community, national and international stations which provide general and informal educational opportunities.

The notable and best documented example of the direct class teaching approach is Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI).. This consists of "ready-made 20-30 minute direct teaching and learning exercises to the classroom on a daily basis. The radio lessons, developed around specific learning objectives at particular levels of mathematics, science, health and languages in national curricula, are intended to improve the quality of classroom teaching and to act as a regular, structured aid to poorly trained classroom teachers in under-resourced schools."IRI projects have been implemented in Latin America and Africa.

5. Teleconferencing and Educational Uses

Teleconferencing refers to "interactive electronic communication among people located at two or more different places." There are four types of teleconferencing based on the nature and extent of interactivity and the sophistication of the technology: Audio conferencing, Audio-graphic conferencing, Videoconferencing; and Web-based conferencing.

Teleconferencing is used in both formal and non-formal learning contexts to facilitate teacher-learner and learner-learner discussions, as well as to access experts and other resource persons remotely. In open and distance learning, teleconferencing is a useful tool for providing direct instruction and learner support, minimizing learner isolation. The audio-graphic teleconferencing network aims to provide continuing education and academic upgrading to users. Higher education institutions using teleconferencing in their online learning programs include National Open University of Nigeria, Open University of the United Kingdom, Unitar (Universiti Tun Abdul Ruzak) in Malaysia, Open University of Hong Kong, and Indira Gandhi National Open University.

6. Computers and the Internet Being Used for Teaching and Learning

There are three general approaches to the instructional use of computers and the Internet, namely:

- Learning about computers and the Internet, in which technological literacy is the end goal;
- Learning with computers and the Internet, in which the technology facilitates learning across the curriculum; and
- Learning through computers and the Internet, integrating technological skills development with curriculum applications.

Learning about computers and the Internet focuses on developing technological literacy. It typically includes:

- Fundamentals: basic terms, concepts and operations
- Use of the keyboard and mouse
- Use of productivity tools such as word processing, spreadsheets, data base and graphics programs
- Use of research and collaboration tools such as search engines and email
- Basic skills in using programming and authoring applications such as Logo or HyperStudio
- Developing an awareness of the social impact of technological change.
- Presentation, demonstration, and the manipulation of data using productivity tools
- Use of curriculum-specific applications types such as educational games, drill and practice, simulations, tutorials, virtual laboratories, visualizations and graphical representations of abstract concepts, musical composition, and expert systems
- Use of information and resources on CD-ROM or online such as encyclopedia, interactive maps and atlases, electronic journals and other references.

7. Tele-collaboration

Online learning involving students logging in to formal courses online is perhaps the most commonly thought of application of the Internet in education. However, it is by no means the only application. Web-based collaboration tools, such as email, list servers, message boards, real-time chat, and Web-based conferencing, connect learners to other learners, teachers, educators, scholars and researchers, scientists and artists, industry leaders and politicians—in short, to any individual with access to the Internet who can enrich the learning process.

The organized use of Web resources and collaboration tools for curriculum appropriate purposes is called tele-collaboration. Judi Harris defines tele-collaboration as "an educational endeavor that involves people in different locations using Internet tools and resources to work together. Much educational tele-collaboration is curriculum-based, teacher-designed, and teacher-coordinated. Most use e-mail to help participants communicate with each other. Many tele-collaborative activities and projects have Web sites to support them." The best tele-collaborative projects are those that are fully integrated into the curriculum and not just extra-curricular activities, those in which technology use enables activities that would not have been possible without it, and those that empower students to become active, collaborative, creative, integrative, and evaluative learners (see Table 1).There are currently hundreds of tele-collaborative projects being implemented worldwide and many more that have either been completed or are in development.

One example is the Voices of Youth project developed by UNICEF. It encourages students to share their views on global issues, such as HIV/AIDS and child labor, with other youths and adults around the world through an electronic discussion forum. The Voices of Youth website also provides background information on the different discussion topics as well as resource materials to help teachers integrate the Voice of Youth discussions in their other classroom activities.

8. International Telementor Program (ITP)

The International Telementor Program (ITP) links students with mentor-experts through email and discussion forums. Founded in 1995 with support from Hewlett Packard, ITP provides project-based online mentoring support to 5th to 12th grade and university students, especially from at-risk communities. The ITP telementor typically meets online with the students at least once every two weeks to answer questions, discuss key issues, recommend useful resources, and comment on student output. The teacher's role, on the other hand, is to provide support to both student and telementor, monitor the telementoring process, and track the student's progress.

9. The Role of Educators in Business Education in the 21st Century Education

In the past, conventional process of teaching has revolved around business educators planning and leading students

through a series of institutional sequences to achieve a desired learning outcome. These forms of teaching have revolved around the planned transmission of a body of knowledge by some form of interaction with the contents as a means to consolidate the knowledge acquisition.

Duncan (2009) opined that teaching has never been more important, and the desperate need for more students' success has never been so urgent. The nature of teaching and learning is changing. This era of technology-facilitated learning is an existing and challenging time for teacher educators.

21st century competencies and expertise such as critical thinking, complex problem-solving, collaboration and multi-media communication should be wooed into all content areas by business educators. (US Department of Education, 2014). Equally important is gaining a knowledge and understanding of the inter-disciplinary nature of learning which includes the intersections between core subjects. Since 21st century learning is skill-based, business educators should learn these skills and how to integrate them into their classroom, facing the two to help graduates fit into the global world.

10. Types of Technologies Used for Distance Learning

Distance education has come a long way, but its popularity and use greatly increased as more advanced technology sprang up.

The wide spread use of computer and the internet have made distance learning easier and faster and today, virtual schools and virtual universities offer full curricular online.

Many modern technologies such as Web Conferencing, Video Conferencing, Educational Television, Instructional Television, Direct Broadcast Satellite (DBC), internet radio, live streaming, telephone, web-based VOIP. Adopt connect tools such as text chat, polls, hand raising, emotions etc. Immersive environments (notably second life and the use of robot proxies including those that help sick students to attend classes. These technologies and many others help in distance learning.

11. Challenges of Distance Learning Education

Some challenges associated with distance learning education in Nigeria are;
- Advancement in learning opportunities tends to be held back by the ICT Capabilities of the lowest common denominator, namely students with the least access to ICT.
- A number of other issues have emerged from the uptake of technology whose impacts have changed the profile of who are the learners in our courses and paramount in all of these, changes in the existing and economics of course delivery.
- The high costs associated with the development of high quality technology-facilitated learning materials are

quite high. It has been found to be more than a matter of repackaging existing materials at large scale costs.
- Costs associated with delivery have not been found to diminish as expected because there has been need to maintain a relatively student to staff ratio and the expectation of students that they will have access to teachers in the courses and programmes.
- Compared to traditional forms of off-campus learning, technology-facilitated learning has proven to be quite expensive in all areas of consideration, infrastructure, course development and course delivery.
- Many Nigerian lecturers' inability to use ICT in teaching and learning is also a big challenge.

Other challenges include but are not limited to;
- Insufficient provision of suitable building.
- Unavailability of regular electricity and telephone.
- Unavailability of access to computers and internet services.
- Absence of extensive usage in the society.
- Absence of adequate ICT capacity among teachers.
- Poor support for use of ICT by policy makers, government administrators, technical support specialists, and content developers such as script writers, web-designers and instructional designers (Nwalor, 2013).

12. Prospects of Distance Education

Some of the prospects of distance education include:
- In many instances, traditional classroom learning has given way to learning in work-based settings with students able to access courses and programmes from their work places.
- The advantages of education and training at the point of need relate not only to convenience but include cost savings associated with travel and time away from work, and also, situation and application of the learning activities within relevant and meaningful content.
- The communication capabilities of modern technologies provide opportunities for many learners to enrol in courses offered by external institutions rather than those situated locally. These opportunities provide such advantages as extended course offering and eclectic class cohorts comprised of students from different backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives.
- The freedoms of choice provided by programmes that can be accessed at any place are also supporting the delivery of programmes with units and courses from a variety of institutions.
- There are now countless ways for students completing undergraduate degrees, for example, to study units for a single degree, through a number of different institutions, an activity that provided a considerable diversity and choice for students in the programmes they complete.
- In concert with geographical flexibility, technological-facilitated educational programmes also have removed many of the temporal constraints that face

learners with special needs (Moorer & Keersley 1996).

- Students are starting to appreciate the capability to undertake education, anywhere, anytime, and any place. This flexibility has heightened the availability of just-in-time learning and provided learning opportunities for many more learners who previously were constrained by other commitments (Young, 1996).
- Through online technologies, learning has become an activity that is no longer set within programmed schedules and sloths.
- Learners are free to participate in learning activities when time permit and those freedoms have greatly increased the opportunities for many students to participate in formal programmes.
- The wide variety of technologies that support learning are able to provide asynchronous supports for learning so that the need for real time participation can be avoided while the advantages of communication and collaboration with other learners is retained.
- As well as learning at anytime, teachers are also finding the capabilities of teaching at anytime to be opportunistic and able to be used to advantage.
- The continued and increased use of ICT in education in years to come, will serve to increase the temporal and geographical opportunities that are currently experienced.

13. Conclusions

Since education and technology plays significant roles in the progress and development of a nation, business educators cannot afford to be on the wrong side of the digital era that makes teaching and learning so enjoyable.

The paper concludes by making the following suggestions:-

(1) Distance education in Nigeria is a welcome diversity in education which has helped to raise the literacy level of the populace. Business educators who are the purveyors should therefore strive to acquaint themselves with the knowledge and skills needed to meet these demands.

Recommendations

The following suggestions are recommended for effective implementation of distance learning education in Nigeria:

(1) Business educators have to undertake workshops on current pedagogy.

(2) Business educators should be willing to learn new technologies to be used in teaching now and in the future, especially those technologies that are used in distance learning education.

(3) There should be sufficient provision of suitable buildings, regular electricity and telephony.

(4) Access to computers, internet services, and adequate ICT capacity among business educators.

(5) There should be greater support for use of ICT by policy makers, government administrators, and technicians.

References

[1] Belmont, C. A: Wadsworth and Duncan, A. (2009). American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education and the Partnership for 21st Century Skills.

[2] Dufty, T. & Cunningham, D. (1996).*Constructivism: Implications for the Design and Delivery of Instructions. Handbook or research for educational telecommunications and technology*. New York: Macmillan.

[3] ICT tools for education (2013). Retrieved from http://www.seameo.iinlotech.org.

[4] Moore, M. and Kearsley, G. (1996). Distance Education; A System View. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

[5] Overview of ICT in Education (2000) retrieved from http://www.infodev.org/articles/use specific-ict-tools-education.

[6] Oliver, R. Todith Cowan University, Perth, Western Australia.

[7] Sabrefencer, Q. (2014). Article About Education at a Distance in Wikipedia (R) cc by SA 3.0 @ www.en.m.wikipedia.org/w/index.php.

[8] Use of specific ICT tools in education (2013). Retrieved from http://pages.uoregon.edu/moursund/ICT-planning/ict-in-education.htm.

[9] US Department of Educatrion (2010). 21st Century Knowledge and Skills in Educator Preparation. Partnership for 21st century skills.

[10] Young M. F. (i993). Instructional design for situated learning; Educational Technology Research and Development. 41(1) 43-48.