
THE ROLE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN THE HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA

By

Rita Obianuju Obi

*Department of Curriculum and Educational Technology,
Nwafor Orizu College of Education,
Nsugbe.*

Abstract

The wealth and prosperity of nations depends upon the development and effective utilization of human resources. Human resources development is the process of training and development of human expertise for the purpose of improving performance. It is the key to nation-building for it helps foster personnel who form the foundation for sustainable growth. Education is the basic tool for development of human resources in other words the key for building the capacity of individuals. Distance education can improve work efficiency and productivity and thereby contribute to economic growth. This paper therefore tries to highlight the concept of human resources development, relationship between distance education and human resource development as well as role of distance education in human resource development. Recommendations are made on how distance education will help learners to bring changes economically both in their personal life, work place and other related issues on futuristic model of distance training for on the job learners.

Human resources are the totality of skills and knowledge available to any given society (Leopold and Wasikama, 2000). Human resources are the energies, skills, and knowledge of people which are or which potentially can or should be, applied to the production of goods or rendering of services in an economy Human beings are the active agents who accumulate capital, exploit natural resources, build social, economic and political organizations and carry out national development. Therefore a country which is unable to develop the skills and knowledge of its peoples and to employ them effectively in the modernization process will be unable to develop anything else.

Human resource development is an all-inclusive activity, affecting and affected by such human activities as production, distribution and exchange; earning a living etc.

Academic Excellence

These are crucial to the process of adding value and ensuring sustainable human development. It connotes man in relationship to the world of work. It deals with developing the most superior workforce. There is need for human resource development through distance education. This is to meet the needs of employers (public and private sectors) who demand skilled labour due to globalization and changes in their respective organizations and those who require daily learning, which has become integral part of their job performance.

Education deals with the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitude. It provides permanent literacy and equips individuals with the skills for the world of work. The pride of any nation should be qualified human resources and rich tradition of academic excellence. Education builds confidence, confers status and dignity as well as helps in acquisition of skills and credentials. It enables individuals to achieve performance improvement. People acquire problem-solving abilities, command of relevant factual information and technical, managerial and entrepreneurial skills through education. Access to knowledge is critical determinant of long-term well-being and is essential to individual freedom, self-determination, and self sufficiency. Education is critical to people's real freedom to decide what to do and who to be.

Distance education is an approach of imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes at all levels of education which is made possible at a distance through print electronic communication media and other technology as well as special organization and administrative arrangement that are convenient to learners. Distance education can influence the quality of human resources in the area of primary education, higher education or practical training, health, ICT, nutrition etc. It enables learners acquire skill in their concerned field which helps them to get job and promotion in their respective enterprises. It also facilitates job performance.

According to Mangal and Mangal (2009), distance education refers to a system of education run along a two way interaction and Communication between the sources of teaching and the learner, maintained through the conventional as well as advanced information and communication technologies with an eye on providing opportunities to the learner to engage in his self-study with a freedom of choice related to time, space, pace, medium, access and curriculum. Distance education has been applied to a tremendous variety of programmes serving numerous audiences via a wide variety of media. This can be reflected in different definitions. As stated by Mehrota, Hollister and Mc Gahey (2001). Distance education is any approach to instruction in which the majority of the instruction occurs while educators and learners are not in each other's physical presence. Kaufman and Watkins (2000) believed that distance learning is intended to offer useful learning opportunities to people at a time and location that is convenient to them.

Learning and teaching activities in campus-based education setting have conventionally been regulated by time and place. Learners and teachers in these educational setting are expected to be present at designated places and times to engage in the educational activities. The constraints of the place of learning in campus-based educational settings potentially disadvantage a wide range of learners, such as those who are in regular employment or committed to other family care responsibilities, who are physically located too far away from the educational organization or source of the service, who are too poor to afford the various cost of campus-based education, or who lack the formal qualifications necessary to gain entry to this form of education. Distance education is an effective supplement or even substitute for the regular classroom instruction. It has been widely used by business, industrial and medical organizations. For many years doctors, veterinarians, pharmacists, engineers and lawyers have used it to continue their professional education. Recently, academic institutions have been using distance education to reach a more diverse and geographically dispersed audience who do not have access to traditional classroom instruction.

Relationship between Distance Education and Human Resource Development

Distance education can play a crucial role in the economic development of Nigeria by meeting human resources as per its needs. The knowledge of those who are on the job can be updated through distance education programmes. The quality of labour force is very important consideration in human resources development of a country. This is influenced by the development of education and training as well as the availability of professionals and facilities. In Nigeria there is low level of education among the labour force particularly in primary sector of the economy. One of the important tasks of distance education has been to upgrade their knowledge, skills and attitudes in order to improve work efficiency and productivity. This will contribute to economy growth. It also helps in quantitative expansion of tertiary and professional education in the country. Distance education can raise employment opportunities in many ways, for it helps develop the necessary skills, attitudes and motivation to match demand for manpower of the economy and opportunities for fresh job seekers as well as self-employment. It also brings changes economically in their personal life.

Globalization and changes in technology and the organization of work has contributed to significant rise in demand for skilled labour. Formal training institutions do not have the capacity to train all those who want to acquire skills and some of those who want to acquire skills do not have the means to afford regular or professional education, therefore distance education offers the solution. In all sectors of the economy, daily learning has become an integral part of the job. Part of such learning relies on the exchange of tacit knowledge among employees which distance education offers.

Role of Distance Education in Human Resource Development

It is an effective supplement or even substitute for the regular classroom instruction. It offers help to individuals who are often too busy to participate in classroom-based education. That is, it increases access to education, for it attracts students who previously may not have been able to attend classes due to various life commitments. Sometimes in a distance training system, students study at their workstations, which are connected to a training centre via audio and computer links?

Other roles served by distance education as pointed out by Mangal and Mangal (2009) are that;

1. distance education remains as the first and lone choice for those learners who:
 - i. have no provision of any educational institution in their locality or neighbourhood.
 - ii. do not have any provision for their higher education in their locality and neighbourhood.
 - iii. are gainfully employed and thus are unable to attend the regular classes of a particular course or school and university education.
 - iv. have a lot of social obligations, responsibilities and commitments such as housewives, adults, priests, social workers, farmers and cowmen, hence not able to attend the regular classes.
 - v. are not able to attend the regular system of education on account of their physical, mental, emotional and social handicapped condition.
 - vi. are poor and deprived and thus cannot afford the cost of the regular higher or professional education.
 - vii. have been unsuccessful or denied admission to the regular system of school, college or professional education on account of their previous educational background, low scores in the entrance test or non-availability of seats for a particular course.
2. Distance education system can work as a good helping hand to the people and government of the developing countries like ours for achieving their target of compulsory education to all future citizens.
3. It can prove a boom to overcome the problems of overcrowding in the school, and higher and professional education classes.
4. Due to its cost-effectiveness. It may attract a huge number of the school and higher education learners and, in turn, may help in its qualitative development so much so that it might be considered better in comparison to the conventional system of education.

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5. It may become an effective and forceful media for mass education, adult and continuing education, population education, health and sanitation education, sex education belonging to the field of social awareness, and eradication of many evils prevalent in the society.
6. It is quite helpful in inculcating among the students a number of good habits like self-study, independent problem solving ability, and time and resource management.
7. It may suit the likings, needs and temperaments of a wide variety of learners on account of the flexibility and freedom offered by it in the following manner;
 - i. Freedom of time: A high level of freedom allows students to communicate whenever it is convenient for them.
 - ii. Freedom of space: The students can choose where they want to study.(in a classroom, at home, at work, or whatever a busy life situates them).
 - iii. Freedom of pace: pacing implies meeting deadlines for starting a course, for examinations and for assignments. Deadlines however can be flexible or rigid. They are flexible when the students can set the deadlines, or select one of the several deadlines. A high level of freedom allows the students to choose the pacing they prefer.
 - iv. Freedom of medium: Programmes with a high level of freedom provide students access to several media or sources of information: print, video, face-face, meetings, computer conferencing, etc
 - v. Freedom of access: Programmes that aspire to a high level of freedom must eliminate discrimination on the basis of social class, entry qualifications, gender, age, ethnicity or occupation.
 - vi. Freedom of curriculum: a high level of freedom allows students to choose among a range of courses and to transfer credits between programmes and universities.
8. Distance education and open learning of the present age governed by e-learning and virtual classroom system give valuable opportunities for the students to get acquainted with and be well versed in the use and application of the advanced technologies for collecting, storage and disseminating needed information and knowledge for self-study and progress.
9. It may be helpful both in the universalization, humanization and globalization of the system of worldwide education and the overall system of governance and living.

Conclusion

Human resources are the totality of skills and knowledge available to any given society. It is cost effective and profit generating. Distance education helps in human resource development. It caters to the requirement not only of those who are unemployed but also of those who are on the job. It enables them to acquire skills and enrich professional development in their concerned areas. The programme helps them to perform better in their present job. It helps the unemployed, self employed and employed learners to bring changes economically in their personal life.

Recommendations

1. In order to foster human resources development, institutions that run distance learning programmes need to maintain the same quality standard for both the regular and distance education programmes.
2. The planning of distance education should take into consideration the human resource needs of the country and design the educational programmes in support of the lifelong education, training and updating for both in-service and pre-service programmes.
3. ICT facilities should be provided and used in distance training programmes in order to help to update the existing skills of learners and generate new skills among them.
4. Web-based training system can be developed which will provide interactivity among different students of the programme from different locations in the country.
5. E-Learning which has emerged as a successful tool to impart education and training in a need-based manner using various, affecting forms of media can be used for human resource development in distance learning.

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