

OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMMES: A PANACEA FOR BRIDGING THE GAP IN HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT FOR 21ST CENTURY IN RIVERS STATE.

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Keywords: Open and Distant Learning, Human Capital, Entrepreneurship Skills, Graduate Programme, National Open University of Nigeria.

ABSTRACT: This study investigated the influence of open and distance learning on human capital development in National Open University Nigeria Rivers State Chapter. Three research questions and three hypotheses guided the study. The study was carried out in National Open University of Nigeria, Rivers State Chapter. This study was anchored on the theory of interaction and communication by Michael Moore (1981). The design adopted for this study was a descriptive survey design. The population of this study consisted of 1,250 learners in National Open University of Nigeria Rivers State Chapter, with a sample size of 350 which represents 27% of the total population. The instrument used for the study was 12 item questionnaires titled Influence of Open and Distance Learning on Human Capital Development Questionnaire {IODLHCDQ} which was designed and developed by the researcher. The instrument was validated by experts in Measurement and Evaluation on which yielded a reliability index of 0.85 using the Cronbach alpha technique. The instrument adopted a rating scale of four-point subjected to mean (\bar{x}), mean set, standard deviation and rank order statistics to answer research questions while the hypotheses were tested with Z-test at 0.05 level of significance. The results revealed that certificate programmes, diploma and degree courses had influence on the learners by subjecting the learners on courses such as entrepreneurship education, accounting, e-learning and e-banking through open and distance learning, the results also revealed some certificate courses in baking, poultry and catering, for skill enhancement. The hypotheses showed no significant difference in the mean scores of male and female learners in two of the variables except one tested. It was recommended that more educational enhancement courses and entrepreneurial skill development programmes be introduced for human resource development in National Open University of Nigeria, Rivers State chapter.

INTRODUCTION

Education is of great importance to every nation, it is because the functionality of citizens is largely dependent on the quality of education imparted on them. There is general consensus among scholars that education is the most potent instrument for the overall development of any nation. There can be no

productive human capital without a functional education. Capital in most cases to most people referred to money in bank account, shares or stock or assets in companies, which yield income and other useful output over a long period of time, these are tangible forms of capital, while schooling, a computer training, on-the-job training, commitment

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to duty and honesty are also forms of capital because they raise earning, improve health and increase productivity, and enhances a person's good habits over much of his life time (Becker, 2004). This thinking informed the advent of human capital theory, which implies an equation of any expenditure on education and training to expenditures on physical capital in order to yield a stream of benefits.

Human capital development through quality education can be acquired by the individual's enrolment into conventional universities or through Open Distance Learning (ODL). Open distance learning refers to educational patterns, approaches and strategies that permit people to learn with no barriers in respect to time and space, age and previous educational qualification, no entry qualification, no age limit, no regard to sex, race, tribe and state of origin (Alaezi, 2008).

There can be no significant economic growth without adequate human capital development. Human capital development of an organization or school includes the provision of learning, training, and development opportunities in order to improve individual, team and corporate performance. According to Sullivan and Steven (2011), human capital development is about recruiting, supporting and investing in people through education, training, coaching, mentoring, internship, organizational development and human resource management. Hence human capital development involves all the training, mentoring and skills acquired by an individual, which enables him to contribute effectively to the growth and development of the nation.

This study was anchored on interaction and communication theory propounded by Michael Moore in (1981). He identified two defining characteristics of autonomy, namely: dialogue and individualization. Dialogue is broadly interpreted as an expression of academic interaction aimed at promoting meaningful learning. It may take place in face-to-face situations, telephone, and correspondence or through computer-assisted instruction. Individualization refers to the manner in which study material is structured. A programme is individualized when the curricular components, namely: objectives, methods, materials and

evaluation are determined with the learner profile in mind.

Human Capital is strategic to the development of any nation; this includes education, health, labour and employment. Human capital according to World Bank cited in (Igum, 2006), is the total stock of knowledge, skills, competencies and innovative abilities possessed by the population. Among the most important changes that characterize the 21st century is the increasing importance of knowledge on economic growth and the advent of the world wide labour market and the global, social and political transformation. Obisi&Anyim, (2012) also noted that human capital development are talents, skills, competencies and other advantages which people possess and can be put in better use to give organizations and nations more benefits. Obisi, (2003) further posited that human capital can be understood from the perspective of the masses that have acquired the relevant education and skills that can be put to positive use towards the development of the nation.

However, it is important to note that the higher human capital of a society is the higher will be the potentials for economic development. In other words, human capital development is an effort to increase human knowledge, enhance skills, productivity and stimulate resourcefulness of individuals (Amachule& Terra, 2011). Human resource development in Nigeria continues to suffer from gross inadequacy as there are huge deficit in training and development.

Concept of Open and Distance Learning

According to UNESCO (2002), ODL is one of the most rapidly growing fields of education and its potential impact on education delivery systems has been generally accentuated through the development of internet based information technologies and in particular, the worldwide web presenting approaches that focus on opening access to education and training provision, freeing learners from the constraint of time and place offering flexible learning opportunities to individuals and groups of learners. ODL on the other hand refers to policies and practices that permit entry to learning with minimum or no barriers with respect to age, gender, or time

constraints and with recognition of prior learning (Glen, 2005).

The objectives of the entire education system in Nigeria as stated in the National policy on education (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1977 [revised 2014]) is to foster the worth and development of the individual and for the general development of the society. However, human resource development in Nigeria continues to suffer from gross inadequacy as there are huge deficits in training and development. The policy stipulates that products of the primary and secondary systems should possess functional skills that would make them useful at different levels in the economy. Several studies have revealed a strong correlation between the human capital, skills, abilities, competencies and the levels of social and economic performance of individuals, communities and nations (Adedeji&Bamidele, 2002) and (Okojie 2005). These skills and knowledge for enhancing human resources are produced through the tertiary education system. The United Nations (2003) described development as a process that goes beyond the improvement of quality of life, it encompasses better education (in the various academic domain), high standard of health and nutrition, poverty reduction, cleaner environment, increasing access to and equality of opportunity, greater individual freedom, and the facilitation of a richer cultural life which are all truly desirable ends in themselves. According to Osuji&Ugorgi,(2019), education does not only improve individual choices available to mankind but also an educated population provides the type of skilled labour necessary for individual development and economic growth.

There is a need to evolve a strategic framework for alternative human capacity development in order to meet national socio-economic imperatives and the desired developmental objectives. ODL systems provide a viable alternative (Olakulehin, 2008)

History of Open and Distance Learning in Nigeria

Distance education in Nigeria can be traced to the colonial period. Nigerian students registered for correspondence courses offered by foreign institutions such as Institution of Education, University of London, Wolsey Hall College, Benett College, etc. (Owoeye, 2004: Fagbamiye, 2000).

Interactions between students and their instructors took place through study materials, which are shipped to the students via the post, previously many students in Nigeria gain awards after years of learning without ever meeting face-to-face with their instructors.

The contemporary distance education in Nigeria started with post-secondary institutions. The Ahmadu Bello University started two distance learning programmes: the Teacher-In-Service Education Programme (TISEP) in 1967 and National Certificate of Education in 1976 by correspondence course (Jegede, 2007). In 1974, University of Lagos opened a correspondence and open study unit called the Distance Learning Institute, which offered Bsc. Degree courses in Accounting, Biology, Chemistry, Science and Education. In the same year, the National Teachers Institute (NTI) was established to upgrade the skills of in-service teachers and train Grade 11 teachers. The institute in 2004 added Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) to the number of programmes it offers. The University of Abuja was established in 1990 as a dual mode institution, which offers first degree programmes in English, History, Economics, Accounting, Sociology and Law. Private institutions were not left out in the bid to enhance human capital through distance learning. These institutions offer professional training in different categories of distance learning. These prepare students who wish to sit for examination of professional bodies such as the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Nigeria and Chartered Institute of Bankers through a blend of distance learning and face-to-face provision (Owoeye, 2004).

The National Open University of Nigeria is the latest in the line of institutions offering distance learning programmes in Nigeria and also the first single-mode ODL University in the West Africa sub-region. It was established in 1983, later suspended due to modifications in government policy. In 2002, NOUN was resuscitated to meet the huge gap in application and admission statistics of a Nigerian Universities. The University took off with about 78 programmes ranging from proficiency certificates to masters levels. By December 2007, the university has 33

functional study centers in 32 states of the six geopolitical zones of the country.

Impact of ODL on human capital development in Nigeria

The open and distance learning in Nigeria has made great impact on skilled human capital provision to boost the nation's economy. The National Teachers Institute (NTI) Kaduna, the dual-mode institutions and the National Open University of Nigeria have been able to significantly increase number of teachers available for Universal Basic Education programme (Jegade, 2002, NTI, 2007, Olakulehin, 2007). They have been able to train teachers and upgrade the skills of large number, primarily through the use of distance learning systems. The nursing education has been upgraded to degree level through ODL in National Open University of Nigeria. ODL through NOUN designs and develops educational programmes according to the needs of potential clients. This is done by the introduction of new courses that are not offered in conventional universities, such as Bachelors of Science in Tourism studies, Entrepreneurial and Small business studies, Cooperative studies, Masters of Business Administration with specializations in non-traditional areas such as e-library, e-commerce, e-banking, e-learning. A post graduate diploma in HIV/AIDS Management, several proficiency certificate courses in skills acquisition areas such as snail-rearing, bee-keeping, beauty care and modeling all centre skills, hotel supervision, etc. These areas are designed to address specific areas of need and gaps in the curriculum of educational institutions in Nigeria (Ojo&Olakulehin, 2006). The purpose of adopting an ODL approach to human capital formation and development in Nigeria is the opportunity to expand access to higher education and at the same time, lower cost.

Open and distance education, through NOUN seeks to achieve a lot in its plan to ascertain that maximum effort are made to ensure that those who can benefit from higher education are given access by providing functional, cost-effective, flexible learning which adds lifelong value to quality education for all who seek knowledge. The National Teachers Institute Kaduna, through ODL has contributed to the

production of quality human resources in Nigeria through teachers' training and in-service up skilling. In 2006, the Institute added Post Graduate Diploma in Education and the Advanced Diploma Courses in School Supervision and Inspection, Guidance and counseling as well as early childhood education to the complement of courses offered for capacity development of Nigerian teachers.

However, Open and Distance Learning has contributed immensely towards the training and development of vocational and technical personnel, who contributes greatly to the growth and development of the nation.

Statement of the Problem

Accessibility and inability of conventional universities to provide admission for the thousands of qualified Nigerians who needed university education but were denied access to it was one of the purposes for open distance learning. In order to enhance education as a form of human capital development and satisfy the exceptionally huge demand for education by our increasing large population which is still mainly rural, remote, under-represented and marginalized through resources, location, economic and other reasons.

Open and distance learning will enable Nigeria to provide access to education at all levels, bridge the unemployment gap, improve entrepreneurial skills and individual empowerment. The problem of unfulfilled quest for education versus the actual supply of educational services has contributed to the acceptance growth and implementation of a distance program, how the open and distance learning as a strategy is bridging the gap in human capital development in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. It is against this backdrop that the researcher intend to investigate.

Furthermore, several scholars and stakeholders in education have raised issues on how the open and distance learning is contributing to human capital development based on the fact that Nigeria is one of the poorest countries in the world.

Purpose of the Study

The study examined the extent to which ODL programmes have bridged the gap on human capital

development in (NOUN Rivers State Chapter) in Nigeria.

Specifically, the objectives of this study are to:

- 1) Investigate the influence of short-term certificate programmes of ODL in bridging the gap in human capital development in NOUN Rivers State Chapter.
- 2) Examine the influence of diploma courses of ODL in bridging the gap in human capital development in NOUN Rivers State Chapter.
- 3) Examine the influences of degree courses of ODL in bridging the gap in human capital development in NOUN Rivers State Chapter.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study.

- 1) What is the influence of certificate programmes of ODL in bridging the gap in human capital development in NOUN Rivers State Chapter?
- 2) What is the influence of diploma courses of ODL in bridging the gap in human capital development in NOUN Rivers State Chapter?
- 3) What is the influence of degree courses of ODL in bridging the gap in human capital development in NOUN Rivers State Chapter?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 significant levels.

- H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female learners on the influence of certificate programme of ODL in bridging the gap in human capital development in NOUN Rivers State Chapter.
- H₀₂: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female learners on the influence of diploma courses of ODL in bridging the gap in human capital development in NOUN Rivers State Chapter.
- H₀₃: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female learners on

the influence of degree courses of ODL in bridging the gap in human capital development in NOUN Rivers State Chapter.

Methodology

The researcher adopted a descriptive survey design, which describes the present condition of a given phenomenon by collection of data from a desired population. The population of the study was 1250 learners from the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) Rivers State Chapter. (Source NOUN: Rivers State 2020) The sample of the study was 350 learners; this represents 27% of the entire population. The stratified random sampling technique was used to stratify the population into male and female.

The population consisted of 350 learners (200 males and 150 females). The instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire, titled Influence of Open and Distance Learning for Human Capital Development Questionnaire (IODLFHDQ). The questionnaire was made up of two sections, section A contained demographic data of the respondents, while section B was questionnaire items structured by using modified likert scale of four points rating, of Very High Extent (VHE) – 4, High Extent (HE) – 3, Low Extent (LE) – 2 and Very Low Extent (VLE) – 1. The instrument was validated by two experts in the educational management department and Measurement and Evaluation. While the Cronbach Alpha Method was adopted for the reliability of the study which yielded a reliability index of 0.85 and 0.87. Data was analyzed using mean and standard deviation while z-test statistical tool was used to test for significance difference of hypotheses at degree of 0.05 significance.

Results

Research Question 1

What are the influences of ODL Certificate programme on human capital development in NOUN Rivers State Chapter?

Table 1: Responses on how certificate courses in ODL has bridged the gap on human capital development in Rivers State Chapter

S/N	QUESTION ITEMS	MALE		FEMALE		MEAN	RANK
		Mean	St. Dev	Mean	St. Dev	Set	Order
1	Certificate courses on beauty and core modeling courses will make learners to be self reliant	2.90	1.08	2.53	1.03	2.72	3 rd
2	Certificate courses in Catering and Bakery courses will increase entrepreneurial skills of learners	3.07	1.06	3.16	1.04	3.12	2 nd
3	Short term certificate course in hotel supervision will add to learners leadership skills	2.06	0.98	2.09	1.01	2.08	4 th
4	Certificate courses in skill acquisition like Snail Rearing and Poultry farming in ODL will impart vocational skills for self-reliance in learners.	3.45	1.03	2.96	0.98	3.21	1 st
Average		2.89	1.04	2.69	1.02	2.78	

From table 1, the high average mean scores range from 3.21 to 2.08, for serial numbers 4, 2, 1, and 3. This indicated that the identified items of 4, 3, and 2 were accepted as the certificate courses in ODL that influence human capital development because the mean scores (\bar{x}) were greater than the criterion mean

of 2.50, while the mean score of item 3 was not accepted due to its low mean.

Research Question 2

What are the influences of ODL diploma courses offered on human capital development in NOUN Rivers State Chapter?

Table 2: Responses on how diploma courses in ODL influences human capital development of learners in NOUN Rivers State Chapter.

S/N	QUESTION ITEMS	MALE		FEMALE		MEAN	RANK
		Mean	St. Dev	Mean	St. Dev	Set	Order
1	Graduate programme in business administration improves managing skills	2.50	0.80	2.20	0.76	2.35	3 rd
2	Diploma in inspection improves selling skills	2.46	1.09	2.30	0.77	2.38	2 nd
3	Diploma in HIV/AIDS management enhances knowledge in disease control	3.40	0.81	2.90	0.80	3.15	1 st
4	Diploma in guidance and counseling creates confidence in learners choice of course	2.20	0.86	2.40	0.78	2.30	4 th
Average		2.64	0.89	2.45	0.78	2.55	

From table 2 above, the high average mean score ranges from 3.15 to 2.30 for serial numbers 3, 2, 1 and 4. This indicated that item 3 was accepted, while the other three items were not accepted as diploma courses that would influence human capital development in NOUN Rivers State Chapter. This is because the mean score of item 3 was above the

Table 3: Responses on how degree courses in ODL influences human capital development in NOUN Rivers State Chapter

S/N	QUESTION ITEMS	MALE		FEMALE		MEAN	RANK
		Mean	St. Dev	Mean	St. Dev	Set	Order
1	Business courses exposes learners to the business world	3.11	0.83	3.20	0.91	3.16	2 nd
2	Tourism studies expands knowledge in tourism	3.09	0.92	2.83	0.81	2.96	3 rd
3	Business Administration helps learners to identify viable business ideas	3.40	0.91	3.12	0.86	3.26	1 st
4	Cooperative studies are needed for capacity development	2.70	0.89	2.56	0.78	2.63	4 th
Average		2.90	0.89	2.93	0.84	2.55	

From Table 3, the high average mean scores range from 3.26 to 2.63 for serial number 3, 1, 2, and 4. This indicated that the identified items along such serial numbers were accepted as degree courses in ODL that influence human capital development in NOUN Rivers State Chapter. This is because the mean scores of such items were above the criterion mean of 2.50.

Table 4: Z-test of difference between male and female learners on the influence of certificate courses on human capital development in NOUN Rivers State Chapter

Sex	N	\bar{x}	S.D	Z-cal	Z-crit	DF	Level of sig.	Decision
Male	200	2.89	1.04					
Female	150	2.69	1.02	1.63	1.96	348	0.05	Failed to Reject.

From the data in Table 4 above, the Z-calculated value of 1.63 is less than the Z-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance with 348 degree of freedom, therefore the null hypothesis was accepted. This means that there was no significant difference

criterion mean of 2.50, while the other three items had mean scores below the criterion mean.

Research Question 3

What are the influences of ODL degree courses on human capital development in NOUN Rivers State Chapter?

Test of Hypothesis

H_{01} : There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female learners on the influence of certificate courses on human capital development in NOUN Rivers State Chapter.

between the mean (\bar{x}) scores of male and female learners on the influence of certificate courses on human capital development in NOUN Rivers State Chapter.

H₀₂: There is no significance difference between the mean scores of male and female learners on the

influence of diploma courses on human capital development in NOUN Rivers State Chapter.

Table 5: Z-test of difference between male and female learners on the influence of diploma courses on human capital development in NOUN Rivers State Chapter

Sex	N	\bar{x}	S.D	Z-cal	Z-crit	df	Level of sig.	Decision
Male	200	2.64	0.89					
Female	150	2.45	0.78	2.12	1.96	348	0.05	Accepted

From the data in table 5, the Z-calculated value of 2.12 is greater than the Z-critical value of 1.96 at a 0.05 level of significance with 348 degree of freedom. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. This means that there is a significant difference in the mean rating of male and female learners on the extent ODL graduate programme in business administration

influence human capital development in NOUN Rivers State Chapter.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female learners on the influence of degree courses on human capital development in NOUN Rivers State Chapter.

Table 6: Z-test of difference between male and female learners on the influence of degree courses on human capital development in NOUN Rivers State Chapter

Sex	N	\bar{x}	S.D	Zcal	Zcrit	df	Level of sig.	Decision
Male	200	3.06	0.89					
				1.40	1.96	348	0.05	
Female	150	2.93	0.84					Failed to Reject

From the data in table 6, the Z-calculated valued of 1.40 is less than the Z-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance with 348 degree of freedom.

The null hypothesis was accepted. This means that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female learners on the influence of degree courses on human capital development in NOUN Rivers State Chapter.

Summary of Findings;

The different programmes and courses organized by the National Open University of Nigeria Rivers State Chapter through ODL for enhancement of human capital are certificate programme like catering, baking, entrepreneurial skills in poultry, beauty and care modeling with a weighted mean of 2.78. The diploma courses in disease management, inspection and supervision and skills to enhance the learners' teaching skills with a weighted mean of 2.55. The degree courses introduced through ODL were cooperative studies, tourism and other business skills with a weighted mean of 2.94. Hypotheses 1 and 3

showed no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female learners on the influence of certificate and degree courses on human capital development in NOUN, while there was significant difference on the diploma courses in hypothesis 2.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings is based on the following: Influence of certificate, diploma and degree courses offered by National Open University of Nigeria, Rivers State Chapter, under the certificate programmes, item 4 ranked 1st, item 2 ranked 2nd, item 1 ranked 3rd and item 3 ranked 4th as revealed in the data analysis. The courses in Bakery, Poultry, Snail rearing are new skills of entrepreneurship for human and economic development. This is in tandem with (Ojo&Olakulehin, 2006) who stated that these areas are designed to address specific areas of need and gaps in the curriculum of educational institutions in Nigeria. These certificate courses offered by NTI has been able to significantly increase the number of teachers available for Universal Basic Education

programme which confirms the words of Jegede, (2002) that in-service training through NTI is very necessary for upgrading teachers' skills and educational qualifications. The findings on the influence of diploma courses of ODL revealed that item 3 ranked 1st followed by items 2, 1 and 4, this proved that through ODL, learners upgrade to higher level of education as observed by (Owoeye, 2004) and (Fagbamiye, 2000). This therefore agrees with their findings that previously many Nigerian students gain certificates and awards without ever meeting face to face with their instructors. The findings on the influence of degree courses of ODL revealed that item 3 ranked 1st followed by items 1, 2 and 4. From the findings, the introduction of business courses in NOUN Rivers State Chapter help in exposing the learners to the business world which will enable them compete favourably with their counterparts in developed countries; this agrees with the opinion of Adedeji&Bamidele,(2002) that several studies have revealed a strong correlation between the human capital and the level of social and economic performance of individuals, communities and nations. The definition of (Amaewhule& Terra, 2011) on human capital development supports the findings that increase in human knowledge enhances skills and production of individuals.

The results of Hypotheses 1 and 3 showed no significant difference on the variables tested while hypothesis 2 showed a significant difference.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concluded that various programmes introduced by the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) Rivers State Chapter through Open and Distance Learning contributed immensely to the enhancement of knowledge to learners who ordinarily could not have accessed these knowledge and skills in the conventional institutions, hence the flexibility and availability of ODL has improved human capital development in Rivers State.

Recommendations

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made.

- 1) Government should assist the National Open University centers in Nigeria, especially

Rivers State Chapter, to offer more certificate courses in other disciplines that will upgrade the human capital to the level that they can contribute immensely to the nation's development.

- 2) There is need for more diploma courses in our open Universities, which will increase the entrepreneurial skills of workers through ODL to keep them abreast with developed countries.

3) Government should assist in providing more virtual learning facilities that will enhance the teaching of degree courses through ODL in our open Universities.

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