THE CHALLENGES OF OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
The quest for university education has led to the increased demand for Open Distance Learning Options in Nigeria, moreso when the Conventional Universities have very limited enrolment spaces. However, many of the ODL students were faced with Challenges in pursuit of the programme which results in lower completion rates. This research work examined the influence of these challenges on the ODL students completion rate. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. It covers all Business Education students in the ODL programme of the National Open University of Nigeria (Ilorin Study Centre) and the University of Ilorin. The study sample covered all final year Business Education students in the programme. A researcher designed instrument entitled “Challenges of Business Education Students in Open Learning Distance Learning Programe Questionnaire” (CBESODLP) was used to gather data for the study. One research question and two hypotheses were raised, and analyzed. The researcher used descriptive statistic to answer the research question and correlation statistics to analyse the hypotheses raised. The result of the analysis indicated a high completion rate in Marketing programme (95%) and Office Management and Technology (86%) while Accounting had a lower completion rate (68%). The two hypotheses raised were rejected, signaling a significant relationship between adequate teaching materials and students' completion rate. The study concluded that, adequate as well as relevant affordable teaching materials as well as student friendly programme methodology are important to successful completion of business Education Programmes in the Open Distance Learning of the two institutions in Ilorin.

Key Words: Synchronous, Asynchronous Blended Learning, Hybrid Learning

Introduction
Distance learning is a way of learning remotely without being in regular face-to-face contact with a teacher in the classroom. In the United Kingdom such learning has its roots in students learning through Correspondence Courses (Simon & Midgley, 2015). At undergraduate level, distance learning usually means students engaging with learning materials at home or work. The materials are produced by the University, College or learning provider and are either sent directly to the student or more usually today accessed via the internet. Tutorial support is provided via a virtual learning environment, telephone, email or other electronic gadgets with tutors and attendance at week-long summer schools.

Wikipedia (2014) described distance learning as a mode of delivering education and instructions, often on an individual basis to students who are not physically present in
a traditional setting such as a classroom. Distance learning and learners are separated by
time, and distance or both. Distance learning was originally designed for people unable to
attend traditional schools. But today, it is a popular education option for students from all
walks of life. Atueji, (2015) was of the view that, the soaring popularity of distance
learning in Nigeria was partly due to increasing population and the accelerating demand
for education at all levels and the challenge associated with accessibility call for a more
viable and robust means of educating Nigerian citizens. Accessibility to traditional
education is becoming very difficult and an alternative platform to access education must
be put in place. This was well observed by President Jonathan during the 4th
Convocation of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), when he said “NOUN
was established by the federal government to provide improved access to many eligible
candidates who are constrained by the limited space in the conventional universities”. He
observed further that, “at the moment, the conventional universities can only admit about
400,000 of the more than 1,500,000.
education and Nigeria being the largest black population in the world with literacy level
of less than 60 percent is compelled to adopt Open and Distance education as a tool for
achieving its developmental goals and objectives.
The US Career Institute (2001) outlined the following benefits of Distance Learning.

- Many distance education programme are self-paced. Students can advance
  quickly through material they have already mastered and slow down on new
  materials
- Students can study when you want, where you want
- Employers use distance learning to train their employees without losing them to
  the classroom
- Your education goes where you go. Those who travel extensively in their joins or
  move place to place like military families can pursue their courses wherever their
  lives take them.
- One-on-one interaction with instructor by phone or email helps individualized
  instruction
- It is affordable. Distance education courses often cost less than traditional courses
- Educational Institutions that offer strictly distance learning do not incur the costs
  of maintaining a campus, so these savings are passed on to the student
- Students do not have to give up their jobs or dramatically alter their personal
  schedules
- For many of today’s money-conscious, time-strapped students, distance education
  offers the best opportunity for success.
History of Distance Learning Education

In 1728, there was an attempt to commence distance learning when Boston Gazette advertised for “Caleb Philops Teacher of the new method of Short Hand” who sought students who wanted to learn through weekly mailed lessons. Sir Isaac Pitman introduced the first distance education course in the modern sense in 1840, he taught a system of shorthand by mailing texts transcribed into shorthand on postcards and receiving transcriptions from his students in return for correction.

The University of London was the first University to offer distance learning degrees: establishing its External Programme in 1858. Enrolment increased steadily during the late 19th century and its example was widely copied elsewhere. This programme is now known as the University of London International Programme and includes Postgraduate, Undergraduate and Diploma degrees created by Colleges such as the London School of Economics, Royal Hallway and Goldsmiths.

In the United States, University of Chicago developed the concept of extended education, whereby the research University had Satellite Colleges of Education in the wider Community. In 1892, the University also encouraged the concept of correspondence school courses to further promote education. The International Correspondence Schools, based in Scranton, Pennsylvania was founded in 1888 to provide training for immigrant coal miners aiming to become State Mine Inspectors or foreman. It enrolled 2,500 new students in 1894, total enrolment reached 900,000. The growth was due to sending-out complete textbooks instead of single lessons and the use of 12,000 aggressive in-person salemen.

In Australia, the University of Queensland established its Department of Correspondence Studies in 1911. In South Africa, the University of South-African formerly an examining and certification body, started to present distance education tuition in 1946.

In Nigeria, the idea of distance education was conceived by the Department of Adult Education of the University of Ibadan in 1972. The proposal for the commencement of the various programmes was presented to the Senate of the University in 1976. Later, the National University Commission also gave its approval on the condition that it would be a self-financing programme. Hence the present-day Distance Learning Programme started first as External Degrees and later changed to External Studies Programme of the Department of Adult Education in 1988 with courses from the parent Department (Adult Education) and two other Departments; Guidance and Counseling and Teacher Education.

By 1993, four more departments – Special Education, Library science, Educational Management and Physical and Health Education had joined the original three departments to offer courses leading to the award of the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree. In order to keep pace with global developments, the name of the centre
was changed from Centre for External Studies to Distance Learning Centre in 2002. Since its inception, the centre has graduated over 4,000 students.

The Distance Learning Centre’s programme of studies is the same as that offered for full-time students of the University of Ibadan. The only difference is that it is designed primarily to suit those in the working class, whose schedules, distance, financial condition and other situations may not permit them to undergo full-time studies at the University.

These students read their study packs at their convenience, communicate with their teachers from time to time and only come into residence six weeks in a year for revision and examinations.

Institutions in Nigeria that offer distance education include:

- Ahmadu Bello University, which offers a special training programme called ‘The Correspondence and Teachers’ In-Service Programme (TISEP) established in 1976 to prepare middle level teacher for Nigeri’s Primary Schools
- The Correspondence and Open Studies Unit (COSU) now called Distance Learning Institute which was established in 1974 by the University of Lagos to produce University graduates in disciplines necessary to meet national labour market.
- The first independent Institution dedicated solely to distance education, the National Teachers’ Institute (NTI) which was officially established in 1978 to upgrade unqualified teachers working in the nation’s primary schools and to accelerate the preparation of qualified teachers needed for the implementation of the Universal Primary Education Programme in 1976 and the Universal Basic Education introduced in 1999.
- To offer similar programme, the University of Abuja established its Centre for Distance Learning and Continuing Education in 1992.
- After being closed for 16 years, the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) was re-opened in 2001. At take-off of the University, Pioneer student enrolment stood at 32,000. In 2011 NOUN had about 57,759 students operating from its national headquarters in Lagos, with study centres throughout the country. It offers over 50 programmes and 750 courses.

**Technologies for Open Distance Learning**

Distance education technologies are divided into two modes of delivery. Synchronous learning and asynchronous learning.

**Synchronous Learning Model**

In synchronous learning, all participants are present in the same time. In this regard, it resembles traditional classroom teaching methods despite the participants being located
remotely. Edglossary (2013), referred to synchronous learning as a general term used to describe forms of education, instruction and learning that occur at the same time, but not in the same place. The term is most commonly applied to various forms of televisual, digital and online learning in which students learn from instructor, colleagues, or peers in real time, but not in person. For example, educational video conferences, interactive webinars, chat-based online discussions and lectures that are broadcast at the same time they delivered would all be considered forms of synchronous learning.

Before the development and widespread adoption of interactive, internet-based technologies, synchronous learning was more commonly called distance education or distance learning. Any learning tool that is in real-time such as instant messaging that allows students and teachers to ask and answer questions immediately, is synchronous. Rather than learning on their own, students who participate in synchronous learning courses are able to interact with other students and their teachers during the lesson.

Asynchronous Learning Model

It is a student-centered learning method that uses online learning resources to facilitate information sharing outside the constraints of time and place among the network of people. The model is based on student-centered approach that emphasizes the importance of peer-to-peer instructions. This approach combines self-study with synchronous interactions to promote learning. It can be used to facilitate learning in traditional on-campus education, distance education and continuing education.

The online learning resources used to support asynchronous learning include e-mail, electronic mailing lists, threaded conferencing systems, online discussion boards, wikis, and blogs. Course management system such as Campus Cruiser LMS, Desire2 Learn, Blackboard, Webcam, etc have been developed to support online interactions, allowing users to organize discussions, post and reply to messages, upload as well as access learning materials. In asynchronous learning can be carried out even when the students or teacher is offline. In these instances students will typically complete the lessons on their own and merely use the internet as a support tool rather than then venturing online solely for interactive classes.

As student is able to follow the Curriculum at their own pace without having to worry about scheduling conflicts, since students are not required to be together at the same time.

The two methods can be combined. Many courses offered by both Open Universities and an increasing number of Campus based institutions use periodic sessions of residential or day teaching to supplement the sessions delivered at a distance. This type of mixed distance and campus based education has recently come to be called “blended Learning” or less often “hybrid learning”
Other models of Distance learning could be Paced or Self-Paced format depending on the nature of the Institution and the policy guidelines of the programme; as well as the needs and demands of the students.

Delivering distance learning in a paced format is similar to the traditional campus based models in which learners commence and complete a course at the same time. Paced delivery is currently the most common mode of distance education delivery. Paced Models are a familiar mode as they are used almost exclusively in campus based schools. Institutes that offer both distance and campus programmes usually use paced models as teacher workload, student semester planning, tuition deadlines, examination schedules and other administrative details can be synchronized with campus delivery.

Self-paced programmes allows for continuous enrolment and the length of time to complete the course is set by the learner’s time, skill and commitment levels. Paced courses may be offered in either synchronous mode, but self-paced courses are almost always offered a synchronously.

Statement of the Problem

The inadequacy of enrolment space in conventional universities in Nigeria, compelled and prompted an increased demand for Open Distance Learning as an alternative. Many Conventional Universities have since established ODL Units to help meet the needs of prospective students. In addition, the quest to have university education by the majority of Nigerian students (young and old) have significantly increased University education demand through the Open Distance Learning Medium. The establishment of National Teachers Institute (NTI) and National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) as dedicated institutions for ODL institutions in Nigeria have also raised the tempo and enthusiasm of Nigerian students.

However, this enthusiasm may not last long as many students enrolled for these programmes, both at NTI, NOUN and ODL Units of Conventional Universities grapples with challenges that makes the completion of the programme difficult. This study therefore investigated the challenges faced by Business Education students in the ODL programmes of NOUN (Ilorin Study Centres) and those of the University of Ilorin.

Objectives of the study

The study was designed to achieve two main objectives.

1. To identify the completion rates of Business Education students of the ODL programme in NOUN, Ilorin Centres and University of Ilorin
2. To identify the challenges faced by these students and their influence on the completion rate of the students in Business Education programmes

The study is a descriptive survey, designed to investigate the challenges of Business Education students in the ODL programmes. The sample consisted of the
Contact IV Business Education students of the University of Ilorin ODL programme, the Contact II students of NOUN Ilorin Study Centre.
The researcher used a self-designed questionnaire entitled “Challenges of Business Education Students in Open Learning Programme Questionnaire” (CBESOLPQ). The instrument was validated by four Senior Lecturers in the Department of Educational Management and Business Education, University of Ilorin. It was also piloted tested for its reliability with the ODL students of National Teachers Institute (Ilorin Centre). Using Pearson Correlation Statistic, a reliability coefficient of .75 was obtained using test-retest method.

Data Analysis
Descriptive techniques was used to answer the research question raised in the study, while Pearson correlation statistics was used to answer the research hypotheses.

Research Question I: What is the completion rate of students in the Business Education Programmes of the Open Distance Learning?

Table 1: Completion rate of Business Education Students in Open Distance Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Enrolment Last Contact</th>
<th>Enrolment in the Final Year Session</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Technology and Management</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>87.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field work, 2015

Table 1 shows initial enrolment figures in the session for each programme. The Enthronement for the last Contact Session serves as the base data with which enrolment in the final session was compared. Marking had the highest enrolment and the highest completers (95%), followed by Office Technology and Management (86%) and Accounting with the lowest enrolment and lowest completers (68%). On the whole, 87.5% of all students enrolled into Business Education programmes completed their studies in the Current Contact Session.

Hypotheses Testing
Ho1: There is no significant relationship between availability of adequate teaching materials and student completion rate.
Table 2: Relationship between adequate teaching Materials and Students Completion Rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Calc</th>
<th>Critical r-Value</th>
<th>r-Value</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adequate Teaching Materials</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>12.66</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.177*</td>
<td>0.174 Rejected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion Rate</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>11.30</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* at 0.05 significance level

Table 2 shows the result of the correlation between adequate teaching materials and students completion rate. It indicated that the calculated r of 0.177 is greater than the critical r of 0.174 at .05 level of significance. The hypothesis is thus rejected, which implies that a significant relationship existed between availability of adequate teaching material and student completion rate.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between ODL programme methodology and completion rate.

Table 3: Relationship between Programme methodology Students Completion Rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Calc</th>
<th>Critical r-Value</th>
<th>r-Value</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programme Methodology</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>14.18</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>0.297*</td>
<td>0.174 Rejected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion Rate</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>11.30</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* at 0.05 significance level

Table 3 indicated a significant relationship between programme methodology and completion rate. The calculated r of 0.297 is greater than the critical r of 0.174 at 0.05 level of significance. The implication of this is that, if the programme adopt a suitable methods that suits the learning conditions of the students in the programme, it will impact positively on the completion rate of students.
Table 4: Coefficient of correlation among completion rate, adequate teaching materials and programme methodology.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Completion Rate</th>
<th>Adequate Teaching Materials</th>
<th>Programme Methodology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.566</td>
<td>.297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.177</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows regression Co-efficient of the relationship between completion rate and adequate teaching materials was .566, .297 was the regression coefficient between completion rate and programme methodology. The regression coefficient between completion rate and teaching materials was very strong and positive, while that of completion rate and programme methodology was also positive, it was however not too strong (.297) at 0.01 level of significance.

Discussion

The study found a positive significant relationship between adequate teaching materials and completion rate (.566) and a positive but low significant relationship between Open Distance Learning methodology and completion rate (.297). The implication is that, if teaching materials (in the form of teaching models, and study packs are made available adequately to the students in the Open Distance Learning, the completion rate of students will be very high. If students have good access to the teaching materials, and they were adequately packaged to cover the course contents, student’s on the programme may do well and pass out without spilling over to the incoming contact session.

It also, reflects the importance of the methodology adopted in disseminating teaching materials and content to the students. Majority of the students on the Open Learning education are in the working class. The paced and hybrid methods adopted by the NOUN and Uniting Distance Learning Programmes ensured higher completion rate, because ODL students operates in a simulated conventional class model, which gives them the opportunity to work with other students, operate in a regulated time frame and move on with co-students at set-time (contact periods). This paced/hybrid learning environments help students to set up completion deadlines and motivate them to meet up.

Recommendations

In view of the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The Business Education programs with higher level of completion rates should be given more space in the enrolment plan of the institutions that run the ODL programmes. A grad study of reasons for lower completion rate in Accounting
programme must also be conducted, with a view to finding reasons for the lower completion rate.

2. The operating institutions must gear up effort at producing and providing quality, relevant study packs/modules at affordable costs to their students. Also virtual class technology/media should be deployed, because they seem to be cost effective on the part of the students.

3. Study centres and contact session period must adopt a more students friendly methods of teaching, and taking feedbacks forms students. Some business Education programmes require face-to-face interaction with tutors (office, word processing, stenography and transcription) etc will require personal contact with teachers because of their practical nature. A “mixed” learning method of Distance Learning and Class work will be more adequate/relevant for the students.

Finally, the ODL programme must be made purchasable for the students; as they currently run in the two institutions (NOUN and UNILORIN). Adopting adequate media and technology to reach students in various homes/work places will reduce, programme cost. E-learning, internet facilities and the social media education sites will reduce Distance Learning Education programme costs significantly.
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