

Students' Perception of the Organisation and Administration of the Study Centres of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)

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Abstract

This study was carried out to investigate students' perception of the organisation and administration of the study centres of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). The two sampled study centres are McCarthy Study Centre in Lagos and Awa-Ijebu in Ogun State. This study was motivated by students' complaints of non-availability of course materials and poor distribution channels, to mention but a few. This research was carried out using a survey design. A sample of 120 students was randomly selected from 6 schools. The instruments used were questionnaires. Simple percentage and chi-square (X^2) distribution was used as a test statistics in testing the hypotheses. From the findings, it was discovered that there were delays in logistics of printing and distribution of course materials. Also, it was revealed that students did not make use of facilities provided by the University that would help them in their academic work, like the library and counselling services. Based on the findings, it was recommended that management should remove administrative bottle neck so that learners would be able to collect their course materials on time, hence prompt submission of tutor-marked assignments. Students should be encouraged on the imperativeness of global ICT compliance and the need to acquire knowledge and practical skills on ICT.

Keywords: Organisation, Administration, Study Centres, Learners' Satisfaction

Introduction and Background to the Study

Every educational institution is established for the purpose of achieving specific academic goals. Likewise, every student that goes to school has the ambition to perform well in his academic pursuits. For these parties to achieve their objectives, the institution through its management group sets up mechanisms

to make the achievement of these goals possible. It is also the desire of the students to make maximum use of the amenities that have been provided to achieve their desired goals (Holmberg, 2005: 13).

Richard, (2005:12) pointed out that it is entirely another issue if these facilities provided are not being put to use by the students. The objectives cannot be achieved by either party if the facilities have any problem. He further maintained that people, structure, technology and environment are basic elements that determine the level of success that can be achieved by any organisation as the structure of an organisation will closely interact with its people, technology and environment. Organisational design and structure are powerful ways to influence the behaviour of individuals and groups. According to Panneerselram (2013:26), the counsellor has the responsibility of keeping in constant touch with distant learners and to provide any early warning signals regarding difficulties with studies in order for prompt remedial actions to be taken. The learner support services, counsellors and other related service providers form an integral part of the distance learning method.

The emergence of distance education in Nigeria dates back to the practice of correspondence education as a means of preparing candidates for the General Certificate in Education, a pre-requisite for the London Matriculation Examination. It became a channel for Nigerians and other nationals of the then British Empire to acquire the much sought after western university education.

In Nigeria, distance education was first recognized by the government in 1959 when the Ashby Report recommended the establishment of a department of correspondence courses in the University of Lagos. Soon after, other institutions like the University of Ibadan and Ahmadu Bello University followed suit. These are basically dual mode institutions that combine both the conventional and distance education programmes. In 1976, however, the National Teachers Institute (NTI) was established. This institution is the first to provide distance education courses for the training of unqualified teaching personnel and in 2002, the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) was re-opened after 16 years of proscription. NOUN is the only single mode university for open and distance education in Nigeria.

However, instructional and tutorial facilitators are required to conduct regular meetings and facilitate instruction at a distance at various study centres, assist with professional workshops, course development and design. They are also responsible for tutor marked assignments and conduct of examination. The institution has made enough provision for library facilities with internet, e-library

and books to make the work of the students easy. The management has made available course materials in both hard and soft copies and students that cannot get the hard copies can download the soft copies from the internet. Despite all these, many students still cannot access the soft copies because they have no access to internet services because of their location (Meyer 2004:31). The students' information centre often does not communicate information early to them. Sometimes, such information gets to them too late. At another time, the students on their own do not know how to access information on the internet which is a vital tool in the Open and Distance Learning.

Statement of Problem

All over the world, nations spend huge resources to bring formal education to their citizens. And to achieve this goal, institutions of learning are built with diverse infrastructures and human elements to attain the desired height. It is therefore, the concern of this study to investigate the organisational flow and administrative structures put in place as well as the activities of the study centres of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) to give an overall learner's satisfaction.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to investigate the perception of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) students on the organisation and administration of NOUN study centres. Other specific objectives are to (a) ascertain the effect of non-availability of course materials on students' academic performance (b) examine the effect of non-utilization of library and counselling services on students' academic performance and (c) ascertain whether knowledge of ICT affects learners' academic performance.

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perception of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) students on the organisation and administration of NOUN study centres. However, this study aims at being relevant in the following ways: (1) Device improved ways of distributing the course materials; (2) Carry out more publicity on services available to be explored by the students for better performance; and (3) The findings will be useful to educational planners and administrators of the National Open University of Nigeria and the general public.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study: (A) Does organisational distribution of course materials improve learners' academic performance in NOUN? (B) Does poor communication from the management to students hinder learners' academic performance in NOUN? (C) Does non-utilization of library facilities militate against students' academic performance in NOUN? (D) Does the dearth of ICT facilities inhibit learners' academic performance in NOUN? (E) To what extent does counsellors' expert advice influence students' academic performance in NOUN?

Research Hypotheses

The research questions were turned into null hypotheses. They are:

- Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between organisational distributions of course materials and learners' academic performance in NOUN.
- Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between organisational communication and learners' academic performance in NOUN.
- Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between library utilisation and students' academic performance in NOUN.
- Ho₄: There is no significant relationship between availability of ICT facilities and students' academic performance in NOUN.
- Ho₅: There is no significant relationship between the expert advice of the counsellors and students' academic performance in NOUN.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perception of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) students on the organisation and administration of NOUN study centres. The areas of interest include the strategies employed to distribute course materials, organisational communication, library utilisation, availability of ICT facilities and expert advice of the counsellors. This study is delimited to McCarthy Study Centre in Lagos and Awa-Ijebu Study Centre in Ogun State, both of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN).

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Theoretical Framework

Constructivists' theories are used for this study. Jean Piaget (1896-1980) and Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) were two eminent figures in the development of constructivist theories. They shared the common belief that classrooms must be constructivists' environments; however, there are differences in terms of their theories and variations as to how constructivism should be carried out in classrooms. Constructivism is a new approach in education that claims humans are better at understanding as well as being able to digest the information they have constructed by themselves. According to constructivist theories, learning is a social advancement that involves language, real world situations, and interaction and collaboration among learners. The learners are considered to be central to the learning process. Learning is affected by our prejudices, experiences, the time in which we live, and both physical and mental maturity. When motivated, the learner exercises his will, determination and action to gather selective information, convert it, formulate hypotheses, test these propositions via applications, interactions or experiences, and draw verifiable conclusions. Constructivism transforms today's classrooms into a knowledge-construction site where information is absorbed and knowledge is built by the learner.

In constructivists' classrooms, unlike the conventional lecturer, the teacher is a facilitator and a guide who plans, organises, guides and gives direction to the learner who is accountable for his own learning. The teacher supports the learner by means of suggestions that arise out of ordinary activities, by challenges that inspire creativity, and with projects that allow for independent thinking and new ways of learning information. Students work in groups to approach problems and challenges in real world situations, and this in turn leads to the creation of practical solutions and a diverse variety of student products.

The Concept of Open System of Education

Open system of higher education, distance education, distance learning or D-Learning is a mode of delivering education and instruction, often on an individual basis, to students who are not physically present in a traditional setting such as classroom settings. Distance learning provides "access" to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both. "Distance education courses" that require a physical on-site presence for any reason (including taking examinations) have been referred to as a hybrid or blended courses of study (Blackmore et al., 2007). Massive open online courses (MOOCs) are aimed at large scale interactive participation and open access via the web or other network technologies and these are a recent development in distance education (Bernard, et al, 2004 ; Woodley, 2004; Oskarsson and

Edvardsson, 2007 & Meyer, 2004). Bernard et al. (2004) and Gabriel (2013:7) also posited that their extensive meta-analysis of 232 studies revealed that some applications (of distance education) are far better than classroom instruction.

Benefits of Open System of Higher Education

According to Howell, et al (2004), Holmberg (2005) and Okopi (2013:3), distance learning can expand access to education and training for both general populace and businesses since its flexible scheduling structure lessens the effects of the many time-constraints imposed by personal responsibilities and commitments. Devolving some activities off-site alleviates institutional capacity and constraints arising from the traditional demand on institutional buildings and infrastructure. Open system of education programmes can act as a catalyst for institutional innovation and are as effective as face-to-face learning programmes, especially if the instructor is knowledgeable and skilled (Mills, 1997:56 in Tenebe, 2011:3). Moore (2005) emphasized that the open system of education can also provide a broader method of communication within the realm of education. With many tools and programmes that technological advancements have to offer, communication appears to increase in the open system of education among students and their tutors as well as students and their classmates.

Honeyman and Miller (Holmberge,2005) stressed that distance learning may enable students who are unable to attend a traditional school setting, due to a disability or an illness such as decreased mobility and immune system suppression, to get a good education. Open system of education may provide equal access regardless of socio-economic status or income, area of residence, gender, race, age or cost per student. Blackmore (2007) opined that distance learning offers a final opportunity for adolescents that are no longer permitted in the general education population due to behaviour disorders. Instead of these students having no other academic opportunities, they may continue their education from their homes and earn their diplomas, offering them another chance to be an integral part of their society.

Barriers to Effective Open System of Education

Barriers to an effective open system of education include domestic distractions and unreliable technology as well as students' programme costs, inadequate contact with teachers and support services, and a need for more experience (Vaughan, 2010). According to Walton (2011), some students attempt

to participate in open system of education without proper training of the tools needed to be successful in the programme. Students must be provided with training on each tool that is used throughout the programme. These tools include the use of a range of media such as print, written correspondence, audio, video, computer based media and networks as well as multimedia facilities for the presentation of information and communication between the university and her students.

Common synchronous and asynchronous technologies, according to Oblinger (2000), Moore (2007) and Barwick (2011), are outlined in table one below:

Table 1: Communication Tools (Synchronous and Asynchronous)

Communication Tools	Synchronous	Asynchronous
Video	Video conferencing	Video tape DVD Broadcast video
Audio	Audio conferencing	Audio files Radio Podcasts
Data	Internet chat Internet video conferencing	E-mail CD-ROM

The lack of advanced technology skills can lead to an unsuccessful experience. Schools have a responsibility to adopt a proactive policy for managing technology barriers. Vanghan (2010) stressed that distance learning benefits may outweigh the disadvantages for students in such a technology driven society. One negative thing in the open system of education is the lack of social interaction. If the classroom environment is what you love most about learning, you may want to take a step back and reconsider distance learning. Another barrier to distance or e-learning is that format isn't ideal for all learners. Not everyone is an ideal candidate for online learning. If you know you have problems with motivation, procrastination and need lots of individual attention from an instructor, you may want to think long and hard before enrolling in an online learning programme.

Factors Influencing Distance Learning Acceptance

1. **Students' Acceptance of Distance Learning (DL):** Many distance learning professionals and academics acknowledge that distance learning (DL) is a simplified version of the teaching and learning method. Thus, students' acceptance of DL is one of the critical factors that should be evaluated in order to adequately assess whether the successful implementation of a DL system can support teaching-learning activities and the student experience (Martins & Kellermans, 2004, Muilenburg & Berge, 2005).
2. **Computer Competency (CC):** Students' computer competency (SCC) is measured by the frequency of computer use, knowledge of software, frequency and type of Internet use (Collis, Muilenburg & Berge, 2005) . These concepts are believed to have important roles in the success of the DL model. Hypothetically, a computer literate student will likely have a positive disposition/tendency towards a DL environment given that there are few and/or limited challenges at the level of technical expertise. Others include technological factors which deal with the use of ICT (Information Communication Technology) in a DL environment, among others.
3. **Social Presence (SP):** Social presence which, according to So & Richardson (2003), Kim (2005) and Gunawardena & Mclsaac (2004), seems to be particularly critical to distance learners' perceptions of psychological distance with their instructor and other learners, has an essential role in the success of distance learning systems. That is to say that learners seem to learn better when they physically see the teacher with his or her demonstrations and detailed explanations.
4. **Instructor Characteristics:** Instructor characteristics mean that instructors are important factors that appear to influence students' perception of DL and that the interaction and communication between instructors and students is also an essential part of online learning (Wegner, et al, 1999; Volery and Lord, 2000; Rovai & Barnum, 2003 & Swan, 2003). That is, an instructor uses diverse methodologies such as audio/visual aids to drive home his/her intended learning experience to the learners.

The Effect of School Characteristics on Students' Academic Performance

According to Adelman, Rovai and Barnum (2003), students' academic performance in ODL system rests on the following variables such as focus on

academic achievement which implies that effective schools convey the attitude that all learners in ODL system can achieve academically and behave appropriately while at the same time appreciating individual differences; involving families in meaningful ways, according to Feldel & Brent, (2005), Richard (2005), Rovai & Barrum (2003) and Woodley (2004), implies that students whose families are involved in their growth (in and outside of school) are more likely to experience school success and less likely to become involved in antisocial activities; developing links to the community which implies that everyone must be committed to improving schools; and emphasizing a positive relationship among students and staff means that a positive relationship with an adult who is available to provide support when needed is one of the most critical factors in preventing students' violence in ODL system, (Feldel & Brent, 2005; Creemer et al., 2009 & Rutter et al., 2009).

Factors Determining Teaching Methods

Several factors can determine the choice of teaching methods in ODL. These may range from the adult age, instructional materials available for use by the instructors, instructors' level of ICT compliance to the instructional content itself and instructional objectives (Aribag, 2001; Carol & Sharon, 2003; Baker, 2003; Saade & Bahli, 2003). This implies that all these have important roles to play in the choice of teaching methods by the ODL instructors.

Methodology

Research Design: This research is the survey type. It is designed in such a way to permit a clear interpretation with a questionnaire design covering all the variables being studied. The questionnaire is divided into different sections: socio-demographic, status and basic information respectively.

Population: The population of this study comprises the entire students of McCarthy Study Centre, Lagos and Awa-Ijebu Study Centre, Ogun State, both of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN).

Sample and Sampling Technique: A sample of 120 students was drawn from McCarthy Study Centre, Lagos and Awa-Ijebu Study Centre, Ogun State of the National Open University using the simple random sampling technique because it is not easy to reach out to all the students in these centres.

Research Instrument: The instrument used for this study was a well designed research questionnaire which covered relevant variables of the research under consideration. It consisted of Sections A and B in which Section A asked questions on the personal (background) information about the respondents and Section B asked questions that were related to the variables to be measured in the research and which were statistically analysed with Chi square contingency tables. The hypotheses were both tested at 0.05 level of significance. The variables to be measured were transformed into questions and/or general statements where the respondents were left to provide free answers to them according to how they felt or thought about such situations addressed in the questions. These were done through the questionnaire distributed by the researcher and his assistant during the field work.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument: To ascertain the face validity of the questionnaire, the researcher presented the draft of the instrument to more than two academic staff of the University and a measurement and evaluation experts from the University of Lagos. They made their corrections and the researcher reflected those in the final draft of the instrument to ensure its reliability. The research instruments were questionnaire items and they statistically analysed with Chi square contingency tables while the hypotheses were both tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Data Collection: The data used for this research were collected through the primary and secondary means of data collection. The primary data were generated by the use of self-administered questionnaires which were distributed to the students of the National Open University of Nigeria, McCarthy and Awa-Ijebu Study Centres. The methods used were direct personal interview and discussion with some students of the same school. The secondary data were gathered from related books on distance learning/distance education.

Method of Data Analysis: The hypotheses developed for this research were tested using the chi-square method.

Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between organisational distributions of course materials and learner's academic performance in NOUN.

To test the hypothesis, Chi-square was used as indicated in table 2:

Table 2: Chi-Square Contingency Table Showing the Relationship between Organisational Distributions of Course Materials and Learners' Academic Performance

Expected Frequency	X ² tab	X ² cal	df	Decision Rule
25.75	61.3947	75.224	0.05	Rejected

Therefore, X² calculated = 75.224, X² tabulated = X² at 0.05 and (r-1)(c-1) degree of freedom.

(r-1) (c-1) = (4-1) (4-1) = 9, X² tab = 61.3947. Since X² calculated 75.224 was greater than X² tabulated 61.3947, the null (Ho) hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis accepted. Therefore, we upheld the alternative hypothesis which stated that there was a significant relationship between organisational distributions of course materials and learners' academic performance in NOUN.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between organisational communication and learners' academic performance in NOUN. The hypothesis was tested and the result is as shown in table 3 below:

Table 3: Chi-Square Contingency Table Showing the Relationship between Organisational Communication and Learners' Academic Performance in Noun

Expected Frequency	X ² tab	X ² cal	df	Decision Rule
25.75	5.5538	111.1164	0.05	Rejected

Therefore, Expected frequency = 25.75, X² tabulated = X² at 0.05 and (r-1) (c-1), (r-1) (c-1) = (2-1) (4-1) = 3, X² tabulated = 5.5538. Since X² calculated (111.1164) was greater than X² tabulated (5.5538), we rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative. It implied that there was a significant relationship between organisational communication and learners' academic performance in McCarthy and Awa-Ijebu Study Centres of NOUN.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant relationship between library utilisation and students' academic performance in NOUN. And the hypothesis was tested as seen in table 4 below:

Table 4: Chi-Square Contingency Table Showing the Relationship between Library Utilisation and Students' Academic Performance in Noun

Expected Frequency	X ² tab	X ² cal	df	Decision Rule
77.25	67.6499	313.667	0.05	Rejected

Therefore, X² calculated = 313.667; X² tabulated = x² at 0.05 and (r-1) (c-1) degree of freedom. (r-1) (c-1) = (3-1) (4-1) = 6. X² tabulated = 67.6499. Since X² calculated 313.667 was greater than X² tabulated 67.6499, we rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative. It therefore implied that there was a significant relationship between library utilisation and students' academic performance.

Hypothesis Four: There is no significant relationship between availability of ICT facilities and students' academic performance in NOUN. The hypothesis was tested and the result is indicated in table 5 below:

Table 5: Chi-Square Contingency Table Showing the Relationship between Availability of ICT Facilities and Students' Academic Performance in Noun

Expected Frequency	X ² tab	X ² cal	df	Decision Rule
25.57	3.3606	67.2134	0.05	Rejected

Therefore, X² = 67.2134 (calculated), X² tabulated = x² at 0.05 and (r-1) (c-1), degree of freedom (r-1) (c-1) = (1-1) (4-1) = 3, X² tabulated = 3.3606. Since x² calculated 67.2134 was greater than x² tabulated 3.3606, we rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative hypothesis which stated that there was a significant relationship between ICT facilities and students' academic performance in Awa-Ijebu and McCarthy Study Centres of NOUN.

Hypothesis Five: There is no significant relationship between the advice of the counsellors and students' academic performance in NOUN. The hypothesis was tested and the result is indicated in table 6 below:

Table 6: Chi-Square Contingency Table Showing the Relationship between Provision of Advice by the Counsellors and Students' Academic Performance in Noun

Expected Frequency	X ² tab	X ² cal	df	Decision Rule
25.75	93.5859	1871.7183	0.05	Rejected

Therefore, Expected frequency =25.75, X^2 calculated =1871.7183, X^2 tabulated = X^2 at 0.05 and (r-1)(c-1), degree of freedom, (r-1) (c-1) = (5-1) (4-1) = (4) (3) =12, X^2 tabulated = 93. 5859. Since x^2 calculated (1871.7183) was greater than x^2 tabulate (93.5859), we rejected the null hypothesis and upheld the alternative hypothesis which stated that there was a significant relationship between the advice of the counsellors and students' academic performance in McCarthy and Awa-Ijebu Study Centres of the National Open University of Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The study investigated the perception of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) students on the organisation and administration of NOUN study centres. These, among others, include the facts of delays in the printing of course materials in NOUN to the study centres, problems of logistics in the administration of course materials in NOUN, and down to the study centres, most students collecting their course materials in the middle of the semester due to logistic problems, non-availability of course materials making students to submit their TMAs late and the passage of academic and administrative information to students not being effective, therefore, affecting the students' academic performance. Also, lack of ICT knowledge poses a problem to students accessing information on-line and the counsellors do not keep cordial relationships with students and the likes.

The findings so far indicate that students find it difficult to get course materials after registration. In fact, all the respondents, that is 100% of them attest to the same view by either agreed or strongly agreed. Again, 86% of the respondents maintained that the channels of distribution and collection of course materials are very effective and 74% confirmed that non-availability of course materials in National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) makes students to submit their TMAs late. In addition, 83% of the respondents maintained that the use of the school library has greatly influenced their academic performance. Moreover, 43% of the respondents reported that academic and administrative information to students affects their academic performance in National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) McCarthy and Awa-Ijebu Study Centres.

Summary/Conclusion

It was observed in the study that some students do not know that there are even library facilities they can use or the services of counsellors that can help

them overcome difficulties in their academic work. The study revealed many variables that inhibit learners' academic performance which include difficulty in getting course materials either in hard or soft copies, delay in the printing of course materials, inadequate provisions of teaching/learning facilities, learners' attitude to study, amongst others. It can therefore, be concluded that there are organisational and administrative problems in NOUN which do not make learners collect their course materials on time as well as promptly submit their tutor-marked assignments. And students are not all that encouraged on the imperativeness of global ICT compliance and the need to acquire knowledge and practical skills on ICT.

Recommendations

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations have been made:

1. Since there is always a delay in printing course materials in NOUN, the Institution should check and monitor the personnel in charge of this in order to avoid delay as the provision of hardcopies of course materials by the Institution to the students will solve the problems of not accessing the soft copies from the internet.
2. Management of NOUN should remove administrative bottle-neck so that learners can collect course materials on time. This will assist prompt submission of Tutor-Marked Assignments.
3. The management of NOUN should check and monitor their delivering mechanisms to ensure that prompt and efficient delivering systems are put in place for over all students' academic performance.
4. The students should be encouraged on the imperativeness of global ICT compliance and hence, the need to acquire knowledge and practical skills on ICT.
5. The students of NOUN at the Study Centres should be encouraged to always attend facilitation classes as these add value to their academic performance.

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