

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PROBLEMS OF DISTANCE LEARNING EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN HIGHER EDUCATION NIGERIA

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Abstract

The purpose was to investigate the problems of distance/outreach programme in the Federal College of Education, Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria. Six research questions were raised to guide the conduct of the research. Three hundred students in the Distance/Outreach programmes in the Federal College of Education, Abeokuta, participated in the study. Structured questionnaire was used as instruments for the study. The surveyed variables included problems faced by students in connection with the availability of classroom and seats, qualifications of lecturers/instructors, students, admission requirements and the conduct of examinations. The findings showed that, students faced problems on the use of printed lecture materials. The findings also show that classrooms and seats are not conducive for lectures and that lecturers/instructors do not teach based on their areas of specialization. The findings pointed out the entry qualifications of students in the programmes which are very low and that, the examinations experience malpractices. The study recommends that, serious attention should be given to rectify these problems.

Keywords: *Investigation, Distance, Instructional Materials, Outreach, Higher Education.*

Background to the Study

Education remains the most formidable weapon of stability of democracy and the technological advancement of any nation. It is the means by which people seek to shape its own destiny and transform itself from what it known itself to be into what it would hope to become.

- 1) Education brings about economic growth, it makes one to be shaped, sharpened and equipped one to be meaningful to him/her self in any society he/she finds him/herself (Umar 2013).
- 2) Education develops in individual a desire to seek for information and knowledge for the betterment of his/her society.

- 3) Education, by its nature, contributes to the public health, socio-political and socio-economic development of any nation.
- 4) Education provides a platform by which other sectors of any country can grow.
- 5) Education has been described as a powerful driver for poverty reduction and sustainable socio-economic development.
- 6) It empowers people with the knowledge and skills they need to increase individual and household income, expand employment opportunities and fight against hunger and malnutrition. Public spending on education is one of the most beneficial investments a country can make for its future well-being. No country has ever climbed the human development ladder without steady investment in education. Social change, employment, competitiveness, innovation and long term prospects for economic growth rely considerably on the expansion of quality learning opportunities for all. One year of schooling can increase a person's earnings by 10%, while each additional year of schooling can lift average annual GDP by 0.37% (UNESCO, 2010).
- 7) On education and health, save the children (2010) reported that educated parents, particularly mothers, make better use of available health services and provide greater quality care to their children.
- 8) Education can save lives and influence the well-being of young children. Enhanced educational opportunities are associated with reduced child mortality rates, better nutrition and healthier livelihoods. In addition, education helps overcome the socio economic barriers that foster the spread of HIV, such as poverty, ill health and gender abuse and violence. In this context, education is essential to providing protection against HIV/AIDS and to ensure that those living with HIV have the knowledge and skills to access appropriate health and social care, even in the absence of HIV-specific interventions (Sofoluwe, Akinsolu, Oduwaige and Irosaro 2011).

The general state of higher education is one that needs serious attention from the governments in Nigeria. In many global rankings of issue related to higher education and scholarly and research output, the usual story is that African countries especially, Nigeria, compete from the bottom or are unlisted due to lack of statistical data. And where data is available, the facts are often grim (Haruna 2013). According to African Network of Scientific and Technological Institutions (ANSTI) (2003) in several African university departments, only 30 to 40 percent of required faculty is at post. The average on the continent is 70%. A 2005 ANSTI study of faculty in science and engineering departments in Nairobi, Addis, Ababa, Malawi, Lagos, Ahmadu Bello, KNUJT, Jomo Kenyatta, Dares Salam, Botswana, Ibadan and Cape Coast showed that some 50% of staff had doctoral degrees. Meanwhile, the International Organization of Migration reported in 2005 that about 40,000 Africans with Ph.Ds lived outside the continent with 10,000 of them being Nigerian academics working in the United States.

For any nation to achieve socio economic development according to Harry and Godfrey (2012) eradication of poverty, illiteracy and promotion of national unity, education therefore should not be confined only to the formal school setting but should be extended to less privileged person in order to equalized educational opportunity. It is therefore very expedient for any nation wishing to keep abreast with changes in modern society to

appreciate the need for adult and those who in one way or the other could not attend the formal school system of education to learn and to continue to learn to be able to adjust to a rapidly changing world (Adediran and Odunuga 2013).

As Ogundiran (2012) observed, that many higher institutions established Distance/Outreach Centres for those categories of people who in one way or the other could not get admission in the regular school system. Distance/Outreach Centres have viewed by north (1995) as an extension of classroom environment for workers. It is a kind of in-service training for most workers, who has no time to attend the regular school system (Adediran and Odunuga 2013). Many people and the employers 'see this mode of learning as inferior to the conventional regular mode of study. This study therefore seeks to contribute and to make improvement for Outreach/Distance Centre with regards to the modes of lecture delivery, teacher's qualification and learning facilities in the Federal College of Education, Outreach/Distance Learning Centres.

Objectives of the Study

This study specifically examined the following:

- (1) To investigate on the effective use of instructional materials.
- (2) To assess the adequacy of the qualification of teachers.
- (3) Examine the differences between face to face contact between distance learners and their tutors for the delivery of lecturers.
- (4) Investigate the authenticity of examination at those study centres.

Research Questions

1. What problems do students face in the use of instructional materials for the delivery of lecturers?
2. How adequate are the classroom and seats for the face to face contact lecturers?
3. How adequately qualified are the teachers in the centres?
4. To what extent are students qualified for admission into the courses they are studying in the Distance/Outreach Centres?
5. To what extent are examination adequately set, conducted and graded?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey. It described the problems that face students in the Federal College of Education outreach centres in Ogun State. The scope of the study covers five outreach centres in Ogun State. These centres are Ilaro, Sango, Ota, Ayeitoro, Ajebo and Idiroko. They were sampled to represent other centres in Ogun State. Three hundred students were randomly sampled. All the lecturers were involved because the numbers of lecturers were small. The main instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The instruments were structured by the researchers, vetted and corrected by senior colleagues. The instruments were assessed for reliability coefficient is 0.82 for lecturers questionnaire and 0.09 for student's questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered on the selected lecturers and students and collected on the spot to avoid loss. This was during two or three contact sessions of the weekend programmes. The collected data are presented in tables and analyzed using frequencies and simple percentages.

Result Analysis

Research Question 1:

What problems do students face in the use of instructional materials for the delivery of lecturers; data for the research question one were collected using questionnaire items 1-5. The information is presented in table 1a.

Table 1a: Problems faced by students in using instructional materials.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD
1	Materials not available	100	170	10	20
2	Materials too difficult	140	90	30	40
3	Materials not rich enough	40	80	80	100
4	Materials too costly	200	100	-	-
5	Materials not readable	90	90	60	60

From the table above, it was revealed that the respondents agreed that the reading materials are not available. Two hundred and seventy respondents out of three hundred students representing 87.6% of the respondents agreed that instructional materials are not available. Again, 230 respondents representing 73.3% agreed that the reading materials are too difficult for the costly nature of the materials, the respondents indicated 100%. However, sixty percentage (60%) of the respondents disagreed that the materials are not rich. In the same way, 180 student representing 57.7% of the respondents agreed that some of the materials cannot be read.

Research Question 2

How adequate are the classroom and seats for the face to face contact lecturers. Data for analysis of research question two were collected using questionnaire. Items 6-10 and the information are presented in table 1b.

Table 1b: Adequacy of classroom and seats.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD
1	Space not enough	300	-	-	-
2	There is poor ventilation	20	60	-	-
3	There is inadequate light	90	80	70	60
4	Seats are not enough	100	200	-	-
5	Specification of seats is not adequate.				

As indicated in table 1b above, it shows that the spaces are not enough and that ventilation and specification are poor. These factors recorded 100% expression of inadequacy. It is also shown that the light situation is poor and seats are grossly inadequate.

Research Question 3

How adequately qualified are the teachers in the centres. The teachers provided information in relation to their personal data as contained in a section of the questionnaire as follows:

Table 2: Bio data lecturers in the centres.

1	First degree with teaching qualification.	241	81%
2	First degree only without teaching qualification	61	20%
3	Higher degree with teaching qualification (M:Ed, etc)	15	5%
4	Higher degree without teaching qualification (M.Sc etc).	6	0.02%
5	Teaching in the primary schools	241	80%
6	Teaching in the secondary schools	62	20%
7	Teaching in areas of specialization	201	66.7%
8	Teaching not in area of specialization	102	33.3%
9	Cognate experience 0-5 years	81	26.7%
10	6-10years	102	33.3%
11	11years and above	122	40%

The above data analysis, shows that majority (80% of distance/outreach centre possess first degree with teaching qualification and that above 5% of the lecturer have higher degrees with teaching qualifications. The data showed that 240 of them representing 30% of the respondents have teaching as employment and many (66.7%) teach subjects of their specialization. It is also shown that some of them are experienced teachers having 11 years and above (40%), 6-10 years (33%) and 0-5 years (26.7% teaching experiences.

Research Question 4

To what extent are students qualified for admission into the courses they are studying in the Distance/Outreach Centres.

Data analysis for this research questions is presented below:

Credit in English and Mathematics	40	13%
Credit in either English or Mathematics	180	60%
Credit in none of English or Mathematics	30	27%

The above information shows that 60% of the admitted students got credit in either English language or mathematics in their 'O' level admission requirements with 13% and 20% English or Mathematics. In the Nigeria higher education admission requirements, there is no room for students who do not obtain a credit in English and Mathematics.

Research Question 5

To what extent are examination adequately set, conducted and graded?

Table 4: Quality/conduct of examinations.

	SA	A	D	SD
Coverage of the course content	30	40	180	50
Free from examination malpractices	-	-	160	140
Conducted as scheduled	10	90	100	100
Results release in time	-	-	230	70

Data analyses with reference to examination reveals that the course contents are not covered while the conduct of examination is not free from examination malpractices. These were indicated by 230 (74%) and 300 (100%) of the respondents respectively. Again, 200 (67.7%) and 300 (100%) of the respondents responded respectively as shown on the table that the examinations are not conducted as scheduled and results are not release in time.

Discussion of Findings

The problems faced by Distance/Outreach Centre of Federal College of Education students in using instructional materials are many because lecture reading materials are too difficult, 87.6% of the respondents agreed to the statement above, this was buttressed by North (1995) who saw outreach centres as the extension of regular classroom being located in very remote areas that admit students who are not qualified for their course of study. They therefore find most of their course materials difficult to read. Also, from the research question 2, 100% of the respondents agreed that classrooms and seats are not adequate because there are usually insufficient space, poor ventilations, poor light, poor and uncomfortable seats. This was supported with the study of Okeri (2002) and Otadele (2003) that distance learning programme should be scrapped before it damages the educational system and the public service through the productions of half baked graduates due to poor facilities for learning in those centres. In the research question 3, the data analysis indicated that, majority of the instructors are teachers in the secondary schools who hold first degrees. This was in collaboration with the views of Opara (1991) and Mudasiru (2006) stated that to ensure more qualified teaching personnel to teach in the centres, more qualified lecturers from the college should be deployed to the centre to teach the students.

Indications from research question 4 and 5 stated that, majority of students are always admitted into the programme without proper entry requirements and qualifications. Furthermore, course contents are inadequate and are hardly covered, the conduct of examinations is always poor, full malpractices examinations are not done on schedule and results not released in time. These were in agreement of 73% and 100% of the respondents respectively. This was in consonance with the Opinion of Okwudili (2003) who confirms this by stressing that no means of delivering lectures or information can serve all the needs of distance/outreach centres or distance education programme all the time. He observed that the choice of a delivery system is dictated by the nature of the course offered, the objectives of the programme and circumstances of the learners. Sherry (1994) and Rumble (2001) in their findings stated that, distance education is urban based while majority of their students are rural based. Therefore, the centre and lecture become a serious affair. Some of the students do not attend the lecture regularly because of the distance and lack of money to pay for transport. Sherry referred to irregularity in study habits among home-based and independents learners as a majority learning difficulty. Irregular study habits could lead to failure for even committed students.

Conclusion

This study has ex-rayed the problems of Distance/Outreach Centre of Federal College of Education in Ogun State. The study investigated the adequacy of printed lecture materials, classrooms and seats, conduct of examinations, qualification of teachers and admission requirements and qualifications of students. The study found that in all the areas, there is need for the management of Federal College of Education, Abeokuta to pay adequate attention in order to improve in the quality and quantity with regards to the lecture, classes, seats, mode of examinations supervision, and admission intake of students and be sure of prompt release of results. This will make the centres be formidable and be able to produce better students that can compete with other regular students from, within the institution and outside the institutions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. The reading materials should be improved upon in quality and quantity and should be made more readily available. There is need to also improve the quality of printed lecture materials so as to make the centre lectures more effective.
2. Permanent lecture venues should be situated where the students can have access to lectures more frequently.
3. The college authorities should recruit more qualified lectures who probably have higher degrees and with cognate teaching experience.
4. The admission requirements for students should be looked into for proper scrutiny and the centre should admit only the qualify students that can cope with the rigorous of lectures.
5. Examination should be conducted in a proper manner so as to be made valid and reliable. The supervisor and the invigilators should see to the proper conducting of the examination.

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