

MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION OF DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The challenge of ever-increasing demand for university education in the face of inadequate human and infrastructural resources and the rapidly increasing population have necessitated distance learning programmes. This study evaluated the management and administration of Universities of Ibadan and Lagos Distance Learning Programmes. Samples of 560 participants (400 distance learning students, 80 academic and 80 non-academic staff of the programmes) were proportionally selected. One research question guided the research. Three validated instruments were used to collect data. Data were analysed using independent t-test. ULDLI was significantly better than UIDLC from the perspectives of students: [$t = -7.51$, $df = 398$, $P < 0.05$] and teaching staff: [$t = -5.69$, $df = 78$, $P < 0.05$], while non-teaching staff of both institutions revealed that there was no significant difference in the quality of administration. The two distance learning institutions were striving to meet the stated objectives of bridging the gap in admission rate to Nigerian universities. The two institutions must aim at improving teaching-learning resources, staff capacity development, learner support services, and increase the number of courses available to prospective candidates in order to position distance education in Nigeria for global competitiveness.

Key words: Distance learning, Teaching-learning resources, Programme administration.

Introduction

The role of education in the socio-political and economic development of a nation is indispensable. Economists and educationists have shown that there is interdependence between economy and education. To this end, education is perceived as investment in human capital and thus a vehicle for national development, since human beings hold the key to all forms of development. There is no doubt that, today, distance

education is gradually finding its way through a competitive terrain by providing suitable alternative solutions to the ever growing needs of the world, particularly in the developing countries of which Nigeria is one. Although, it may seem to be novel, the idea of distance learning is a creation of the inability of formal educational institutions to meet the educational needs of the teeming populace. It thus provides easy access to education. It is, therefore, a veritable tool in that direction because it is generally believed that education reduces ignorance (FRN, 2004).

Universities all over the world are faced with the challenge of inadequate space, which in turn inhibits greater access to educational opportunities, yet appropriation and revenue for higher education are on the decline (Schott, Chernish, Dooley and Linder, 2002). This situation, they observed, led universities to pay more attention to distance learning programmes, which is a major development in education in the 21st century in both the developed and the developing worlds. In spite of a sometimes seeming wide berth in technological interventions between the North and South of the world, distance education has not only become a focal point of discussions, but it has also been the basis of major developments recorded in the area of educational innovations. Bodies such as the European Union, the Commonwealth and the Southern African Development Community, among others, have accepted its significance. Governments all over the world have resorted to it as a way out of their resource incapacitation.

Table 1.1: Some Countries with Very Large Distance Education Systems

| Country | Name of Institution | Enrolment | Foundation |
|----------------|--|-----------|------------|
| China | Chinese Central Radio and Television University (CCRTVU) network | 825,000 | 1997 |
| Turkey | Anadolu University | 600,000 | 1982 |
| France | CNED | 350,000 | 1939 |
| Indonesia | Universitas Terbuka | 353,000 | 1984 |
| Thailand | Sukothai Thamatirat Open University (STOU) | 350,000 | 1978 |
| India | Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) | 242,000 | 1985 |
| Korea | National Open University (NOU) | 200,000 | 1972 |
| United Kingdom | United Kingdom Open University (UKOU) | 200,000 | 1969 |
| Spain | Universidad Nacional de Educacion a Distancia (UNED) | 140,000 | 1972 |
| South Africa | University of South Africa (UNISA) | 130,000 | 1949 |
| Total | | 3,417,000 | |

Source: Institutional Statistics 2005.

Table 1.1 shows some developed and developing countries with very large distance education system. Some of the highlights show that CCTVU network in China, which was founded in 1997, has the highest enrolment of 825,000 as at 1995, followed by Anadolu University which was founded in 1982 in Turkey with enrolment of 600,000 to distance education.

Table 1.2: Number of Conventional Universities per Population in Some Developed and Developing Countries of the World

| Country | Population (Million) | No of Universities |
|------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| India | 1000 (1Billion) | 8,407 |
| USA | 290 | 5,758 |
| Bangladesh | 138 | 1,258 |
| Argentina | 39 | 1,705 |
| Indonesia | 238 | 1,236 |
| Japan | 127 | 1,223 |
| Nigeria | 140 | 91 |

Source: National Universities Commission (2006).

The table above shows the number of conventional universities per population in some developed and developing countries of the world. It is pertinent to know that proportionally as at 2006, Argentina has the highest number of conventional universities (1,705) with a population of 39 million people, while Nigeria has the lowest number of conventional universities (91) with a population of 140 million people. The implication of this to education is that Nigeria cannot provide university admission to all her aspiring students, hence the need for the country to embrace distance education, which will invariably cater for the overflow and also meet the needs of workers who still aspire to continue their education while working.

According to van de Sand (2005), Almazan-Khan (2005) and Abdulaeva (2006), the world had reached an agreement to ensure education for all by 2015. To this end, nations of the world are devising appropriate policies and relevant programmes that would facilitate its realization on target. In this direction, the Association for the Development of Education in Africa, ADEA, in its 2002 and 2003 reports (ADEA, 2004), revealed that in spite of the ever-increasing demand for education, funding of the sector in Sub-Saharan Africa, (SSA) is declining in real economic terms. The issue of providing access to education through distance learning has therefore gained unprecedented prominence.

Table 1.3: JAMB application and admission profiles into Nigerian Universities

| Session | No of application | No admitted | Percent admitted |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------|------------------|
| 1995/1996/1997 | 512,777 | 37,498 | 7.3 |
| 1996/19997/1998 | 427,363 | 76,430 | 16.2 |
| 1998/1999 | 419,807 | 72,791 | 17.3 |
| 1999/2000 | 418,928 | 64,718 | 15.4 |
| 2000/2001 | 550,399 | 60,718 | 11.0 |
| 2001/2002 | 749,727 | 90,769 | 12.1 |
| 2002/2003 | 994,381 | 51,845 | 5.2 |
| 2003/2004 | 1,046,103 | 104,991 | 10.1 |

Source: National Universities Commission, 2006.

It is clear from the above that the problem of access to higher education in Nigeria has created numerous other problems bothering on quality and credibility of degrees. The situation in admission trends into conventional universities in Nigeria, however, has paved way for more attention to be shifted to the distance learning programmes as a way of bridging the wide gap.

A good distance-learning programme will normally possess the following components, namely:

- Management and Administration: Appropriate management and administration ensures that learners receive the support services that they need.
- Curriculum Design: Evolution of responsive curricula to the needs of the nation is preferable to imported curricula which bear no relevance to national developmental realities.
- Course Production: This should accommodate the characteristics of the learners. Course development involves a number of various experts such as writers, reviewers, editors, electronic media specialists and graphic artists.
- Quality Assurance: Measures to ensure quality assurance are expected to be put together to facilitate quality of programme.

- **Learner Support:** Since the course learners are separated from their instructors, there is the agreement in distance education that learners should be given the necessary support to assist them in learning well.
- **Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs):** The services of ICTs assist the achievement of distance learning faster, especially because it is provided on-line.

The essence of the concept of distance learning is the mode of instructional delivery to its students from a distance whereby the teacher and the taught are separated from one another most of the time, except during short contact sessions on few occasions. It is this essence that informs the increasing level of importance being given to it because it thus creates access to education for many who would not have otherwise had such opportunities. Thus, quality is an essential ingredient of distance learning if it were to compete favourably with the regular programmes.

Obanya (2005a) views quality in education as a multi-dimensional concept built into and nurtured in the course of all the phases and all facets of educational development endeavours, in order to ensure that they yield the right type of fruits in a sustainable manner. According to Ekhaguere (2005), quality is a degree of excellence. He further posits that it is not a fixed, immutable target or destination. Therefore, some kind of mechanism must be put in place to define and ensure quality in any viable undertaking such as the education sector. Ekhaguere (2005) suggests that quality should be characterized by the fitness of purpose, fitness for purpose, value for money, transformation, perfection and excellence.

Yet, Osasona (2005), corroborating Ekhaguere, outlines five major approaches to quality as: exceptionality, consistency, fitness of purpose, value for money and transformation. However, Aworh (2005) views quality as the standard of excellence. That is conformity to a given level of excellence which represents particular standards or specifications. He also states that quality can be defined in terms of teaching, learning and research environment, as well as with regards to quality of students, quality of staff and curricula. Quality can only be achieved if those trusted with various functions perform them well. Quality is usually specified with measurable indicators for comparative purposes.

According to Osasona (2005), in Nigeria, maintaining quality in the university system is not new. It started with the University of Ibadan from inception in 1948. Quality maintenance was through both internal and external processes. Such processes include student admission requirements, curriculum reviews, external examining system and accreditation by professional bodies, as well as by National Universities Commission. Quality, therefore, may not always be quantifiable, yet it has a great value attached to it and can be appreciated whenever it is present in anything. It implies thus that quality can be seen and felt, even though it cannot be exactly quantifiable.

University of Lagos Distance Learning Institute (ULDLI) and University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre (UIDLC) were both able to admit 20,000 and 15,522 persons respectively as at 2008. Yet, the purpose of placing an emphasis on distance/open education is to use it to bridge the gap in university enrolment created by the inability of conventional universities to meet the ever-increasing demand for admission (ADEA, 2004). Panda (2005) and Peters (2005) believe that management (including planning) is central to, and an essential part of distance learning. While it is obvious that management of open and distance learning must be innovative and dynamic, for effectiveness, because its pool of studentship is scattered all over the place (Kanshik, Garg and Dikshit 2006).

According to the prospectus of the University of Lagos Distance Learning Institute (ULDLI) (2002 – 2005) which was still in use as at September, 2008, the Institute was established first as a Correspondence and Open Studies Unit (COSU) in 1973, but transformed to Correspondence and Open Studies Institute (COSIT) in 1983, as a result of its upgrading and restructuring by the University's Senate. In 1997, it was again upgraded and renamed Distance Learning Institute. With this enhanced status, it assumed the status of a college rather than of a faculty. The Institute has three categories of academic staff, namely: the permanent academic staff, adjunct (part-time) academic staff, and associate academic staff. As of 2008, the ULDLI had thirteen full-time academic staff and some two hundred part-time academic staff. A director and a deputy director are part of the thirteen permanent academic members of staff of the Institute as at September,

2008. The Institute also engaged additional ad-hoc academic staff, whenever the need arose.

The Institute is semi-autonomous. At its inception and for a long time, it ran courses only in education, business administration and accounting. However, it now runs (i.e. as of 2009) courses in biology, chemistry, physics and mathematics, in addition to the above mentioned courses. It also has twenty-four senior non-teaching staff, and an academic board of studies and board of examiners, as well as five other committees. It has its own separate building within the University Campus. The building contains a library, offices, a fairly large auditorium and some classes which are, however, insufficient for use of its students, as well as a reception for visitors and students with a Television Set and security personnel. It also runs diploma courses in library and information science and in mass communication. On its academic staff are the director, the deputy director and eleven others drawn from diverse disciplines in the university, particularly those participating in the programme. It also has a counselling unit (2002-2005 ULDLI prospectus). Modes of instruction include printed instructional materials and contact sessions in the main. The National Universities Commission gave full accreditation to all the programmes run by the University of Lagos Distance Learning Institute.

The University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre (UIDLC) was conceived as an external studies programme of the Department of Adult Education in 1972 but started operations in 1988. By 1993, it graduated its first set of students. The Centre was established with the goal of providing university education to students who are too busy, working or living too far away to attend lectures on a regular basis. It got transformed to Centre for External Studies in 1993 when more departments in the Faculty of Education started the programme; and by the year 2002, the programme got upgraded to become distance learning centre with the status of a faculty (UIDLC Prospectus, 2006 Edition). However, unlike the ULDLI, the UIDLC does not have academic staff of its own, but relies entirely on those of the participating departments.

The Distance Learning Centre extended to the Faculty of Agriculture in the 1998/1999 academic session and, recently, extended her programmes to Faculties of Arts, Sciences and Social Sciences (2006/2007 Academic Session). It is also contemplating to recruit

academic staff from both outside and within the university (UIDLC Prospectus, 2006 Reviewed Edition). It is not, however, yet clear whether or not some would be on its permanent staff list. The organizational structure of the University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre is overseen by the Senate of the university in order to enhance adequate planning programme and implementation so that the university's standard may be maintained. The Distance Learning Centre has information centres in Lagos (Lagos State), Abeokuta (Ogun State), and Ile-Ife (Osun State) which indicates that its geographical coverage is still small. It also runs diploma courses in the Faculty of Education and in Departments of Theatre Arts and Statistics.

The main objectives of these two Distance Learning Programmes (University of Lagos Distance Learning Institute and University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre) were synchronized thus:

- Bridging the gap between actual enrolment and demand for enrolment in university education in Nigeria;
- To use global quality modes of instruction in educating distance learners;
- Utilization of innovative method of programme delivery;
- Provision of quality education through distance learning mode to enhance Distance Learner's productivity.

In comparing University of Lagos Distance Learning Institute (ULDLI) and University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre (UIDLC), both programmes use printed materials, face-to-face lectures on weekends, tutorials in mathematically-oriented courses and contact sessions as the major media of instruction but have not been able to perfect the multi-media instructional strategy. However, both Institutions make use of audio and video media which are distributed to students as parts of course materials. University of Lagos Distance Learning Institute uses *Radio Unilag* which covers only two hundred metres radius within Lagos Metropolis while the University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre has 'Diamond F.M' Radio Station which covers Ibadan and its environs.

The University of Lagos Distance Learning Institute has its own large building with library and some lecture rooms like other faculties on the main campus and has the status of a college placing at par only with the college of medicine, unlike its University of Ibadan Distance

Learning Centre counterpart, whose status is only at par with that of a faculty. The University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre has its administrative building outside the University of Ibadan Campus, and uses lecture rooms on the main campus for its contact sessions until year 2009, when it acquired more buildings outside the main campus for lectures during contact sessions

One common problem that becomes obvious to the discerning observer of the two programmes is the reluctance of many departments of the two universities to participate in the programmes, even though they both have long history behind them. This is unlike the situations in other countries such as South Africa, India, The U.S.A., Argentina, The U.K., Indonesia and Japan. However, from 2005/2006 academic session, Faculties of Arts, Social Sciences, Agricultural Science, and Science have since joined the University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre Programmes.

The evaluation of any programme entails that at least a model should be employed as guide to its proper and appropriate evaluation (Bhola, 1990). Obemeata (1985) asserts that evaluating distance learning programme entails delineating the purpose of the evaluation.

He states that this is so because the purpose would define the method to be employed. Obemeata further stresses that evaluation has four major purposes: decision to be taken about the programme commencement, making final judgment about the distance learning programme, contributing to decision to guide the improvement of a distance learning programme, and obtaining evidence for the purpose of promoting a cause.

Existing literature shows only case studies rather than comparative study of at least any two of such existing programmes, by which they can learn from each other. Also several departments of the universities where the two programmes are based are reluctant to join in these distance learning programmes. Therefore, it becomes imperative to carry out a comparative evaluation research on management and administration of the programmes being run by the University of Lagos Distance Learning Institute and the University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre. The utilization of the results of this study would further move the institutions closer to the achievement of their set objectives, as well as improve quality. Making a meaningful impact on the society will equally enhance access to distance learning

programmes in Nigeria and further reduce the level of illiteracy in the country.

Statement of the Problem

Distance learning has become an alternative means of education globally. Yet, its administration is not encouraging in Nigeria, as the programmes are yet to catch up in terms of some aspects that can enhance quality, hence the need to seek ways of improving the quality of administration of distance learning programmes in Nigeria and the need for a comparative study of, at least, two of such programmes. It is on this note that the present study undertook comparative evaluation of the management and administration of the University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre and the University of Lagos Distance Learning Institute's programmes.

Based on the stated problem, the study provided answer to this research question:

1. What is the comparative quality of administration of the two distance learning programmes from the perspectives of:
 - distance learning students,
 - academic staff, and
 - non-teaching staff?

Methodology

This study is an ex-post facto survey research and it adopted Input-Process-Output evaluation model. The target population for the study comprised all distance learning students of the two Institutions from 1996/97 to 2005/2006 academic sessions, all academic staff of the two distance learning institutions, and all non-teaching staff of the two distance learning institutions

Multi-stage sampling technique was employed in this study as follows. Academic staff members and distance learning students (from 200 level to 500 level) were clustered according to all participating faculties of the two distance learning institutions. Academic staff members and students from each of the five faculties: (i) Education, (ii) Business Administration, (iii) Accounting, (iv) Library and Information Science, and (v) Mass Communication of the University of Lagos Distance Learning Institute were chosen using probability proportion to size as sample for the study. However, academic staff and students

from five participating faculties, namely: Education, Arts, Agriculture, Sciences and Social Sciences of the University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre, were chosen using probability proportion to size as sample for the study.

Finally, the administrative members of staff were stratified into three categories, namely: management, senior, and junior staff. All members of staff of the management cadre participated in the study while senior and junior staff were proportionately drawn from each of the two strata. About 20 % of the senior and junior staff were randomly selected from various departments that took part in the study. The sample comprised 400 distance learning students of the two distance learning programmes, 80 academic staff and 80 administrative staff. In all, a total sample size of 560 participants, were involved in the study.

The instrument constructed by the researcher for data collection was Quality of Distance Learning Programme Administration Questionnaire (QDLPAQ). It was sub-divided into three versions namely: (1) Student version (2) Academic staff version (3) Non-teaching staff version, and validated by the researcher before they were administered on respondents from three perspectives, namely: distance learning students, academic staff and non-teaching staff. The instruments have 37 items for students, 50 items for academic staff and 23 items for non-teaching staff.

Validation was conducted on the three key sample respondents as follows: 100 distance learning students, 30 distance learning academics staff and 30 distance learning non-academic staff of a similar institution. The reliability coefficient of 0.88, 0.86 and 0.77 was obtained from the perspectives of the distance learning students, academic staff, and non-academic staff respectively. Data were collected with the help of six trained research assistants and analysed using Independent t-test.

Results and Discussion

Research Question

1. What is the comparative quality of administration of the two distance learning programmes from the perspectives of:
 - (a) distance learning students,
 - (b) academic staff, and
 - (c) non-teaching staff?

Results:**Table 4.1: Difference in the Two Distance Learning Programme Administration Quality from the Perspectives of Students**

| Variable s | Name of Institution | N | Mean | SD | SE M | T | Df | Pvalue |
|------------|---------------------|-----|--------|-------|------|------|----|--------|
| | | | | | | | | |
| | ULDLI | 200 | 142.90 | 18.97 | 1.34 | 7.51 | 8 | |

*Statistically significant at 0.05 alpha level Table 4.1 shows that from the perspectives of distance learning students of the two programmes, there is a significant difference in the administration of the two distance learning programmes. The mean score of ULDLI is 142.90 while that of UIDLC is 130.82 (t-cal =-7.51, Df= 398, P< .05). This shows that the observed difference in the mean scores of the two programmes is statistically significant from the perspectives of distance learning students of the two programmes and is to the advantage of ULDLI. Hence, ULDLI fared better than UIDLC.

Table 4.2: Difference in the Two Distance Learning Programme Administration Quality from the Perspectives of Teaching Staff

| Variable | Name of Institution | N | Mean | SD | SE M | T | Df | P value |
|---------------------------|---------------------|----|-------|------|------|------|----|---------|
| Quality of Administration | UIDLC | 40 | 54.20 | 8.04 | 1.28 | - | 78 | .000* |
| | ULDLI | 40 | 62.58 | 4.71 | .74 | 5.69 | | |

* Statistically significant at 0.05 alpha level.

Table 4.2 indicates the results of the quality of programme administration of the two distance learning institutions from the

perspectives of academic staff. The table shows that there is a significant difference in the administration of the two distance learning programmes from the perspectives of academic staff of the two programmes. However, the mean score for UIDLC is 54.20 while ULDLI mean score is 62.58 (t-cal.= -5.69, Df= 78, P< .05). The observed difference in the mean scores is statistically significant to the advantage of ULDLI. Hence, ULDLI fared better in terms of quality of programme administration from the perspectives of academic staff of the distance learning programme than their UIDLC counterparts.

Table 4.3: Difference in the Two Distance Learning Programme Administration Quality from the Perspectives of Non-Teaching Staff

| Variables | Name of Institution | N | Mean | SD | SEM | T | Df | P value |
|----------------------------|---------------------|----|-------|-------|------|-------|----|---------|
| Quality of Administration. | UIDLC | 40 | 67.23 | 9.16 | 1.45 | -.167 | 78 | .868 |
| | ULDLI | 40 | 67.60 | 10.83 | 1.71 | | | |

Not statistically significant at 0.05 alpha level.

Table 4.3 shows the summary of t-test analysis on the quality of administration of the two distance learning programmes from the perspectives of the non-teaching staff of the two programmes. The table reveals that there is no significant difference in the quality of administration of UIDLC and ULDLI. The table shows that the mean scores of the two programmes indicate a competitive mean scores of 67.23 for UIDLC and 67.60 for ULDLI (t-cal.= -.167, df = 78, sig.t = .868). This, of course, is an extremely close range. The observed difference in the mean scores on the quality of the two distance learning programmes from the table is not strong to make a significant difference. There is therefore no difference in the quality of administration of the two distance learning programmes as revealed from the perspectives of the Non-teaching staff of the two distance learning institutions.

Discussions

Results in tables 4.1 and 4.2 reveal that there is a statistical significant difference in the quality of programme administration of the two institutions from both students and academic staff's perspectives and the results are to the advantage of ULDLI. However, table 4.3 reveals that there is no statistical significant difference in the quality of administration of the two distance learning programmes from their non-teaching staff's perspectives. The table further shows that the mean scores of the two programmes indicate a competitive mean scores of 67.23 for UIDLC and 67.60 for ULDLI ($t\text{-cal.} = -.167$, $df = 78$, $P > 0.05$). This, of course, is an extremely close range. The observed difference in the mean scores on the quality of the two distance learning programmes from the table is not strong enough to make a significant difference.

There is therefore the need for the two distance learning institutions to operationalize effective on-line interaction between students on one side and between tutors and students on the other side in order to enhance quality administration of the programme. Lockwood (1992) suggests the design of learning activities that is on-line for distance learners. More recent studies have also reinforced the role of student interaction (Jawah, 2005) and online activities (Salmon, 2002). This is further buttressed by Jochems, Van Merrienboer and Koper (2000) who emphasized the importance of interaction as an integral part of the teaching process, but one fraught with danger, especially in terms of the sheer volume of messages that can be posted on websites and the reactions of some learners if rapid replies are not immediately forthcoming. In this regard, the briefing of teaching staff who may be teaching on-line will be vital.

However, studies have revealed that the expectations of on-line learners can be unrealistic, expecting almost instant responses to e-mails or messages posted on the bulletin board. Salmon (2004) however posits that fostering mutual support among learners and developing skills in E moderating will be vital for not only mutual survival but also student learning. The big problem, envisaged here in the Nigerian context, is the availability of electricity to effect online interaction as the country is faced with epileptic power supply which is seen as hindrance to online learning.

The result of the study also reveals that feedback which is providing summaries of information provided by learners and the actions resulting from it are very good practice. Distance learners should have an identified contact person who can provide constructive feedback on academic performance and guidance on student's progression opportunity for inter-learner discussion and provision of feedback on their experience of programmes.

Simpson (2003) in his own studies noted that among Open University students, a substantial proportion of those who enquire about study with the university subsequently fail to register as a result of lack of proper feedback to prospective students, hence the resultant need for a national student survey in the United Kingdom which was piloted in 2005. There is the need therefore to survey those who fail to progress in the two distance learning programmes respectively, so as to provide information that can be acted upon and share with all learners. Brennan and Williams (2004) agree with this point in their view that feedback is not only a good practice but is also likely to increase student's response rate.

The result of findings also corroborates Aderinoye (2007) who submits that emphasis of distance education should be on access and learner support services, as integration of the two in open and distance learning will enhance learning at a distance since distance education has gone beyond mere reliance on rigid pre-requisite. He further posited that access device or point of contact should focus on application/preparation for admission of the distance learner, registration, contacts with the distance learning institution, online course material, online contact with tutors, study centres/teaching practice, examination and graduation. Hence, learner support should be geared towards administrative support, academic support (tutorials, assignments) and counselling or personal support (Aderinoye, 2007).

The two institutions provide a support network for their distance learners respectively, as it was revealed in the result of findings, which is thus seen as an achievement in their parts to maintain quality assurance, and the network of support consisted of academic, administrative and counselling. This result agrees with Simpson (2003) in his study of the United Kingdom Open University students. He revealed that the tutor was not regarded as the main source of advice and support; rather, it was the network of support of

friends and colleagues, relatives, work colleagues and fellow students that was valued.

Administrative support is the most wanted support of the distance learning student as it entails: sending out routine information, responding to routine enquires, processing admissions, registering of distance learners, keeping records, delivery of course materials, supervising assignment turnaround, monitoring administrative support, administering examinations and issuing certificates to the graduates of the programmes. Academic support starts with the institution's preparation of course materials, tutorials, interactive sessions, teaching practice, assignment and examination and, lastly, counselling support which entails ensuring that learner's needs are met, peer support and teaching practice (Aderinoye, 2007).

Recommendations and Conclusion

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are hereby made in order to improve on distance learning students, academic staff, non-teaching staff and the administration of the distance learning programmes in the two institutions. The two distance learning institutions are expected to position distance learning education in Nigeria for global competitiveness, of which there is no doubt they are striving hard to do.

Efforts should be made to increase the number of courses available to the various faculties in the two programmes and more faculties should be encouraged by the mother universities to join the distance learning programmes. This will thereby be addressing objective one of the two distance learning programmes.

The capacity of resource centres (ICTs) needs to be increased to accommodate more learners at a time to utilize these facilities; ICTs do not only enable increased access, but also improve the quality of education to the extent that they make it easier to access vast amount of information; facilitate presentation of materials, using multi media and collaboration with similar institutions to improve classroom experience, and ultimately lead to improve cognitive skills.

The two distance learning institutions should take steps to use the internet for dispensing course materials to students and also exchange communication between distance learning students and their

course lecturers. If this is adhered to, it will help them in meeting the second objectives of their programmes.

There should be more use of other ICT facilities like e-mails, sms, and telephone services to fast track communication with students particularly between course tutors and distance learning students. The provision of assignments/activities in the course materials will become a useless exercise if there is no effective way of administering assignments to students and receiving feedback from teaching staff.

There should be periodic review of course material at least every five years, in line with accreditation exercise of the National Universities Commission. This applies in particular to the ULDLI which still makes use of course materials of the Correspondent Open Studies Institute (COSIT) for her education courses up to 2007/2008 academic session, instead of producing distance learning institution's course materials for its education students. Hence, there is need to include an assessment of the appropriateness of course materials as part of quality assurance in the two institutions.

Activity modules need to be operationalized. Assignment turn around between distance learning students and feedback by distance learning lecturers should be monitored by the departmental head of each of the programmes of the two distance learning institutions to enhance quality learning during contact sessions.

The two distance learning institutions should operate more study centres outside their domains in order to cater for envisaged large number of distance learning students, where they will be able to meet regularly for the purpose of interaction.

Both distance learning institutions should provide a link to e-library at their respective institutions and more current books and journals should be purchased for the libraries.

Academic and non-academic staff of the two distance learning institutions should be exposed to both local and foreign training in the area of distance learning in order to keep up with the rapid change in emerging technologies. Also, non-teaching staff of the two programmes should be trained on proper record keeping.

Distance learning students should be allowed to assess their lecturers' performance during contact session and the result should be used as part of criteria for remuneration and/or promotion of such teaching staff.

From the management's point of views, the distance learning institutions must strive to be very economical with respect to the number of full-time academic staff to be employed which must of necessity be experts in open and distance learning. In view of the cost of maintaining them, intensive use should be made of part-time academics staff, especially at their regional or local study centres.

Some government parastatals and organization can also be encouraged to extend their facilities to the management of distance education in Nigeria at non-commercial rates. Such government bodies include Federal Radio Corporation of Nigerian, Nigerian Television Authority of their respective locations, the National and State libraries.

The programmes should be properly planned based on national needs and thus should be expanded beyond its scope whereby only a few disciplines are covered. For instance, vocational education courses like Home Economics, Business Education, Music, Fine Arts, etc and Educational Technology courses should feature as part of education courses of the two distance learning institutions since the National Policy on Education emphasizes their importance in the primary and secondary school curricular, hence the expansion of the programmes will definitely encourage people to take advantage of it.

The Federal Government of Nigeria should attach importance to the supply of electricity supply for efficient and reliable delivery of course materials, the use of ICT and internet services to their distance learners. If the objectives of distance education as stated by the National Policy on Education are to be achieved, then distance learning must be given utmost attention.

In conclusion, it is apparent that the two distance learning institutions are striving to meet the stated objectives of their respective programmes, it would be necessary to remind these two universities operating distance learning programmes that they both have international recognition to maintain, hence, they both must aim at international coverage respectively.

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