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IMPACT OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING ON NIGERIA EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Abstract

The study investigated the impact of open and distance learning on Nigeria's educational system. The descriptive research survey design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised of students and graduates from the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) who are teachers in public senior and junior secondary schools in Edo State. A sample of 65 students and 20 graduates was drawn from the population using a stratified sampling technique. Two research questions guided the study and were answered with descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation. A 10-item questionnaire titled "Impact of Open and Distance Learning on Nigeria Education System (IODLNES)" was used to elicit information from the respondents. The instrument was validated by two experts and the test re-test method of reliability was used with a reliability coefficient of 0.78. Findings from the study revealed that quality and standard educational experiences are provided for students of open and distance education and that the perception of distance education students positively affected their attitude towards learning. Based on the findings, it was recommended amongst others, that there should be the establishment of open and distance education centres in every university in Nigeria.

Keywords: Open and Distance Learning, Nigeria, Education System

Introduction

It is a truism that education is universally seen as a weapon to combat diverse ills that can befall any nation. Any nation that toys with the education of its citizen may not experience accelerated development and may not be ranked high among the developed nations of the world (Etejere and Ogundele, 2008). Education is seen as an agent of light that can illuminate a nation and place it on a pedestal for development, and every nation that wants this light thrives by all positive possible means to provide education to all its citizens. Educated citizens are not just creative and productive citizens, they are culturally and socially tolerant people who exercise ethical and moral considerations in national and local affairs (Jegede, 2016). Education is provided through formal and informal means. In formal setting, the conventional (face-to-face school instruction) and the distance education offered with separation in terms of the physical location of instructors and students has been used to provide educational opportunities to recipients.

Having realized the contributions of education to a nation, the Nigerian government decided to introduce Open and Distance Education (ODE) to enable citizens who could not access conventional education have access to be educated, whether young and old, privileged and non-privileged, working class and non-working class. With this system of education, diverse channels are created in our educational system to provide access to quality education and equality in educational opportunities to all, as stipulated in our national policy on education.

Open and distance education is an educational pattern, approach and strategy that permit people to learn with no barrier with respect to time and space, age and previous educational qualification, no entry qualification, no age limit, no regard to sex, race, tribe, state of origin e.t.c. (Alaezi in Jimoh, 2013). In the same vein, Kaufman, Watkins and Guerra (2001) stated that distance education means the delivery of useful learning opportunities at a convenient place and time for learners, irrespective of the institution providing the learning opportunity. Jegede, (2003) opined that distance education is the education provided by a mode other than the conventional face-to-face method whose goals are similar to and just as noble and practical as those of on-campus, full-time, face-to-face education. It is a field of education that focuses on imparting knowledge through methods and

technology to students who are not physically present in a traditional face-to-face setting such as the classroom. This process provides access to learning experiences when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance.

Distance education also known as distance learning, traditionally involved correspondence courses wherein the students correspond with the school via mail. Today, it usually involves online education. A distance learning programme can be completely distance or a combination of distance learning and traditional classroom instruction called Hybrid or blended. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) offering large-scale interactive participation and open access through the World Wide Web or other network technologies are recent educational models in distance education (Wikipedia, 2022).

Aderinoye and Ojokheta (2004) posited that distance learning is an appropriate instrument for filling the gap in the provision of education. It has created more room for all to be educated and to get more education, meeting the special needs of employers and employees through special certificate programmes, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Our teachers and instructors can also have the opportunity to further their education which in turn increases their input and productivity. This form of education is being used by the government to tackle problems of education deficiency in high priority area puts which includes teacher education, amongst others. This is an area that can be described as an umbrella covering other areas in the field of education because when the trainers (teachers) are trained and well-equipped, the transfer of knowledge, skills and values to meet educational goals will be easily achievable.

The history of distance education dates back to correspondence education which was a means of preparing candidates for the general certificate in education, a prerequisite for the London Matriculation Examination before independence. Shortly after the colonial era, distance learning was no longer operational in Nigeria until 1983 when it was re-introduced but became operational in 2001 following the establishment of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) which takes the lead in exclusively providing open and distance education for students. Two other universities in Nigeria (Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Akwa) were also given the license to operate open and distance education. These

three universities introduced diverse programmes such as correspondence study, part-time programmes, sandwich programmes and continuing education programmes. The programmes were opened to all categories of persons with no discrimination concerning age, sex, marital status, religion or race, but with varied entry qualifications which r from primary school, secondary school certificate, NCE to first degree Holdangeers (Owoeye in Jimoh, 2013). A lot of people seized the opportunity to be educated. Today, many universities have introduced distance learning programmes, consequently increasing people's access to education. Khakhar (2001) stated that distance learning is spreading to all areas of education and training, as government becomes aware of its potential in dealing with the numerous problems they face.

The national policy of education outlined the objectives of introducing distance education in Nigeria. According to the policy in Jimoh (2013) the objectives of open and distance learning are to:

1. Provide access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied;
2. Meet the special need of employers by mounting special certificate courses for their employees at their workplace;
3. encourage internalization, especially of tertiary education curricula;
4. ameliorate the effect of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing Nigerian experts as teachers regardless of their locations or places of work.

Considering the operations of the Open University and other institutions offering distance education, it is believed that these objectives are being achieved year after year. However, there is still debate on whether students are given equal learning experiences, opportunities and quality education that will enable them to compete favourably with their counterparts from the conventional education system upon graduation or completion of the programme.

The findings of Duffy, Gilbert, Kennedy and Kwong (2002) from a comparative study carried out on the academic achievements of distance learning students and classroom-based students, undertaking the same module in a degree course showed that though all the

sampled students were successful in their studies, the distance learning students' performance was significantly higher than the performance of the classroom-based students. Similarly, the study of Udokang, Michael and Ogundele (2013) revealed that there was no significant difference in the products of both distance learning and conventional system of education. Verdum and Clark (1991) in their study submitted that there was no significant difference in learning outcomes that can be attained at traditional institutions versus distance learning. Contrary to this, some researchers submitted that despite the rapid growth and increased popularity of distance learning, the quality of higher learning via distance education has been called to question. Harrison (2001) as cited in Peat and Helland, (2002) believed there are administrative problems facing distance learning which is fighting against effective service delivery to the students and consequently affects their performance negatively. Obioha and Ndiri (2011) in their study, found the most serious problem of open and distance education in Nigeria was the administration of study centres by staff that lacked sufficient experience in the field of educational administration.

It is against this background that the study investigated the impact of open and distance learning on the Nigerian education system. The writer examined the effectiveness of distance learning programmes and explored the factors driving students' interest.

Statement of Problem

The increasing rate of population in Nigeria who are denied access to education in our conventional institutions, especially at the tertiary level influenced the introduction of open and distance education. The quest to provide a wide range of access to education has greatly popularized distance education all over the world. Nigeria has taken a giant step in recent times to introduce distance learning to our education system. The National Open University takes the lead in providing exclusive open and distance education for students, with study centres across the nation, while some other universities have sections where distance education programmes are offered. Over the years, it was believed that a lot of successes have been made in the education sector, as thousands of students have benefited from distance learning programmes, while a large number got admitted every year. However, attention must be drawn to the fact as to

whether this system of distance learning is providing quality learning experiences to students. can the graduates from distance education compete favourably with other graduates from the traditional education system? What are the attitudes and perceptions of the students towards distance learning? These questions spurred this investigation to examine the effectiveness of distance learning programmes and explore factors driving students' interest in distance learning.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. Are the students of distance education exposed to quality and standard educational experiences?
2. Does students' perception of distance education affect their attitude towards learning?

Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. The population of the study comprised students and graduates from the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) who are teachers in public senior and junior secondary schools in Edo state. A sample of 20 graduates and 65 students were drawn from the population using a stratified sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire tagged "Impact of Open and Distance Learning on Nigeria Education System (IODLNES)" and consisted of two parts, A and B. Part A elicited information on the demographic data of respondents, while Part B contained 10 items that sought answers to the research questions raised by the researcher, structured on a 4-point Likert rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) -4, Agree (A) -3, Disagree (D) -2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) -1. Mean and Standard Deviation were used to answer the research questions and determine the homogeneity of the respondents' views. Decisions were based on a criterion mean of 2.50. Any item that attained a response score of 2.50 and above was accepted, otherwise was rejected.

Table 1: Exposure of Distance Learning Students to Quality and Standard Educational Experiences

S/N	Items	X	SD	Decision
1.	Quality learning experiences are given to distance education students in an efficient manner	3.59	.49	Strongly Agree
2.	Media –mix, that is, printed materials, electronic media, interactive and non-interactive, are employed to bring quality learning experiences to distance learning students	3.50	.50	Strongly Agree
3.	Study centres are available for face-to-face contact where appropriate	3.07	.56	Agree
4.	There are effective regular assessments and evaluation of students' performance to ensure quality in distance education programmes	3.40	.46	Agree
5.	There is room for counselling services for students in distance education to ensure quality education	3.10	.51	Agree
Grand Mean		3.33		Agree

Table 1 shows that two out of the five items listed with the mean ratings of 3.59 and 3.50, showed that respondents strongly agreed that the quality of learning experiences exposed to distance education students is not inferior to that of the conventional school. The remaining three items have a mean rating that ranged from 3.07 to 3.40. It shows there are available study centres for face-to-face contact when necessary, assessment and evaluation are carried out regularly and there is room for counselling services to ensure quality education. The grand mean score of 3.33 indicated that quality learning experiences are provided for distance education students. Standard deviations for all the items are within the same range which indicated that the respondents are not wide apart in their opinions.

Table 2: Perception of Distance Education Students Affecting their Attitude Towards Learning

S/N	Items	X	SD	Decision
1.	Distance education is providing the needed access to Nigerians who cannot access conventional education	3.64	.49	Strongly Agree
2.	Distance learning students are not inferior compared to their counterparts in the conventional school system	3.47	.48	Agree
3.	Students of distance learning are motivated to continue and complete their learning programmes	3.23	.48	Agree
4.	Distance education is relatively affordable	2.61	.51	Agree
5.	Distance education should be encouraged and Sustained in Nigeria	3.57	.50	Strongly Agree
Grand Mean		3.30		Agree

Table 2 indicates that two of the five items listed with the mean ratings of 3.64 and 3.57, showed that respondents strongly agreed that distance education provided needed access to education and should be therefore encouraged and sustained. The remaining three items have mean ratings ranging from 2.61 to 3.47 showing that distance education students do not see themselves as inferior to other students of the conventional education system, distance education is relatively affordable and students are ready and motivated to continue and complete their programmes. The grand mean score of 3.30 indicated that the perception of distance education students is such that positively affected their attitude towards learning. Standard deviations for all the items are within the same range which indicated that the respondents are not wide apart in their opinions.

Discussion of Findings

It was affirmed from the findings that, quality and standard educational experiences are provided for students of open and distance education, as respondents were of the view that: distance education students enjoy standard and quality educational experiences. Through the use of media –mix (in the teaching-learning process), regular assessments and evaluation, counselling services and availability of study centres for

face-to-face contact when appropriate, quality education is ensured. This is in line with one of the objectives of open and distance education as stated in the national policy on education which is: to provide access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied (Jimoh,(2013). Similarly, the outcome of this study supported the submission of Duffy, Gilbert, Kennedy and Kwong, (2002) from a comparative study on the academic achievements of distance learning students and classroom-based students. They concluded that though all the sampled students were successful in their studies, the distance learning students' performance was significantly higher than the performance of the classroom-based students.

The findings further showed that the perception of distance education students positively affected their attitude towards learning. The respondents agreed that distance education provided the needed access to Nigerians who cannot access conventional education and it is relatively affordable, they are strong of the opinion that distance education should be encouraged and sustained, and students of distance learning are motivated and ready to continue and complete their learning programmes as they do not see themselves as inferior to their counterparts in the conventional school system. This research supported the findings of Udokang, Michael and Ogundele (2013), that there is no significant difference in the products of both distance learning and conventional system of education.

Conclusion

From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the role of open and distance learning in our educational system cannot be overemphasized. It creates the opportunity for all to have access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities, especially for those who otherwise would have been denied. Through distance learning, thousands of people have been, and are being educated and trained to complement conventional institutions' efforts in the manpower development of the nation. It suffices to state that the success, growth and sustainability of distance education will immensely contribute to the overall goals and objectives of our nation's education.

Recommendations

The following measures should be taken to ensure consistent improvement in the quality and standard of Open and Distance Education in Nigeria:

1. Establishment of an open and distance education centre in every university;
2. More teleconferencing centres should be created for ODE operations;
3. To ensure adequate and consistent achievement of distance education goals such that all stakeholders should be involved, which includes government, community leaders, business groups conventional educational institutions, amongst others.
4. Valid performance models should be selected and applied both in the planning and implementation of open and distance education
5. The funds' allocation to open and distance education by the government should be such that is adequate in providing for more infrastructures and equipment, and regular payment of staff salaries.

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