

STAFF AND STUDENTS' ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY AND EQUITY IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMME BY NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

¹AKANO, O. T. ²ADEGOKE, J. M., ³ODUWAIYE, M. & ⁴OWOLABI, H. O

^{1,2,&3}Department of Social Sciences Education,
University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.

⁴Department of Adult and Primary Education,
University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.
oluwafemiakano1@gmail.com, adegokejohnsonm@gmail.com
modupeoduwaiye3@gmail.com, henryowolabi2000@yahoo.com.

Abstract

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) was established to provide wider access and quality university education anchored by social justice, equity and equality. To report the extent to which the objectives for establishing NOUN have been achieved, this study therefore aimed at assessing the quality and equity in open and distance learning programme by NOUN. This study employed concurrent triangulation survey design. The population for this study was the entire staff and students' of the eighty four NOUN study centres. A total of one thousand, two hundred and eighty seven participants comprising, one thousand, one hundred and ninety one students and ninety six staff of NOUN constituted the sample for the study they were selected using simple random and purposive sampling techniques respectively. Evaluation of National Open University of Nigeria Questionnaire for students and staff and oral interview were used to collect data. The hypotheses were tested with k- Sample Median Test. The findings revealed that there is a significant difference in the assessment of NOUN staff and students' on the extent of quality university education provided by NOUN. The outcome of the study also revealed that there is no significant difference in the assessment of NOUN students and staff on the extent of equity in university education provided by NOUN. Hence, it was recommended that Federal and state government should formulate policies and enact laws against the discrimination of NOUN students' certificate in the labour market.

Keywords: Quality, Equity, Open and Distance Learning, NOUN

Introduction

Open and distance learning (ODL) can be regarded as the practices and policies which allow entry to learning without barriers in terms of age, gender and time. It is a philosophy of learning that is based on the principle of flexibility and increased access to education as well as equity in opportunities to education. The philosophy of Open and Distance Learning allows the provider to find varieties of ways to open access to learning opportunities to all qualified learners. Therefore, learners in ODL are provided the opportunities to what, how and where they want to learn. ((The Commonwealth of Learning, 2002, & Glen, 2005) To some researchers "open" in ODL simply means openness in terms of: entry and access to learning opportunities; and the removal of barriers to learning opportunities, to some other researchers "open" in ODL simple means flexibility in learning.

It is a form of learning that enable learners to make choice in time and space, it is an approach that combines the principles of lifelong learning, provision of flexibility in learning, and the removal of barriers to access learning (Dhanarajan, Creed, 2001 & Mujibul, 2008).

In order to provide a full benefit of ODL, the Federal Government of Nigeria on 22nd July, 1983 in the second republic enacted a law by signing a bill establishing the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) as a full – fledged single - mode modern ODL institution in Nigeria, therefore, this began a new period in meeting the millennium goal of Education for All, but, the idea did not last long as the military government, on 25th of April, 1984 suspended the programme. However, the institution was resuscitated on 12th April, 2001 when the democratically elected President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo in the fourth Republic, after a careful consideration of the massive demand by applicants for higher education in Nigeria, lifted this suspension and ensured that NOUN commenced academic activities. The adoption and deployment of ODL delivery system was justified on several reasons which were articulated in the National Policy on Education as: providing access to quality education; providing equity in educational opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied; providing the entrenchment of global learning culture among other. (Kpolovie & Olulube, 2013).

Quality could mean worth of value. In this context, quality of higher education can be described as the degree to which the education meets the needs and demands of the society. (Okebukola, 2008). Also, Ojerinde (2008) described quality as “the degree of conformity of procedures of an organization with set standards.” The process of achieving quality in any institution brings about quality assurance. Okojie (2011) defined Quality assurance as a systematic activity implemented in a system so that quality requirements for a service and products are met. In a way it is to be sure that the right things are done, in the right way. The term quality assurance in distance education is generally understood to refer to, systematic standards, policies, actions and procedures designed to enhance excellence and achieve pre-determined criteria (Stella&Gnanam, 2004; Tait, 2008).

However, research evidence from Obasi and Akuchie (2014) on the implementation of distance learning programme indicates that the quality of learning and graduates produced by the distance learning institutions in Nigeria has remained a controversial issue among stakeholders in the education sector. This has therefore revealed a gap in the level of the objective of NOUN the only institution providing full – fledged single mode open and distance learning in providing flexible, but qualitative higher education in Nigeria and ensuring equity of opportunities in education. Therefore, this study was carried out to assess quality and equity in open and distance learning programme by NOUN. The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

Research Hypotheses

HO₁: There is no significant difference in the assessment of NOUN staff and students' on the quality of university education provided by NOUN.

HO₂: There is no significant difference in the assessment of NOUN staff and students' on the extent of equity in university education provided by NOUN.

Methodology

The study adopted a mixed method of evaluation. Mixed methodology research design has been defined as a philosophical assumption that guides the direction of the collection and

analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches in many phases in the research process (Braun & Clark 2007). Specifically, concurrent triangulation design was adopted for this study.

The population of this study was the entire staff and students' of the 84 NOUN study centres in Nigeria. The research employed multi stage sampling procedure which comprises of simple random sampling and purposive sampling technique. The simple random sampling technique was used to select one state from each of the Geo-Political Zones for the study making a total of six (6) states out of the thirty-six (36) states of Nigeria as follows: North - Central = Kwara, North - East = Gombe, North - West = Kaduna, South-South = Edo, South - West = Osun, South - East = Akwa – Ibom. Purposively, the available NOUN staff and students in all the selected ten study centres from the selected six states constituted the sample for the study.

The researcher developed a questionnaire titled Evaluation of the Implementation of Open and Distance Learning of NOUN Questionnaire for students and staff with items to ascertain the attainment quality and equity in ODL. The responses mode of High Extent, Moderate Extent and Low Extent were utilized to gather information from the respondents. The questionnaire was subjected to content and face validation done by three test and measurement experts while the reliability of the instrument was established using 50 respondents in Ado – Ekiti NOUN study centre. The interview was thematically analysed as qualitative data, both the quantitative and qualitative forms of data were triangulated for a mixed result. According to Tucker and Brown (2012), the triangulation design is an approach used to confirm, cross-validate or corroborate findings. The responses from the questionnaire were subjected to Cronbach's alpha method of internal consistency reliability analysis and the reliability co-efficient of 0.77 was obtained. The hypotheses generated for the study were tested with K- sample median statistical test

Results

Hypothesis One: *There is no significant difference in the assessment of NOUN staff and students' on the quality of university education provided by NOUN.*

To test hypothesis one, responses to the various items on the quality of university education provided by NOUN of the questionnaire were scored. High Extent, Moderate Extent and Low Extent. Scores of the respondents were used to categorize to LE, ME, and HE and was analyzed with K – sample median test.

Table 1: Results of K – Sample Median Test on Difference between staff and students' assessment on quality university education provided by NOUN

Groups	No.	k-sample χ^2 – value	p-value	> median	≤ median	Remark
Staff	98			61 (62%)	37 (38%)	
Students	1191	84.183	0.000	250 (21%)	941 (79%)	Significant
Total	1289					

***Significant p- value < 0.05**

Table 1 presented K – sample χ^2 – value of 84.183 with p – value of 0.000 which is an indication that the null hypothesis is significant as 0.000 is less than 0.05 alpha levels.

Therefore, the answer is to reject the null hypothesis stating that: There is no significant difference in the assessment of NOUN staff and students' on the quality university education provided by NOUN. This implies that, there is a significant difference in the assessment of NOUN staff and students' on the extent of quality university education provided by NOUN. The K – sample median test also revealed that 62% and 21% of NOUN staff and students respectively considered the objective of quality university education provided by NOUN to be achievable to a High extent while, 38% and 79% acknowledged that the objective is achievable to a moderate and low extent. This showed that majority of staff considered the objective achievable to a high extent while majority of NOUN students perceived the objective achievable to a moderate and low extent. This revealed discrepancy in the assessment of staff and students on this objective of NOUN.

Hypothesis Two: *There is no significant difference in the assessment of NOUN staff and students' on the extent of equity in university education provided by NOUN.*

To test hypothesis two, responses to the various items on equity in university education provided by NOUN of the questionnaire were scored. High Extent (HE), Moderate Extent (ME) and Low Extent (LE) were scored of 3, 2, and 1 respectively. Scores of the respondents were used to categorize into three categories (LE, ME, and HE) and was analyzed with K – sample median test.

Table 2: Results of K – Sample Median Test on Difference between staff and students' assessment on equity in university education provided by NOUN

Groups	No.	k-sample χ^2 – value	p-value	> median	≤ median	Remark
Staff	98			61(62%)	37(38%)	
Students	1191	1.688	0.235	803(67%)	388(33%)	Not Significant
Total	1289					

***Significant p – value < 0.05**

Table 2 presents K – sample χ^2 – value of 1.688 with p – value of 0.235, since p – value is greater than 0.05 alpha level, the null hypothesis is not rejected which implies that, there is no significant difference in the assessment of NOUN students and staff on the extent of equity in university education provided by NOUN. The table also revealed that majority of NOUN staff and students assessed the objective of equity in university education provided by NOUN achievable to a high extent as the K – sample median test revealed 61% and 67% respectively.

Discussion of Findings

The finding revealed that there is a significant difference in the assessment of staff and students on the provision of quality university education by NOUN. Table 1 indicated that 62% of NOUN staff considered the objective of quality university education provided by NOUN to be achievable to a High extent, while 21% of NOUN students considered this objective of quality university education provided by NOUN to be achievable to a High extent. On the other hand 79% of NOUN students considered the objective of quality of

university education provided by NOUN to a moderate and low extent while 38% of NOUN staff considered the objective to be achievable to a moderate and low. The result is an indication that majority of NOUN students who benefited from the university education provided by NOUN assess the achievable level of the objective of this education in terms of quality university education to a moderate and low extent. This finding supports the result of Obasi and Akuchie (2014) on the implementation of distance learning programme at NOUN which revealed that quality of learning and graduates produced by the distance learning institutions in Nigeria has remained a controversial issue among stakeholders in the education sector, the results revealed that various schools significantly differed with respect to the quality of assessment and feedback mechanism used in NOUN.

However, the findings of Thompson and Wordu (2017) through a comparative analysis of NOUN academic programme components of Port Harcourt centre in response to the research question on the quality of curriculum of NOUN compared to that of the conventional university revealed that the extent to which the curriculum of NOUN meets the standard of the curriculum of conventional universities was 73% very high extent. Also, finding on the question about the extent the qualifications of teachers of NOUN programmes meets the qualification of teachers in the conventional universities was asks. In response to the items on this question, the respondents confirmed that an average of 59% qualifications of teachers of NOUN programmes can be compared with that of the conventional universities. The qualitative results through the oral interview conducted in this research supported the findings of Thompson and Wordu (2017) with the comments of the senior staff of NOUN as stated below:

“NOUN is fully recognized by the National Universities Commission. We have programmes that are accredited by NUC and we can't go farther than that. NUC says “we know you, we accept your existence”. We follow the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standard (BMMAS) which is the curriculum created by the NUC and it is the same BMMAS in all universities in Nigeria. Let's take Computer Science for instance, our computer science BMMAS is the same as that of University of the Ibadan, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, UNILAG and all other conventional universities across the nation” (Centre director)

... “for quality university education, NOUN only employ facilitators with Ph.D. in various fields in 2017” (admin staff)

“When it comes to learning materials for students, there is no doubt about the quality because it is properly reviewed and edited by qualified professionals, from conventional universities within and outside Nigeria” (admin staff)

“In terms of quality, NOUN ensures proper moderation of Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMA) and final examination script and grades”. (staff)

“All programmes offered in NOUN, its tutorial facilitation and degrees awarded are all subjected to the same quality as it is in all other Nigerian universities”. (staff)

On the contrary, it was said by students that:

“.....i will like to say NOUN is not providing quality university education because some organizations don't recognise their certificate and even NOUN student cannot participate in the one-year compulsory service by the NYSC why?” (student)

“There is a form of discrimination when it comes to getting job with NOUN certificate compared to others that graduated from other universities” (student)

The qualitative results indicated that NOUN staff considered the objective of quality university education provided by NOUN to be achievable to a High extent in terms of: ensuing the Bench mark Minimum Academic Standard (BMAS) curriculum as created by the NUC, programme monitoring and accreditation by NUC, the recruitment of professional as facilitators, and learning materials properly reviewed and edited by professionals. While the students on the other hand considered the university education provided by NOUN to a moderate and low extent as a result of discrimination when it comes to getting job with NOUN certificate, non-recognition of NOUN certificate by some organization and non-participation of NOUN student in the NYSC scheme.

Findings further revealed that there is no significant difference in the assessment of NOUN students and staff on the extent of equity in university education provided by NOUN. Table 2 revealed that, 62% NOUN staff and 67% NOUN students assessed this objective of equity in university education provided by NOUN achievable to a high extent. This is in line with the study of Ofoha (2010) who confirmed that NOUN has taken practical steps towards promoting equity in educational opportunity and empowering people who are perceived disadvantaged in various ways.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has shown that NOUN stated objectives on access to quality university education and providing equity in educational opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied were implemented as defined, though not without some challenges. These challenges have revealed discrepancy in the assessment of NOUN staff and students' on the objective of the quality of university education provided by NOUN. Based on the findings and implication of the study, it was recommended that: Federal and state government should formulate policies and enact laws against the discrimination of NOUN students' certificate in the labour market, federal government to implement any acts that will allow NOUN graduates to participate in the one year National Youth service Corps (NYSC) scheme and since NOUN programme is accredited and approved by the NUC, NOUN students should be given every equal rights, benefits and privileges as other conventional universities in Nigeria.

References

- Braun, V. & Clark, V. (2007). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Quantitative Research Psychology*, 3(2), 321-332.
- Commonwealth of Learning International. (2002). Building Capacity to Deliver Distance Education in Nigeria's Federal University System. *Report prepared for the World Bank*. Retrieved January 11th 2016.
- Creed, C. (2001). The Use of Distance Education for Teachers: Defining and Sustaining Useful Results. *Education Technology*, 41(3), 19-26.
- Dhanarajan, G. (2001). *Combating Poverty through Adult Education*. Guyana: University of Guyana.
- Glen, F. (2005). A Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth Vancouver: *The Commonwealth for Learning*, 7(3), 12-19.
- Kpolovie, P. J. & Ololube, N. P. (2013). The indispensability of utilitarian evaluation design in the reformation of Nigerian education. *International Journal of Scientific Research in Education (IJSRE)*. http://www.ij sre.com/Vol.,%206_2_.
- Mujibul, E. (2008). *Distance Learning Technologies in Education*. New Dehli. APFI Publishing Corporation.
- Obasi, S. N. & Akuchie, R. C. (2014). The Implementation of Distance Learning Programme at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). *Journal of Education and Practice*, 5(3), 201-219.
- Ojerinde, D. (2008). Quality Assurance in University System: Assessment and Feedback Mechanism. *Proceedings of a symposium organized by the Federal University of Technology Akure Nigeria November 2008*.
- Okebukola, P. C. (2008). Education reform: Imperatives for achieving vision 20-2020. *Paper Presented at the National Summit on Education Organized by Senate Committee on Education, held at Sheraton Hotel, Abuja*.
- Okojie J. A. (2011). Increasing access and the quality of University education in Nigeria. *An Address presented at the 2011 Annual conference and general meeting of directors of academic Planning of Nigerian Universities with the theme Increasing access and the quality of University education in Nigeria, held at the National Open University of Nigeria, 25th – 28th October, 2011*.
- Stella, A., & Gnanam, A. (2004). Quality assurance in distance education: The challenges to be addressed. *Higher Education*, 47(2), 143-160.
- Tait, A. (2008). What are open universities for? *The Journal of Open and Distance Learning*, 23(2), 85 – 93.