

## Administrative Problems of Open Distance Education in Nigeria. a Case Study of National Open University of Nigeria

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**Abstract** *The purpose of this study was to identify the administrative problems of open and distance education in Nigeria with particular reference to National Open University of Nigeria and to ascertain whether there is a significant difference between the administrative problems of National Open University in the two broad geo-political zones (Northern and Southern zone) of Nigeria. To guide the study, two research questions and one hypothesis were formulated. The study was carried out in all the study centres in the geo-political zones of Nigeria. The population of the study comprised of five administrative staff from each of the 26 study centres of National Open University of Nigeria, numbering 130, who also served as respondents. Questionnaire (NOUAPS) was used for data collection. The data generated were analysed with mean and t-test. It was found that there is no significant difference between the administrative problems identified in the study centres of National Open University in the Northern and Southern geo political zones of Nigeria. The most serious problem identified is the administration of the study centres by people who lack sufficient experience in the field of educational administration to develop, maintain and manage exemplary programs. Recommendations were made based on the findings.*

**Keywords:** *Administrative Problems, Solutions, Open University*

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### Introduction

A definition of open and distance education cannot be too precise. It would be as precise as the concept of distance itself is or as precise as the concept of education can be, both of which are within the province of subjectivity. In an attempt to define open education, Burge (1993) states that it is a situation in which the learner uses resources in a flexible way to achieve their goals. The resources here could be print, audio, computer based; used at home, at a study center, in the work place, with or without the guidance of a tutor or mentor.

On the other hand, Mujibul (2008) sees distance education as situations in which learners are physically separated from the educational provider, and communicate in writing (using letters, e-mail, fax or computer conferencing) verbally (by telephone, audio, conferencing, videoconferencing), or in face to face tutorial sessions.

From the above definitions therefore, open and distance education is forms of education and training in which using learning resources rather than attending classroom sessions, is the central feature of leaning experience. It is a field of education that focuses on the pedagogy, technology and instructional system designs that aim to deliver education to students who are not physical "on site" in a traditional classroom or campus. It is a process used to create and provide access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance or both. In other words, distance education is the process of creating an education experience of equal quality for the learner to best suit their needs outside the classroom situation. It is worthy to note that there is a considerable overlap between the two terms, open and distance leaning and they are often used together to refer to the whole range of leaning approaches as described above. Open and distance education courses that require a physical on-site presence for any reason,

including taking examination is considered a hybrid or blended course of study and it is the most popular in Nigeria today. Since establishment of National Open University of Nigeria, thousands have embraced this mode of education having seen it as an approved one in the national policy on education.

### Statement of the Problem

With the passing of the Open University bill into Law in Nigeria in 1983, and the test transmission on February 4, 1984 started on Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), National Teachers Institute (NTI) in Kaduna, and the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) in Lagos are the official institutions that offer open and distance education through Distance Learning System (DLS). Since then the staff and students of National Open University in both undergraduate and post graduate levels complained bitterly about series of administrative problems they encounter in different study centres of the institution.

Unfortunately, the rate of turnover from the National Open University of Nigeria reveals that the rate is slow in meeting the demand of staff and students in her study centres as well as that of the society. This slow pace has been due to certain constraints. These constraints which will be called problems in this work seems to have a nucleus in the administrative aspect propelling teaching and learning in the entire study centres of National Open University of Nigeria. It is therefore the intention of the researchers to expose the administrative problems of open and distance Education in Nigerian with particular reference to that of National Open University of Nigeria.

The purpose of this research is to identify the administrative problems of Open and distance education in Nigerian with particular reference to National Open University of Nigeria and ways of solving them. The result of the study and recommendations if implemented would enable the National Open University of Nigeria administrators and planners to solve the administrative problems existing in all their study centres. A study of this nature is important for development and growth of the university.

Based on the stated problem and purpose, two research question and one hypothesis were formulated to guide the study.

Research question:-

- (1) What are the administrative problems of National Open University of Nigeria study centres in Nigeria?
- (2) What are the solutions to the administrative problems of National Open University study centres in Nigeria?

### HYPOTHESIS

There is no significant difference between the administrative problems of National Open University study centres in the two broad geo-political zones (made up of North East, North West, North Central and South East, South West, South-South) of Nigeria.

### METHODOLOGY

The survey approach of ex-post facto design was used for this study. This design was found fit because the opinions of administrative staff were sampled about the phenomena that had already occurred in the respective study centres in the geo political zones.

Population of this study consisted of all the administrative staff in the twenty-six study centers of National Open University of Nigeria numbering 130

**Table 1: The distribution of the sample in terms of the number of Administrative staff in each study centre of National Open university in each geo-political zones in Nigeria.**

Geo-political Zones	Study centres	Number sampled	Geo-political zones	Study centres	Number sampled
North East	1) Federal Polytechnic Bauchi	5	South East	14) Federal Polytechnic Nekede –Owerri	5
	2) Yola Study Centre	5		15) National Root Crop Institute Umudike	5
	3) Kashim Ibrahim College of Edu. Maiduguri	5		16) Enugu Study Centre	5
	4) Damaturu study centre	5		17) Anambra study Centre	5
North West	5) Kano Study Centre	5	South West	18) Ibadan Study Centre	5
	6) Kaduna Study Centre	5		19) South West Resource Centre, Abeokuta Ogun State	5
	7) Shehu Study Centre	5		20) Adeyemi College of Edu. Ondo	5
	8) Katsina Study Centre	5		21) Lagos Study Centre	5
North Central				22) Oghogbo Study Centre	5
	9) Plateau State Polytechnic Jos	5		23) EDDI South-South Community Centre	5
	10) State College of Education Ilorin	5		24) State College of Education Rumuolumeni P.H	5
	11) Abuja Study Centre	5		25) Benin Study Centre	5
	12) Minna Study Centre	5		26) Yenagoa Study Centre	5
	13) Makurdi Study Centre	5			

Source: National Open University of Nigeria students Hand Book (2006)

### Sample AND Sampling Technique

All the administrative staff in the twenty-six study centres of National Open University in the Six Geo-Political Zones of Nigeria was sampled as indicated in table 1.

National Open University Administrative problems and solution questionnaire (NOUAPS) was the instrument used for collection of data for this research. The NOUAPS had two sections, A and B. Section A had 14 items and measured the administrative problems in the study centres of National Open University of Nigeria. Section B also with 5 items while measured the solution of problems contained in section A. These added up to 19 items, all measured in a four point likert-type scale of highly acceptable (4 points), acceptable (3 point), unacceptable (2 points) and highly unacceptable (1 point)

Face and content validities of NOUAPS were ascertained by experts in the field of measurement, evaluation and administration. Test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.78 was established for NOUAPS by administering the instrument twice within a two-week interval on 20 administrative officer of outreach centres of Nwafor-Orizu College of Education Nsugbe, Anambra State. The data from test and retest exercise was correlated using the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient, (r).

The researchers used face to face distribution technique in administering their questionnaire to respondents in the South East Geo-political Zone and electronic administrations by sending the questionnaire through e-mail of other respondents in the remaining geo-political zones. Mean and t-test were used to analysed the data collected.

### Data Analysis AND Results

This portion indicates the summary of data collected from the respondents and were analysed according to the research questions and hypothesis.

Table 2: Administrative problems of NOUN study centres

S/No	Items	Respondents from N. East, N.W and N. central Geo-political							Respondent from B.East S.W and S.S Geo – Political Zone						
		HA	A	UA	H.UA	Total	X	Remarks	HA	A	UA	H.UA	Total	X	Remarks
1.	Appointment of Non-specialists in Educational Administration and planning as centre Director	30	35	-	-	225	3.41	A	30	30	5	-	220	3.38	A
2	Accommodation problem	20	35	10	-	205	3.15	A	28	32	-	5	213	3.27	A
3	Lack of facilitators in some courses	15	43	5	2	189	2.90	A	40	23	2	-	174	2.67	A
4.	Irregular payment and omission of some facilitators honorarium	40	25	-	-	235	3.61	A	50	15	-	-	245	3.76	A
5	Autocratic leadership style adopted by most centre directors	-	52	10	3	149	2.75	A	-	50	10	5	175	2.69	A
6	Inadequate funding	-	65	-	-	195	3.0	A	50	15	-	-	245	3.76	A
7	Lack of receptive to open and distance education by most Nigeria	30	35	-	-	225	3.46	A	32	33	-	-	227	3.49	A
8	Inability of the centre directors to identify and recruit committed facilitators	10	40	-	15	175	2.69	A	20	35	2	8	197	3	A
9.	High cost of technology to support to programme	15	50	-	-	210	3.23	A	18	47	-	-	203	3.12	A
10	Insufficient and unequal distribution of course materials	35	30	-	-	230	3.53	A	30	35	-	-	225	3.46	A
11	Staff disobedience	32	33	-	-	227	3.49	A	20	35	10	-	205	3.15	A
12	Course allocation conflicts	40	23	2	-	174	2.67	A	40	25	-	-	235	3.61	A
13	Inaccurate data for effective planning	50	15	-	-	245	3.76	A	15	50	-	-	210	3.23	A
14	Lack of supervisor	28	32	-	5	213	3.27	A	20	35	10	-	245	3.15	A

All the items in table 2 had their mean scores above to cut off point of 2.5 and are therefore the administrative problems of all study centres of National Open University in the six geo-political zones of Nigeria.

## Research Question 2

What are the solutions of administrative problems of the study centres of National Open University in the six political zones in Nigeria?

**Table 3:- solution of the administrative problems of noun study centres.**

S/No	Items	Respondents from N. East, N.W and N. central Geo-political							Respondent from B.East S.W and S.S Geo –Political Zone						
		HA	A	UA	H.UA	Total	X	Remarks	HA	A	UA	H.UA	Total	X	Remarks
1.	Adequate accommodation should be provided in all study centre (permanent structures)	18	47	-	-	203	3.12	A	28	32	-	5	213	3.27	A
2.	The programme should be sufficiently funded	40	23	2	-	174	2.67	A	15	43	5	2	189	2.90	A
3.	Adequate and qualified facilitators	20	35	10	-	205	3.15	A	32	33	-	-	227	2.67	A
4.	Enough course materials should be provided in all study centres	20	35	2	8	197	3.0	A	10	40	5	10	130	2.76	A
5.	Specialist in educational administration and planning should be employed as centre directors	36	20	4	5	217	3.33	A	40	20	-	5	225	3.46	A

In table 3, all the items had their mean scores above the cut off point of 2.5. This indicates that they are the solutions to the administrative problem of the study centres of National Open University in all geo-political zones in Nigeria.

### Hypothesis

There is no significant difference between the administrative problems of National Open University study centres in the two broad geo-political zones (made up of N.E, N.W, N. Central and South East, S.W, South-South) of Nigeria.

**Table 4 Correlation co-efficient computation for testing the above hypothesis**

Geo-political zones	N	X	SD	t-cal	Df	Alpha level	t-tab	Decision
N.E,N.W & N Central	14	3.21	0.35	0.22	26	0.05	0.37	Accepted
S.E, S.W & S.S	14	3.26	0.33					

From table 4 above, it can be observed that the t-calculated value is 0.22 which is less than the t-table value 0.37 for 26 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. For this reason therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted, hence there is no significant difference between the administrative problems of National Open University study centres in the two broad geo-political zones of Nigeria.

### Discussion

The results obtained from the analysis of data in table 2 identified the following as administrative problems in all the study centres of National Open University of Nigeria:-

- Appointment of non education administrators as centre Directors in open and distance education

centres. As center Directors and supervisors main duties are to get things done in a proper way from the workers, they are supposed to be experts in education administration, planning and supervision. Same should be applicable to the appointment of the Vice Chancellors in universities running open and distance education.

The above finding is in line with (Aguna 2006) which states that inadequate planning, recruitment of staff, late production as well as of course materials and non utilization of experts in the field of educational administration and planning are affecting the proper implementation of the programmes.

- Accommodation problem. All the center used for open and distance education whether established by public or private institution are operating in either hired structure or hosted by already established institution. Building provided for offices and lecture rooms are inadequate resulting to slow rate of work in the office as well as in teaching and leaning.

This is in consonance with Obayi (2007) which states that no effective work can be done in a congested environment. A situation where the chief executive of a study center and his administrative staff share one room apartment as their office make jest of administrative block of a campus in a higher institution of such cadre.

This situation belittles not only the chief executives and her staff but the institution herself. Owerri and Port Harcourt centers of the National Open University of Nigeria are experiencing the problem right now. In line with this Nwaga (2007) pointed out that lack of space in their office has affected students guidance and counseling services. She received with dismay series of students' complaints on lack of classroom for facilitation coupled with insults from students of Federal Polytechnic hosting them.

These problems exist in all National University (open and distance education) study centre thereby leading to delay in performance of office duties, facilitation and restlessness to the centre Directors who run around resolving conflicts between the host students and his/her students. Stressing on conducive work environment. Moore (2005) observed that in the environment where human beings work, the interfaces between them and environment affect and determine the level of human performance and output (production) at the workplace. Irrespective of the type and level of technology employed at the congested environment existing in different learning centres; the problems related to these aspects cannot be eliminated completely as technology in use is being assessed continuously, and no two persons can work exactly in the same way on the same job because of difference in inherent capabilities and responses to work environment. The primary concern of management of open and distance education (National Open University of Nigeria) should be to provide a conducive accommodation (environment) for work, so as to achieve the best-possible performance from the staff and the students.

### **Irregular Payment and Omission of Some Facilitators Honorarium**

In most cases facilitators from different study centres of National Open University of Nigerian have complained about irregular payment and omission of their names in the schedule for payment of their honorarium. When such happens no supplement voucher is raised to pay them before the next semester runs out. For instance the facilitators have not received their last two semesters honorarium up till now including those whose names were omitted before. This results to negative motivation of the affected facilitators. They become frustrated and their rate of work will be drastically reduced.

### **Leadership Style Adopted BY Centre Directors/Administrators**

The success of National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) is largely depended on the quality of its leadership. The leadership style adopted by most centre managers could be branded as "medieval instrument". They tend to be autocratic in the way they manage their permanent staff and facilitators. The human side of management is a thing that "belongs to the other side of the fence". Communication style

between management and employees whether on permanent or temporal basis is jaundiced”.

It is usually from top-down, not the other way round, workers are given rare opportunity to talk let alone defend their rights.

The administrators mainly are “they who must be obeyed”. Some of the centre Directors or co-ordinators have been found wanting or dismissed due to negligence of duty, abetting examination malpractices and being involved in one corrupt practice or another.

In view of this many Nigerians are still doubting the quality and acceptability of the products of open and distance education in the labour market. Further more, the academic system does little but accord National Open University poor recognition so that many potentially good leaders are reluctant to accept leadership opportunities in open and distance education programmes including the institution under study. This raises a member of problems such as:

### **Inadequate Funding and Lack of Receptive to Open and Distance Education**

Most people who are used to the traditional system of tertiary education are not receptive to open and distance education/learning resulting to low enrolment in most centres of National Open University of Nigeria. Majority of them are in the upper house of the Nation (senate) which is the highest policy making body. They tend to disparage open and distance learning by allocating mega amount of money to it thereby in-capacitating the management of the programme. It is only when enough fund is released to the administrators that they can do a reasonable work.

### **Inability of the Administrators to Identify and Recruit Committed Facilitators**

It is the responsibility of the personnel department of National Open University of Nigeria various institution to recruit their staff. Because of the peculiar nature of the programme only very few qualified candidates apply for facilitating in the programme thereby making it difficult to recruit enough facilitators to cover all the courses in different centres.

Commenting on this, Veduin and Clark (1991) state that teachers with enthusiasm for non-traditional course work are few and difficult to convince to be absorbed as facilitators in open and distance education programme.

Therefore managers waste a lot of time, searching for qualified facilitators willing to handle core science courses.

### **High Cost of Technology to Support Open and Distance Education**

Institutions offering open and distance education must consider the initial cost as well as the continuing cost of installing, maintaining, using and upgrading technology to support open and distance education service. Telecommunications and connectivity costs such as those needed to use the internet are ongoing costs. The administrators running National Open University did not anticipate connectivity costs and subsequent barriers in planning their programmes. This has led to continuous addition investments in toll-free lines and computers (Willis, 1993). Also, they did not plan to have many competent computers staff to support internet use or to develop the few available. Therefore, ongoing staff training costs must be considered and fund provided for it.

### **Insufficient and Unequal Distribution of Course Materials.**

The centre directors’ office in different centres are always invaded by student demanding their course materials which are insufficient in number and unequally distributed to their centres. Students are forced to

down load or photocopy course materials which they have already paid for. This problem has led to delay in facilitation and conflict between the centre Directors and the students.

### **Staff Disobedience**

Some staff recruited by the personnel department of different National Open University of Nigeria and posted to their study centers are seen as threats by the center Directors because of the difference in academic qualifications and experience. In centers where many facilitators are more experienced and qualified academically, their center Directors feel inferior and find it difficult to control them.

Most facilitators who find themselves in this situation tends to impose their decisions on the center directors, ill-advise other facilitators and students thereby making the center difficult to control by Directors.

### **Course Allocation Conflicts**

Many things are usually done on "Man-Know-Man" basic by some center Directors. This is highly reflective of course allocation Lopsidedness which is skewed in favour of Lady-friends, relations and old boys. This practice creates conflict among facilitators, and between facilitators on tracing who has been handling the course and why it should be re-allocated. This ugly act has resulted to the transfer of reliable and efficient guidance councilor handling the job to other centers by the center Directors to enable him/her perpetuate the evil act.

### **Inaccurate Statistics**

National Open University (Open and distance education) cannot succeed without statistics which is the basic ingredients for effective planning. Information is needed on the number of participants being planned for in order to project needs as correctly as possible. Unfortunately, most of the center Directors plan are not backed by valid information, a situation such as this makes their plans to rest on inaccurate projections and predictions. This matter is compounded by unimaginable increase in dropout rate, general lack of information gathering and storing facilities. Furthermore, inadequate data on the personal characteristics of the learner affect effective planning. It is worthy to note that student motivation has a power effect on attrition and completion rates, regardless of institutional setting. Motivators for open and distance students are often different from the traditional students. Knowles (1980), in explaining the advantages of knowing the learner, believes that learner behaviour is influence by a combination of the learner's needs plus the learner's situation and personal characteristics.

Knowing these personal characteristics is an important aspect of planning open and distance learning courseware and strategies. Since these students are not close to the Directors, how can they identify their needs, situation and personal character for their plans to be successful. In line with this, Ofole (2007) observed that after matriculation majority of the students may not have any other contact with the center Director or guidance counselor except in the examination hall. This situation makes planning difficult.

### **Lack of Supervisors**

The supervisors should carry out their own personal supervision of the facilitators in every study center to enable them make personal observations of facilitators activities and efforts. The center Director and the supervisors are supposed to ensure that all tasks and activities are actually carried out on time and in a proper manner. Unfortunately, the absence of supervisors in the centers have compounded the problems of the center administrators since they cannot carry out both duties effectively.



## Solutions:

These problems cannot be allowed to continue:

In view of this, the under listed solutions can remedy the situation

- (1) Adequate accommodation should be provided by institutions running open and distance education programmes. Therefore, for institutions owned by government like National Open University, permanent structures should be erected.
- (2) The programmes should be properly funded in order to achieve the objectives for establishing them
- (3) Adequate and qualified facilitators should be recruited. Those who are capable can be allowed to facilitate in not more than two centers.
- (4) Enough course materials should be produced and distributed to the students on registration to avoid delay in facilitation and encourage prompt completion of course content.
- (5) National Open University should employ specialists in Educational administrations and planning as centre Directors in all her study centres.

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