

ASSESSMENT OF THE AVAILABILITY AND UTILIZATION OF COMMUNICATION MEDIA FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN THE NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY (NOUN) OF NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The study is a survey research to examine the availability and utilization of communication media in the two distance education study centers in Benue state of Nigeria. Three research questions and two hypotheses guided and directed the study respectively. The entire staff and students who enrolled for the year 2012/2013 session formed the population of the study. Haphazard non-probability sampling technique was used to compose a sample of 150 respondents for the study. The instruments for the study were checklist and questionnaire. The data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation and the t-test was used to test the hypotheses at

0.05 level of significance. The findings shows that all the items indicated were available at the two centers; the centers utilize the available communication media to a moderate extent. Based on the findings, the researchers made some recommendations which included effective supervision to ensure effective utilization of the available media especially those that showed low extent of utilization; government should ensure improvement in the provision of facilities that were identified as challenges in the adoption of this mode of study as well as decentralizing the centers to accommodate more students.

Key-words: communication, communication media, distance education, Infrastructural facilities, open education, study centres, supervision,

INTRODUCTION

Education is the bedrock of individual and national development. In the views of Abad and Fenoy (2007), education involves the development of an individual for him to develop his environment and ultimately his nation. The National Policy on Education of Nigeria (FRN, 2004), defines education as an “instrument par excellence” for affecting national development. The Nigerian Government established series of educational programmes and signed several conventions and declarations including Universal Basic Education (UBE), National Mass Literacy Programme (NMLP), Open and Distance Education (O&DE),(1999) Jomtien Declaration on Education for All (EFA) by the year 2000 and the New Delhi (1991) declaration on the E-9 countries (Nine Countries with the largest number or concentration of illiterates) among others. The Nigerian Government is also obliged under chapter II, Section 18 of the 1999 constitution to eradicate illiteracy. With this intention, the Federal Government of Nigeria in the National Policy on Education (NPE,2004) stipulates that every citizen of Nigeria must have equal access to educational opportunities. To this end, the Open and Distance Education Programme was introduced to widen access to education, especially higher education, to create a second chance for adult learners and reduce the problem of overcrowding in the universities.

Distance education is an educational process in which the teacher or educator bears the responsibility of imparting knowledge and skill to the learner who does not receive instructions orally but who has the flexibility of learning in a place and time governed by his or her circumstances. According to Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2004) in the National Policy on Education, Distance Education is the mode of

teaching in which learners are removed in time and space from the teachers. Similarly, Alaezi (2005) sees it as an educational pattern, approach and strategies that permit people to learn with no barrier in respect to time, space, age and previous educational qualifications.

One of the most complete discussions of the meaning of the term Distance education is given by Keegan (1990) with the following characteristics:

- * It involves a semi-permanent separation of the teacher and the learner;
- * It is influenced by the educational organization in both the preparation of teaching materials and the support of the students;
- * It uses technical media;
- * It is a two-way process and
- * It has a semi-permanent absence of a learning group.

Jarves (2010) views Distance Education as a form of education utilizing all forms of information technology to assist learners to learn. Furthermore that space-time distance, non -embedded mechanisms and expert systems, reflective learning and individual responsibility are central to them.

Open Education, on the other hand, is a technological initiative and learning strategy which has been adopted to provide an equitable access to education and training, so that balanced development for all the citizens in the country will be achieved. Open System Education, according to Adegun and Balogun (2003), is any form of learning in which the provider allows the learner to exercise choice over a number of aspects of learning. The Distance and Open systems of education are major keys to understanding our world ourselves, in order to anticipate the future and importance of our natural environment for the benefit of all human beings as they progress in the process of development. Boutros-Ghali in Nwizu (2011) opines that "universal access to education, a gage (sic) of social justice is more than a right; it is an open door to freedom to initiate, to act and to take one's destiny in hand". These systems of education provide the learner the opportunity of being responsible for the pace and time of completion of the studies, as the learners determine where and how their educational programmes are run. Supporting this view, Achunye (2007) opines that the learners take responsibility for what to learn, how to learn, where to learn, how quickly to learn, who to turn to for help, when and where to have the learning assessed. This means that, learners have the opportunity to be educated at a time and place convenient for them while they retain and perform their duties and responsibilities as required. These potential have made Open and Distance Education to be an effective and efficient strategy in the education of the citizens of this country. The programme is therefore important. Ogwuazor and

Nwahan (2008) identify some advantages of Open and Distance Education which include:-

- Provision of needed manpower in the society ;
- Contribution to rural development;
- Provision of access to education for all classes of people in the society and
- Encouragement of critical and independent study as it is a viable alternative to existing formal and non-formal training outlets in the task of developing skilled human resources for the economy among others.

GOALS OF DISTANCE AND OPEN EDUCATION

The National Policy on Education (2004) in recognition of the vital role of open and distance Education stipulates that the goal/objectives shall include:-

- Provision of access to quality education and equality in educational opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied;
- Meeting special needs of employers by mounting special certificate courses for their employees at their work place among others. While the objectives shall include:
 - To increase learning opportunities for the mass illiterate group;
 - To provide alternative access to education for those who could not be accommodated in the conventional school system;
 - To afford learners the opportunity of studying at their own pace while carrying out their social works;
 - To satisfy the national desire to educate every citizen as persons of worth, both inside and outside the formal school system.
 - To provide professional development and up grading opportunities that does not remove learners from their work place; among others.

Herasim et al in Nwizu (2011) observe that the traditional method of teaching can no longer satisfy the learning needs for the following reasons:

- a. High quality learning depends to a large extent on finding sufficient number of suitable educators;
- b. studies in public research universities are expensive, thus accessibility is usually limited and subject to budget cuts and restrictions;
- c. Traditional learning is limited to a particular place (e.g. classroom on campus, which is also expensive to set up)

Bearing the above in mind, there is a need to widen access to education through Open or Distance Education. From the objectives and importance of Open or Distance Education discussed, it could be seen clearly that it is an effective and efficient strategy suitable for many groups in the society, such groups as the

deprived, marginalized, school drop-out and women among others. Such people, if offered educational opportunity, will be afforded the chance for vital economic sustenance of their families and also contribute their own quota to the development of their society and the nation in general. It also involves training people in employment and offers workers education to keep abreast with recent technological changes and research findings, thereby enhancing the efficiency, productivity and effective service delivery of such people in their various workplaces in contemporary society. The implication of this is that without this form of education, the target group to be reached will not be reached and may not do anything meaningful in the contemporary global environment. It then follows that; they will not contribute significantly to sustainable national development. Distance Education has great potentials for expanding access to education irrespective of the time and geographical location of the learners. Interestingly, the NPE (2004) clearly stated that the Federal Government of Nigeria shall ensure that the programmes are equivalent in structure and status to those offered by face-to-face mode of delivery in the appropriate educational institution in every location. Also that the organizers of this programme will liaise with media houses, information and communication technology providers and other relevant bodies in enhancing Open and Distance Education; encourage participation in Open/Distance Education programme at local level. To achieve these in the students, the students are contacted through a variety of communication media such as electronic computer, written correspondences, books, audio tapes, CD-ROMs and websites.

Communication can be seen as the interchange of thoughts, ideas or information through words or images between speaker and sender or listener and receiver that leaves both parties with the same understanding of the message that was exchanged and has the potential to change or reinforce behavior. According to Hybels & Weaver (2001), communication is any process in which people share information, ideas and feelings. These authors viewed that it involves not only the spoken and written word but also body language, personal mannerisms and style i.e. anything that adds meaning to life. (Verbal or non-verbal, body language and behavior). Hybels & Weaver identifies the following as types of communication, intrapersonal, interpersonal, small-group and public communication. Communication is effective when it enables individuals and teams achieve set goals and create value for their organization. Invariably effective communication in educational programmes such as the Open and Distance Education can make participants create value by becoming more motivated, productive, efficient, effective and innovative.

It is therefore expected that the media of communication be made available at the study centers to adequately cater for the needs of the learners. Unlike the conventional educational delivery methods, there are no structural face-to-face contacts between the learners and instructors rather high quality, self-directed learner-centered instructional materials are made available for students. Instructional facilitation is done when necessary between the students and the instructors or facilitators via the mode of communication agreed upon. Although Open/Distance Education, has been criticized by the public on many grounds that it compromises quality and that the facilities needed for effective running of the programmes are lacking. Nakpodia (2010) viewed that there are concerns expressed by some educators that qualities of teaching as well as that of students admitted into distance learning programmes are poor. According to Maduewesi (2005), quality in education is multi-faceted issue which encompasses how learning is organized and managed; what the content of learning is; what level of learning is achieved or managed; what outcomes are and what goes on in the learning environment.

In a study by Nakpodia (2010) on the management of distance education in the development of Nigerian's education, opined that there is need to find out how adequate and satisfactory the facilities are in terms of the number and quality of staff, quality and size of buildings including classrooms, laboratories and workshops; library facilities, instructional support services such as photocopy and secretarial centers, staff/students ratio and so on. With the nature of distance education programme, where these things are lacking, it is certain that nothing serious could be achieved. Nwizu (2005) carried out a survey study on the challenges and strategies in distance education of women in Anambra and Enugu states. It was discovered among other things that interactive and newer communication technologies are not utilized in the distance education programme. The researcher identified infrastructural facilities, interactive social and technological factors as influencing distance education programmes in the area of study. This implies that, in Open or Distance Education, communication media are to be highly emphasized and as a matter of necessity they should be made available and utilized too. The extent to which these communication media are available or use at the study centers by both students and instructors in Benue state is the focus of this study. It is the purpose of this study to identify the available communication media, determine the extent they are utilized and to determine the problems encountered in the adoption of open or distance education as a mode of study.

Statement of the Problem

Failure of the traditional and conventional system of education to provide unlimited and equitable access to education has led to the introduction of Open or Distance Education. In view of this, Open or Distance Education should be made sufficiently accessible to the entire Nigerian citizenry. However, Open or Distance Education programmes have been condemned on the grounds of quality. Nwizu (2011) opined that distance education have been publicly criticized the world over, on the grounds that it compromises quality and so produces low quality man-power leading to discrimination against certificates obtained from the programme. Nakpodia (2010) maintains that there are concerns expressed by some educators that qualities of teaching as well as that of students admitted into distance learning programmes are poor. These attendant problems could be attributed to many factors that have been identified as problems facing the programme such as lack of instructional materials, poor facilitation and inefficient or ineffective communication media as the case may be. The problem of this study, therefore, put in question form is: to what extent is communication media made available, utilized and effective for the successful operation of Open and Distance Education at the study centers in Benue state?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the available communication media and their utilization for effective adoption of Open and Distance Education programmes. Specifically, the study:

- Determined the available communication media;
- Determined the extent of utilization of the available media strategy at the study centers and
- Determined the problems encountered in the adoption of the open and distance education as a mode of study.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study

- ❖ What are the communication media strategies available at the study centers in Benue state?
- ❖ To what extent is the utilization of the available communication media at the study centers?
- ❖ What are the perceived problems in adopting Open or Distance as a mode of study?

These hypotheses directed the study:

- ❖ There is no significant difference in the extent of availability of communication media in the study centers across the state.
- ❖ There is no significant difference in the perception of participants on the problems in the adoption of open and distance education mode of study in the study centers across the state.

Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. According to Anaeke (2007), survey researches involve the use of samples to generalize to the population. A sample of 150 respondents was composed through haphazard/accidental non-probability sampling technique for the study, as any member of the population that was available was used. According to Anaeke (2007), haphazard sampling ensures the choice of any member of the population that is available at the given time until the required number is achieved.

Instrumentation:

Three instruments were used to collect data for the study. They are Checklist of Communication Media Available at the Centers (COCMACS); Utilization of Communication Media (UCM) and Problems of Adoption of Open and Distance Education Questionnaire (PAODEQ). COCMACS is structured in two parts as: Available (A) and Not Available (N/A) with 14 items for responses on research question one; UCM is a 4 - point scale of Very High Extent (VHE), Moderate Extent (ME), Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE) for responses on research questions 2 and the hypothesis 2 and a 4-point Scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) for research question 3 and hypothesis 3 with weights of 4,3,2,1 and 4,3,2,1 respectively. Each of these instruments has 14 items for respondents to respond to. The internal consistency of UCM and PAODEQ were determined using Cronbach Alpha reliability formula and they yielded coefficients of 0.82 and 0.72 respectively. The Mean and Standard Deviation was used to analyze the research questions while the t-test statistic was used to test the hypotheses. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to determine the Mean, Standard Deviation and t values to ensure accuracy.

INTERPRETATION CRITERIA FOR THE SCALES

THE TWO- POINT RATING SCALE

Range of Mean Scores	Interpretation	Abbreviations
00 – 1.00	Not Available	N/A
1.0 – 2	Available	Av

THE FOUR- POINT RATING SCALE

Range of Mean Scores	Interpretation	Abbreviations of Interpretation
3.00 – 4.00	Very High Extent and Strongly Agree	VHE and SA
2.00 – 2.99	Moderate Extent and Agree	ME and A
1.00 – 1.99	Low Extent and Disagree	LE and D
0.01 – 0.99	Very Low Extent and Strongly Disagree	VLE and SD

Discussion of Results

Research Question 1: What are the available communication media at the study centers?

Table 1

	Media	Otukpo Mean	Makurdi Mean	Decision
1	Audio Tapes	2.00	2.00	Av
2	C-D ROMs	2.00	2.00	Av
3	Books	2.00	2.00	Av
4	Fax	2.00	2.00	Av
5	Telephone	2.00	2.00	Av
6	Radio	2.00	2.00	Av
7	Video	2.00	2.00	Av
8	Satellite	2.00	2.00	Av
9	Electronic Computer	2.00	2.00	Av
10	E-mail	2.00	2.00	Av
11	Study Guide	2.00	2.00	Av
12	Internet	2.00	2.00	Av
13	Written Correspondence	2.00	2.00	Av
14	Course Book	2.00	2.00	Av
Grand Mean		2.00		

Table 1 shows that the fourteen items on the table are present at the two study centers with means of 2.00.

Research Question 2: To what extent is the utilization of the available communication media at the study centers?

Table 2

S/N	Communication Media	OTUKPO			MAKURDI		
		Mean	SD	DECISION	Mean	SD	DECISION
1	Audio Tapes	1.57	0.498	LE	2.53	1.057	ME
2	C-D ROMs	1.43	0.498	LE	2.47	1.223	ME
3	Books	3.01	0.557	VHE	3.68	0.791	VHE
4	Fax	1.48	0.644	LE	1.51	0.812	LE
5	Telephone	2.12	1.013	ME	2.79	0.990	ME
6	Radio	1.53	0.622	LE	1.93	1.178	LE
7	Video	2.47	0.502	ME	2.09	1.307	ME
8	Satellite	3.44	0.642	VHE	2.75	1.274	ME
9	Electronic Computer	3.69	0.464	VHE	3.68	0.661	VHE
10	E-mail	3.12	0.753	VHE	3.48	0.828	VHE
11	Study Guide	2.89	0.649	ME	3.87	0.528	VHE
12	Internet	3.79	0.552	VHE	3.72	0.508	VHE
13	Written Correspondents	3.12	0.869	VHE	2.95	1.240	ME
14	Course Book	3.25	0.699	VHE	2.64	0.895	ME
	Grand Mean	2.636	0.859	ME	2.935	0.764	ME

Table 1 indicates that items 1 to 14 in otukpo study centre have means of 1.57, 1.43, 3.01, 1.48, 2.12, 1.53, 2.47, 3.44, 3.69, 3.12, 2.89, 3.79, 3.12 and 3.25 respectively with a grand mean and standard deviation of 2.636 and 0.859 respectively while Makurdi have means of 2.53, 2.47, 3.68, 1.51, 2.79, 1.93, 2.09, 2.75, 3.68, 3.48, 3.87, 3.72, 2.95, 2.64, for same items 1-14 respectively with a grand mean and standard deviation of 2.935 and 0.764 respectively.

Table 3

S/N	Challenges	Otukpo Mean	Otukpo STD	Otukpo Interp.	Makurdi Mean	Makurdi STD	Makurdi Interp.
1	Electric Power Supply	2.03	0.854	A	1.58	0.597	D
2	Cost of Study Material	1.95	0.787	D	1.54	0.578	D
3	Lack of Immediate Feedback to Students	2.19	0.562	A	1.85	0.839	D
4	Far Study Center	3.59	0.496	SA	1.72	0.750	D
5	Radio Not Available	2.61	0.676	A	2.32	1.124	A
6	Lack of Regular Interaction	2.45	1.017	A	2.03	0.936	A
7	Delay in Postage	2.69	0.870	A	1.74	0.908	D
8	Inaccessible Internet	3.16	0.679	SA	2.38	1.082	A
9	Television Not Available	2.89	0.709	A	1.73	0.969	D
10	Expensive Programme	1.69	0.657	D	1.70	0.716	D
11	No Immediate Reinforcement From The Facilitators	2.16	1.103	A	1.73	0.668	D
12	Public Criticism of Open/Distance Education	2.72	0.781	A	1.69	0.890	D
13	Lack of Infrastructure	2.76	0.714	A	2.27	1.102	A
14	Other Competing Activities	2.40	0.944	A	1.80	0.758	D
	Grand Mean	2.52	0.507	A	1.86	0.275	D

Table 3 shows that items 1-14 has means of 2.03, 1.95, 2.19, 3.59, 2.61, 2.45, 2.69, 3.16, 2.89, 1.69, 2.16, 2.72, 2.76, and 2.40 respectively for otukpo and the grand mean and standard deviation of 2.52 and 0.507 respectively. Based on the interpretation criteria given earlier, a grand mean of 2.52 Otukpo respondents agreed with the items of the table while a grand mean of 1.86 shows that Makurdi respondents disagree with most of the items on the table.

Table 3

SN	SOURCE	N	MEAN	SD	Df	t-cal	t-val	Lev.	Dec.
1	Otukpo	14	2.636	0.859	13	0.595	2.160	0.05	Fail to reject Ho
						1.363			
2	Makurdi	14	2.935	0.764	13	2.131	2.160	0.05	Fail to reject Ho

Table 4 indicates that the calculated t-values of otukpo and makurdi 0.595 and 2.131 respectively at 13 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance were less than the table value of 2.160. Since the t-calculated values are both less than the table value, we fail to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 4

SN	SOURCE	N	MEAN	SD	Df	t-cal	t-val	Lev.	Dec.
1	Otukpo	14	2.521	0.507	13	0.153	2.160	0.05	
						-4.253			
2	Makurdi	14	1.863	0.275	13	-8.658	2.160	0.05	

Table 5 indicates that the calculated t-values of Otukpo and Makurdi 0.153 and -8.658 respectively at 13 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance were both less than the table value of 2.160. Since the t-calculated values were both less than the table value, we fail to reject the null hypothesis.

Discussion of findings

From the analysis in table 1.1, the fourteen items checked were all available at the two study centers with means of 2.0 and a grand mean of 2.0. This is to say that no

item recorded 1 which represent not available. This finding is contrary to both the researchers' opinion and public opinion in the sense that, it is generally believed that, these media are lacking and it is the reason why the mode of study is underscore.

The analysis on table 2 shows that communication media are utilized to a moderate extent when compared against the mean set as interpretation criteria. However, books, satellite, electronic computer, email, study guide, internet, written correspondence recorded means well above the benchmark of 2.50 with some having very high mean of 3.87. Based on the findings on this table, the necessary communication media are being utilized with a good number of them having many responses of very high extent. Based on the criteria interpretation given earlier, the grand means of 2.636 and 2.935 show that, these media are utilized to a moderate extent in the both centers.

This is an important finding as it agrees with Jarves (2010) who viewed distance education as the type of education that utilizes all forms of information technology to assist the learners to learn. This finding is contrary to public opinion that these media are not available, if they are not available; how come there is utilization to a moderate extent. The table further reveals that, both study centers, the itemized media are available and are utilized though the extent varies. It is an indication of impartiality in the provision and allocation of these media at the centers. One would have thought that since Makurdi was the state capital, availability and utilization of these media would have shown a higher mean score than Otukpo but it is not the case as revealed. In this regards, the idea of equal access to educational opportunity that was stipulated in the National Policy on Education (2004) also applies to provision of communication media at the study centers as well. This notwithstanding, there were negative values reported on some items. For instance, the table reveals that in Otukpo, items 1, 2, 4 and 6 representing audio tapes, C-D Roms, fax and radio had scores below the benchmark of 2.50. Their means as shown were 1.57, 1.43, 1.48 and 1.53 respectively. In the same vein, items 4, 6 and 7 in Makurdi, representing fax, radio and video had means of 1.51, 1.93 and 2.09 respectively. As revealed, all these recorded low extent in their utilization. This finding is contrary to the expectation of the researchers who thought that all the communication media provided should be utilized to some extent.

From the analysis on table 3, the 14 items identified as possible challenges in the adoption of open and distance education, a grand mean of 2.52 shows that only item 2 (cost of study materials) and item 10 (expensive programme) were not challenges in Otukpo study center as perceived by the students. The remaining 12 items form part of their challenges while in Makurdi study center, a grand mean of

1.86 was recorded and the respondents disagree with all the items except 4 of the items namely radio not adequate, lack of regular interaction, inaccessible internet and lack of infrastructure were challenges to them. The remaining 10 items did not form part of their challenges in Makurdi center. This finding agrees with that of Nwizu (2005) who in her study of challenges and strategies in the distance education of women in Anambra and Enugu states discovered that infrastructural facilities, newer communication technologies utilized at the study centers, interactive social and technological factors were some of the challenges faced in the adoption of the mode of study. This finding is contrary to the expectation of the researchers who felt that considering the reason for the adoption of this mode of study, particularly as a technological initiative and learning strategy which has been adopted to provide an equitable access to education and training, so that balanced development for all the citizens in the country will be achieved, these issues would have been minimized.

Conclusion

Considering the findings of the study, all the items listed were available at the two study centers. The study also revealed that the items were utilized to a moderate extent and that certain factors were indicated as challenges to the adoption of the distance education mode of study. The findings have led the researchers to conclude that, so far in Benue state of Nigeria, there is un-biasness in the provision of the needed communication media in their study centers.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- 1) Government should ensure that there is regular monitoring and supervision of the programme for effective utilization of the available communication media at the centers;
- 2) Government and other stake holders should do more in the provision of facilities and items that were identified as challenges in the adoption of open or distance education;
- 3) Government should decentralized the centers to accommodate more students;
- 4) Government and other stakeholders should embark on awareness campaign to sensitize the public on the operations of distance education;
- 5) Modern information communication technology facilities should be introduced and utilized for efficiency.

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