

Subtheme: Equity and Inclusion

Title:

Teacher Education at a Distance: What are the student teachers saying???

By

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Abstract

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) is one of the increasing Open and Distance learning Institution that has reposition itself for innovative teacher training programme at a distance. This ODL paradigm has widen student's access and opened up new possibilities of learning. But if the emergence of student's voice has presented itself as a challenge to schools and researchers (Keeffe and Andrew 2015) then the need to become more responsive to these voices as regard their learning. This ongoing research work therefore captures the voices and views of some distance learners on their teacher education programme. The study was conducted between January and March 2018 during the student's physical presence at the Pen on Paper (POP) and E-examinations. A randomly selected sample of 68 students out of the 248 that registered for the various education programmes in a study center took part in the study. A mixed methods approach was adopted which involves learners interviewed and questionnaires administered to establish the extent to which the voices corroborates the written expressions. Key issues captured in the validated instruments included the students views on the use of course materials, library, access to internet, study group and examination procedure. From the analysis, it was found among others that while 73.5% of the students found the materials useful, got so glued and didn't see the need for the library (82.4%), only 47.0% had access to the internet because of their location. It is important to note also that as useful as the claim for the materials, some students expressed that some of the examination questions were not within the materials. For teacher education at a distance to provide an effective, flexible alternative to the traditional approach, there is the need to rethink all learning resources that could empower these teachers especially those living in rural communities. This will facilitate quality professional development and translate them to "members of learning community".

Key Words: Students Voices, Flexible alternative, Pen on Paper.

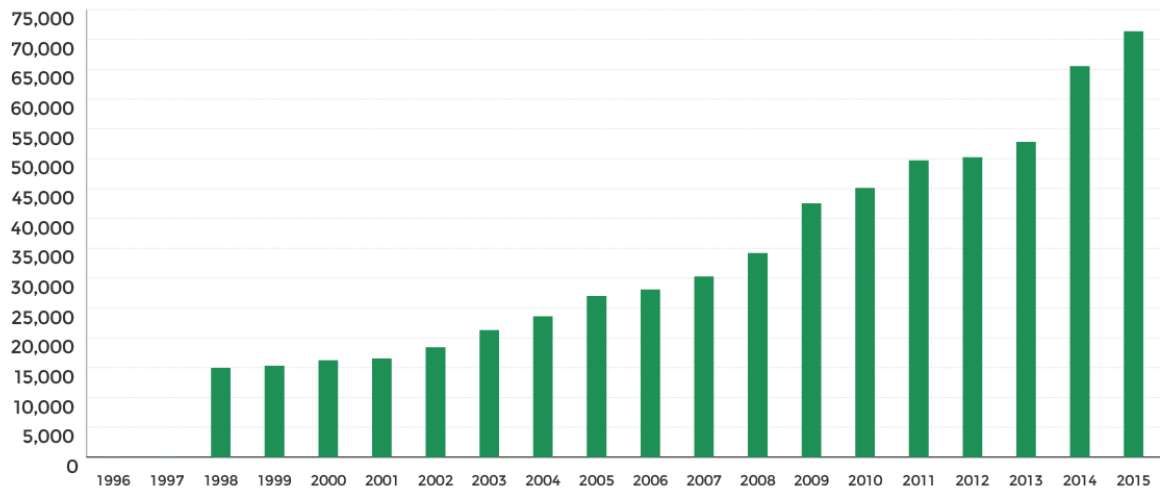
Introduction

.Despite the raising doubts by some education communities on the effectiveness of learning at a distance for professions such as teaching, the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) has continued at a reasonable level to train teachers at a distance. But the question is ---Why ODL despite these doubts???

This could be because many 'conventional' educational institutions over the years are also seeking ways to adopt the distance learning because of pressures to widen student access and increase students' share of responsibility for their own learning. (Lewis 1998, Ogunsola-Bandele 2002,2016,Ogunsola-Bandele et al 2007 Renwick 1992). This has involved breaking the rigid admission/entry requirements for students and helping the adults including those in the teaching profession return to higher education after several years of leaving the school "walls".

This rigidity in admission and entry requirements has also led quite a number of Nigerian students to leave the country. For according to data from the [UNESCO Institute of Statistics](#) (UIS), the number of Nigerian students abroad increased by 164 percent in the decade between 2005 and 2015 alone– from 26,997 to 71,351.

Number of Outbound Nigerian Students between 1996 and 2015



Source: UIS UNESCO

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Also from data provided by JAMB on its [website](#), a total of 1,579,027 students sat for the UTME exam in 2016. 69.6 percent of university applications were made to Federal Universities, 27.5 percent to State Universities, and less than 1 percent to Private Universities.

This is to say that the number of applicants currently exceeds the number of available university seats by a ratio of two to one. In 2015 for instance, only 415,500 out of 1,428,379 applicants were admitted to university. A more comprehensive data from Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) shows that between 2010 and 2015, of the 10 million applicants that sought entry into Nigerian tertiary institutions, only 26% gained admission.

This admission ratio, low as it may be, is a significant improvement versus 10 years ago when the ratio was closer to one in ten for university entry.

But the admissions crisis continues to be one of Nigeria's biggest challenges in higher education, especially given the strong growth of its youth population.

Nigeria's system of education presently leaves over a million qualified college-age Nigerians without access to postsecondary education on an annual basis

From the latest release (2019) by the National University Commission (NUC), the government umbrella organization that oversees the administration of higher education in Nigeria, there are 43 Federal universities, 48 State universities and 79 Private universities as accredited degree-granting institutions. This gives a total of 169 universities as against 157 recorded in 2017 as shown on the table.

Although many of these institutions are relatively new, Nigeria's higher education sector has expanded over a short period in response to demographic pressures,

Institutional Growth in Nigeria's University Sector	
YEAR	NUMBER OF UNIVERSITIES
2005	51
2008	94
2011	117
2012	122
2013	128
2017	152

Source: National Universities Commission

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The Open and Distance Learning programme has therefore provided and still providing solution to the millions of Nigerian youths and adults yearning for education. It is no wonder therefore that the National Open University of Nigeria has opened up to accommodate all willing learners irrespective of age. In other words, it has opened up in terms of time, place and pace!

As regards the teaching profession, it is clearly stated on NOUN website, that the university is designed to cater for continuous educational development in professions such as teaching and prepares these professionals using the distance learning modes. It offers qualifications from diploma to degrees courses and the Faculty of Education prepares these professional teachers/leaders in teacher education and researchers through the distance-learning programme.

The instructional methodology is specially designed packaged materials including radio, television broadcast, CDROM and Internet complimented by face-to-face facilitation when necessary but not compulsory. The latter will soon be done electronically

Some of the mandate for the Faculty includes:

- produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient personnel for all levels of educational systems;
- produce teachers in specialised areas for people with special needs;
- produce educators who have good understanding of the increasing complexity of technology; and
- provide serving teachers and educational administrators and research workers with the technical skills so as to expose Nigerian students to awareness by exploring usable options in the world of works. (NOUN 2018 Website)

The Undergraduate Programmes

The student teachers in the Faculty of Education are distributed into academic programmes approved by the accreditation body (NUC). Currently there are 12 of these undergraduate programmes which are:

- [B.Sc.\(Ed\) Business Education](#)
- [B.A.\(Ed\) Primary Education](#)
- [B.A.\(Ed\) French](#)
- [B.A.\(Ed\) English](#)
- [B.A.\(Ed\) Early Childhood Education](#)
- [B.Sc.\(Ed\) Physics](#)
- [B.Sc.\(Ed\) Mathematics](#)
- [B.Sc.\(Ed\) Computer Science](#)
- [B.Sc.\(Ed\) Integrated Science](#)
- [B.Sc.\(Ed\) Chemistry](#)
- [B.Sc.\(Ed\) Biology](#)
- [B.Sc.\(Ed\) Agricultural Science](#)

Admission Requirement for the Undergraduate Programmes:

This is in accordance to JAMB requirements for University entry which is:

Admission into 100 Level

- A minimum of 5 credits in O' levels.
- Compulsory courses required in O'levels are Mathematics and English Language.

- Any other relevant courses in O'levels
- For Teacher's Grade II Certificate, compulsory courses are Arithmetic and English Language.
- Any other relevant courses in O'levels/Teacher's Grade II Certificate

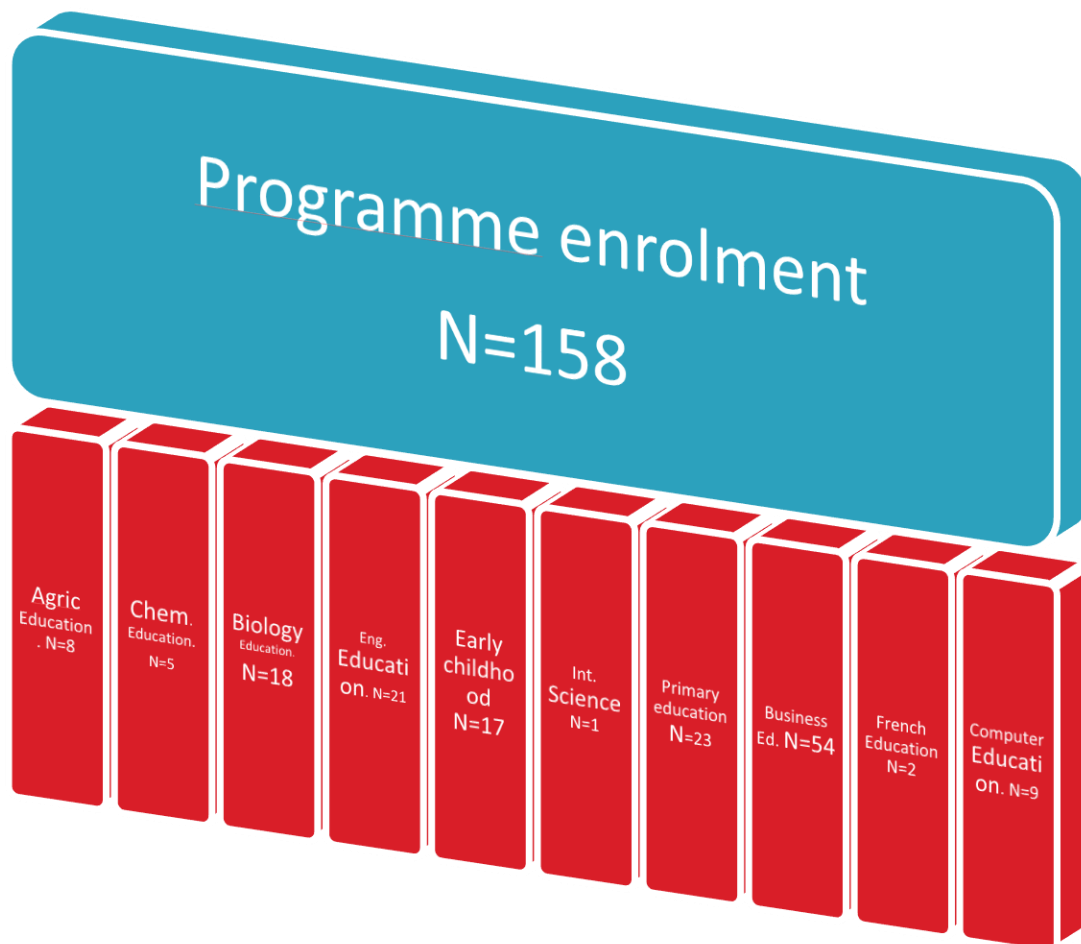
For Admission into 200 Level

- Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) with a minimum grade C in relevant subjects.

Participants

Out of the 2,003 students that sat for the 2018 Pen on Paper examinations in one of the study centers in the southern part of the country only 248 was from the Faculty of Education. From this figure, the undergraduate enrolment in 10 programmes was 158 with the age range of 16 to 55. Out of the 158, a randomly selected 68 students were involved in this ongoing research work. The distribution in the various programme can be seen on the diagram.

From the diagram, it could be observed that the least enrolment was recorded in integrated science with only one candidate, followed by French (2) and chemistry (5). While the highest was recorded in business education (54). But not to be diverted, the focus here is what the students are saying about their teacher training at a distance as regards some identified issues?



Instrument, Data Collection and Analysis

All the 68 students reacted to a 20 item instrument developed by the researcher and validated by three experts with reliability of 0.78 using the likert scale of agree, disagree and undecided. It also provided open space for free explicit statements. The instrument covers the five major areas consisting of four questions each. So an expected total of 272 responses was gotten for each focus area. These major/focus areas are:

- Use of developed Course material
- Use of internet
- Use of the library

- Use of Study group
- Examination procedure

The analysis of the questionnaires in percentages is shown on table1

Table 1

Focus Areas	Options		
	Agree	Disagree	undecided
Course materials	200 (73.5%)	60 (22.1%)	12 (4.4%)
Internet Access	128 (47.0%)	120 (44.1%)	24 (8.8%)
Use of library	30 (11.0%)	224 (82.4%)	18 (6.6%)
Study group	182 (66.9%)	87 (32.0%)	03 (1.1%)
Examination procedure	156 (57.4%)	112 (41.2%)	04 (1.5%)

From the table, the use of material (73.5%) and study group (66.9%) had the highest responses. The high responses for course materials has gone a long way to support Oguniola-bande (2016) claim on the attractiveness and usefulness of ODL course materials. Also one is not surprised at the high percentage on the use of study group since facilitation is optional and students would rather remain within their comfort zones with their colleagues for group discussions. The low percentage on the use of the library cannot be unconnected with the satisfaction expressed with the richness and attractiveness of their developed course materials. Also the distance learner would prefer the use of the e-library as indicated in their voices.

Captured voices

Rudduck and Fielding (2006) investigated the way schools implemented student voice opportunities and explained why so many interpretations are geared towards bureaucratic convenience rather than empowering students to have confidence in their own opinions and actions. In line with this, is the capturing of some of the Faculty of Education students voices in a study center of the university.

Out of the 158 students, the voices of 26 early arrivals for the last day of the examination were captured and these students were given pseudo names. Key issues included the student's views on the examination procedure, use of course materials and access/usage of the internet. Although most of them expressed great satisfaction with the teacher education programme as a whole, some expressed dissatisfaction with having to come physically for their examination in an ODL institution.

A great percentage had concern on the epileptic power supply in the nation generally which affects their submission of their Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs). Of particular interest is the excitement shown as regards their course materials which supports Oguniola-Bande (2016). These materials have been specially designed by ODL experts to take care of the distance learners needs as regards pace and time. The diagram below shows the area covered by some of the voices captured.



Few Captured voices on usage of the Library

- Only: my course materials are good enough to pass my examination
- Twly: I don't see the need for the library
- Thrlly: I check for more reading materials on line
- Forly: I once visited the library and I even download materials to teach my students
- Fivly: it's not cost effective to come to the physical library

Few Captured voices on Examination Procedure

- Only: Can you imagine coming all the way (61/2hrs) to write this examination as there is only one study center in this state.
- Twly: Where is the education taken to my door steps if I have to be here for the examination?
- Thrlly: Some of the examination questions are not within the course material.
- Forly: Make our POP examinations online
- Fivly: I love the way the examination is conducted but the time table is too congested

Few Captured voices on course materials

- Only: Our course materials are so easy and understand
- Twly: The inbuilt tutor marked assignment has helped me to prepare for the examination

- Trly: I enjoy reading through the course material
- Forly: I like the self assessment part of it
- Fivly: They should make it available to all students

Few Captured voices on access to internet

- Only: We all should be trained on how to connect to help in submission of our assignments
- Twly :I can spend the whole day trying to connect and submit my assignment
- Thrly: Too many people at the cyber café and you have to take your turn
- Forly :I bought an internet stick but low connectivity.
- Fivly :What is the need for the computer or internet when there is no power”

Few Captured voices on Study Group

- Only: I learn more from my other classmates.
- Twly: It is so cumbersome and time consuming to come for facilitation so I rather go for group discussions
- Thrly :I have never attended one I depend on my course materials
- Forly: Difficult for me as an adult learner to read but discussion helps
- Fivly: some group discussions are waste of time

Observations/Recommendation

From the student’s voices, quite a number of negative comments were towards lack of power supply, physical presence for their examination, some questions not within the course material and poor internet connectivity. On the issue of examination questions not within the course material, it was discovered during the students interaction that some of the students are not used application questions but just to recall what they have memorized. This supports Ogunsola Bandele (2012) research findings. As regards students physical presence at the examinations, this may be looked into as the university progresses technologically. On the issue of the distance to the study center, the university is at the verge of opening up two other centers in the state to bring education closer to the students. Others also expressed concern on the lack of training in the use of the computer and the internet. But even with this training in place, the frequent power failure should be addressed to cater for the voice that said-, “what is the need for the computer and internet when there is no power?”

The challenge of using technology for the 21st century should be supported by DL multimedia learning packages which the NOUN is daily improving on. Bean (2016, Moon & Villet 2016) also commented that though there is the proliferation of technology with schools allowing the use of computers on daily basis, the way it is accessed and the production of the content and instructional design is of concern. Most of these technologies are in place but needs institutional planning with well trained staff and resources (including power supply) available.

On the use of computers/internet from the student’s voices to ease submissions of assignments,, the suggestion of Seeletso (2016) could be recommended. According to Seeletso, using tablets to package content instead of print study materials has encouraged learners to use ICT. Learners can use the tablets for studying online, doing assignments, sending TMA, as well as receiving their marked TMAs. Overall integration of ICT was perceived positively as they developed professionally and acquired the ICT skills and competencies needed for the knowledge society of the 21st century.

Daniel (2012) further emphasized that claiming victory for the ODL was premature. For public colleges and universities are not moving into online distance learning fast enough to meet the demand for education. In his words-"If public institutions do not step up, then the corporate for-profit sector will".

On the basis of the students voices it is evident that distance education programme that are well designed and effectively implemented will provide an effective flexible alternative to the traditional approach to teacher training programme.

Although the university is already trying to put in place the logistic of e-learning facilitation to attain the desired flexibility which may entail individual students ‘tablet” more will be required on ICT training, and constant power supply. These areas where the students’ voices are **loudest** constitute great challenges that should be considered if our country is to rise beyond the quality of her teachers. On the whole it could be seen that- on most issues the voices corroborate their written expressions.

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