

Institutional Support Services and Learners' Retention and Completion

In Open-Distance Learning Institutions in south-west Nigeria

By

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Abstract

One of the critical components in Open-Distance learning programmes are institutional support services. These services subsume all interactions between institutional personnel and learners (prospective and registered) intended to assist them in meeting their objectives from the point of first inquiry through graduation. This notwithstanding, the rate at which learners remain on the programmes and complete their programme in ODL is low. It is on this premise, that this study, examined institutional support services in relation to retention and completion of learners in open-distance learning institutions in the south-west, Nigeria. This study adopted a descriptive design of an ex post facto type. The population consisted of final year learners, in open and distance learning institutions in the southwest, Nigeria. There are seven (7) NUC approved ODL Institutions in South-West, Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used for the selection of samples sizes for the study. The instruments were validated by two experts in the field of ODL, measurement and evaluation. The structured instrument was subjected to ordinal alpha reliability with 0.862 co-efficient. The descriptive statistics of frequency counts, Percentages were used to answer the researcher questions while inferential statistics of multiple regression and univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of Alpha. The study established significant linear relationship between the predictor variables and retention and completion of learners in open and distance learning institutions in southwest. Based on these findings, the need to enhance institutional support services ODL policy in Nigeria that will promote and enhanced learner-centered techniques were recommended.

Keywords: Institutional services, Retention, Completion, Open-Distance, Learners.

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is an important global strategy in resolving problems of access to education around the world. This is particularly importance in Nigerian because her education system especially higher education has not been able to meet the demand of her citizenry. The demands for admission has risen to the extent that government could barely cope financially to increase the carrying capacities of her institutions and this left applicants and parents to brawl for admission every year, Akande (2018). To tackle the problem of access into higher institutions in Nigeria, the National University Commission (NUC) has between 2001 to 2018 licensed 75 Private Universities but despite these additional numbers, there is still the problem of absorption capacity, where the increasing number of students seeking admission to universities far outpaces the rate of capacity expansion. The table below shows the debt of access to higher education in Nigeria

Table 1.1. Number of UTME/ applicants to the universities and the numbers that gained admission in 2016 according to state

S/N	State	No. Of applicants to university by state	Number that gained the admission	percentages of admitted
1.	Abia	51,209	13,383	26.13408
2.	Adamawa	15,205	6,566	43.18316
3.	Akwa ibom	58,135	14,766	25.3995
4.	Anambra	77,239	20,663	26.75203
5.	Bauchi	15,420	6,423	41.6537
6.	Bayelsa	21,130	5,633	26.65878
7.	Benue	59,395	17,558	29.56141
8.	Borno	14,243	5,850	41.07281
9.	Cross river	29,059	9,781	33.65911
10.	Delta	78,126	19,576	25.05696
11.	Ebonyi	31,852	9,252	29.04684
12.	Edo	65,513	17,772	27.12744
13.	Ekiti	33,909	11,871	35.0084
14.	Enugu	68,904	16,080	23.33682
15.	Gombe	18,201	7,143	39.2451
16.	Imo	103,724	11,778	11.35513
17.	Jigawa	12,071	5,351	44.32938
18.	Kaduna	48,611	16,135	33.19208
19.	Kano	47,454	17,321	36.50061
20.	Katsina	22,133	7,663	34.62251
21.	Kebbi	8,772	3,354	38.23529
22.	Kogi	56,673	16,282	28.72973
23.	Kwara	52,436	13,626	25.98596
24.	Lagos	23,833	6,938	29.1109
25.	Nasarawa	29,049	7,669	26.40022
26.	Niger	17,599	6,132	34.84289
27.	Ogun	59,824	18,948	31.67291
28.	Ondo	53,572	16,490	30.78101
29.	Osun	68,479	9,339	13.63776
30.	Oyo	70,382	17,196	24.43238
31.	Plateau	32,893	7,107	21.60642
32.	Rivers	40,482	11,385	28.12361
33.	Sokoto	9,982	2,229	22.33019
34.	Taraba	14,720	5,106	34.6875
35.	Yobe	7,827	5,226	66.76888
36.	Zamfara	5,222	1,303	24.95213
37.	Fct	3,830	1,507	39.34726
	Total	1,427,108	390,402	27.35616

Source: National Bureau of Statistics /Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board, 2019

This notwithstanding, the advent of technology for instructional delivery in education has strengthening open and distance learning to cater for students who may not have time, resources and opportunity to acquire education in conventional way. Akande (2021) The philosophy and practice of ODL is to opening access to education and training provision by freeing learners from constraints of time and place, and offering flexible learning opportunities to individuals and groups of learners (UNESCO 2002)

The Federal Ministry of Education (2002) defines ODL as any form of learning in which the provider enables individual learners to exercise choices over any one or more of a number of aspects of learning. The National Policy on Education (2014) has since recognized the place of open and distance learning in achieving lifelong education and affirms that lifelong education shall be the basis of the nation’s education policy. According to the policy document, the goals of open and distance education are to: • Provide access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied. • Meet special needs of employers by mounting special certificate courses for their employees at their work place. • Encourage internationalization especially of tertiary education curricula. • Ameliorate the effect of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing experts as teachers regardless of their locations or places of work. (NPE, 2004)

This emergence of ODL is an inevitable and unparalleled advancement in the history of educational development in Nigeria and internationally. Unlike the formal system of education which has its inherent limitations with regards to expansion, provision of access, equity and cost- effectiveness, the growth of open and distance mode of education has now made education flexible .by providing increased educational opportunities to a larger population in different situations and needs. Thus, ODL is moving gradually from the exclusive, closed system mode of “privileged” access to education, towards a more inclusive educational model, which supports and is reflective of UNESCO’s goal of Education for All for the 21st century. Through various initiatives, such as those undertaken by UNESCO, COL, the British Council, the Literacy Enhancement Assistance Program, and others, the gap between education and world of work that many developing countries have experienced in the past is being narrowed.

With the development of modern technology, it is possible for a single distance learning University to absorb all students currently enrolled in Nigerian universities as well as those that are denied admission for lack of space. For example, a remarkable number of distance learning universities have several hundreds of thousands of students on their rolls. In Nigeria the managers of conventional Universities have realized this and have had to make structure adjustments to be able to meet the new challenges (Okebukola, 2002). This is the case in many countries of the world and in recent time has become so in Nigeria where not a few conventional Universities have gone dual mode and many more are moving towards doing that.

Despite the expanding growth of ODL and its benefits Akande, Oyelami, Ojo, (2021) asserts the rate at which learners remain and complete their programmes is low. This has been timeless concern of the stakeholders. A learner, who lacks enthusiasm or is not self-instructed, will find himself easily deterred from continuing his education. Okopi and Pindar (2014) corroborated with report below by stating that without effective learners ‘support services which will provide OD learners with motivation, quality interactions and feedback student achievement will be undermined and dropout rates will increase

The table 1. Enrolment, Completion and Attrition Rate in National Open University of Nigeria between 2013 And 2017 Academic Session

S/n	All Programmes	Enrolment in 2014 academic session	Completion rate IN 2018 SESSION	Attrition rate
Total	38	85031	12666	0.85

Source (NOUN, MIS 2019)

Table1.2 learners’ Admission and Retention rate in Distance learning Centre (DLC), University of Ibadan (Dual mode)

Sn	Programme	No. Of students admitted 2013\2014	No. That progressed to final session 2018/2019
1	Adult education	-	-
2	Special education	--	-
3	Education management	-	-

4	Guidance and counseling	-	-
5	Human kinetic and health education	-	-
6	Library archival and information studies	-	-
7	Social work	1,204	23
8	Teacher education	-	-
9		-	-
10	Communication and language arts	-	-
11	Linguistics	-	-
12	English	313	7
13	French	-	-
14	Philosophy and public affair	331	10
15	Psychology	1,722	126
16	Economics	1,575	51
17	Political science	1,298	184
18	Agriculture sc	-	-
	Total	6,443	401

Source: Distance learning Centre (DLC), University of Ibadan

Table 3. Students' Admission and Retention rate in Centre for Distance Learning (CDL), Obafemi Awolowo University (Dua mode)

Programmes	2015-2016 session total no. of students admitted	total no. that progressed to final session 2019/2020
all odl programmes	328	32

Source: Centre for Distance Learning (CDL), Obafemi Awolowo University

One of the critical components in ODL is institutional support. The concept of institutional support is a term used to subsume all interactions between institutional personnel and students (prospective and registered) intended to assist them in meeting their objectives from the point of first inquiry through graduation and often for life time (COL, 2002) According to Simpson (2002) they are services provided to distance learners so that they can overcome barriers to learning and complete their studies successfully. It covers learning materials, teaching and tutoring and non-academic elements, administrative aspects, guidance and counseling.

However, the Institutional support system of any distance education institution varies from institution to institution. In general the support services broadly address the following needs of the learners:

1. Information support

Learners are acquainted with all necessary information prior to admission of their course so that they can make appropriate decisions about their studies and also have access to all resources and support services. This includes information about various programmes, admission criteria, eligibility, fees structure, study material, evaluation system and other support services provided by the institution during course of study.

2. Academic support: Information about the academic support, who are the academic counsellors, where the counselling sessions both theory and practical would be held, provisions of assignments, provision of practical for practical based programmes, use of audio visual aids, teleconferencing, interactive radio counselling facilities etc.

3. Learning centers: Where the students will have the access to the library facility, counselling facilities, submission and evaluation of assignment, term end examinations and other general support.

4. Feedback: Provide feedback to course material developers and to the students on assignment responses

Tait (2003) identifies three reasons why institutional support is necessary. According to him, most students want support and interaction with others, except for about 10% of students who may not want interaction with other students. However, time and location constraints in the lives of adult learners may not allow this; secondly, Student support especially guidance and counseling, tutor support, effective information and administration reinforce students' sense of confidence and reduce drop-out rate; and thirdly, the nature of learning, which includes a further explanation for students through tutoring in group work in study centres, online tutoring and feedback through the return of assignments (termed 'mediation') has an impact on the learning process.

Statement of the Problem

Institutional support services is a major components in ODL system Notwithstanding the provision of these support programmes in open distance learning, the rate at which learners remain on the programme and complete their programme is low. Zirnkle (2001) identified specific challenges facing distance learners as programme as lack of equipment and infrastructure, instructional concerns and poor technical assistance. Others are inadequate feedback and poor teacher contact, alienation and isolation, and poor student support services.

The institutional support system is an important service that needs to be provided by the institution to the learners because of the characteristics of distance learners themselves which are mainly isolated and learners from diverse backgrounds. It is against this problems that this study seek to examine the influence of learners' support services (LSS) of learners retention and completion in open distance learning in south west Nigeria

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine institutional support programmes as relate to learners' retention and completion in open-distance learning institutions in the south-west, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the level of availability and usability of institutional support programmes in open-distance learning institutions in south-west, Nigeria
2. Examine the extent to which institutional support programmes (orientation, counselling, Feedback mechanism, registration procedures, monitoring/mentorship) facilitate retention and completion in open-distance learning institutions in the south-west, Nigeria

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. To what extent is the availability of institutional support services in open-distance learning institutions?
2. To what extent is the use of institutional support services in open-distance learning institutions?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant composite contributions of institutional services (Orientation, Feedback, Administrative support, Counselling services and Monitoring) on retention and completion of learners in open and distance learning institutions.
2. There is no significant relative contributions of institutional services (Orientation, Feedback, Administrative support, counselling services monitoring) on retention and completion of learners in open and distance learning institutions.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive design of an ex post facto type. The population consisted of final year learners, in open and distance learning institutions in southwest, Nigeria. There are seven (7) NUC approved ODL Institutions in South-West, Nigeria. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used for the selection of samples sizes for the study. First, purposive sampling technique was used to select four (4) States out of six (6) south-western States namely; Oyo, Lagos, Ondo and Osun respectively. Secondly, In each state (that is Oyo, Lagos and Osun, Ondo), purposive sampling method was used to select one (1) dual mode university that are owned by government and had admitted and graduated learners for the period of five years while a study Centre of the single mode open and distance institution was selected in Ondo State. In the third stage, Using snowballing sampling methods all the final year learners in the selected institutions totaling 1,374 were contacted but only 840 who responded, completed and returned research

instruments were sampled. The choice of final year students was considered as the most appropriate for this study because they have interacted with all institutional support services since their admission to these institutions.

Structured questionnaire was used to elicit information from the respondents (final year learners). The questionnaires was titled; **Institutional support services, Retention and Completion Scale (ISSRRCS)** was used to elicit responses that helped to determine the availability and the influence of institutional services on learners’ retention and completion of courses. The questionnaire was divided into two parts, A and B. Part A contained bio-data of residents such as Age, sex, religious Affiliations and course of study. Part B contained statement items on institutional services in relations to retention and completion in ODL programmes. Modified four point-Likert response format of strongly agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD) was used.

The instruments were validated experts in the field of ODL, measurement and evaluation also the structured instrument was subjected to ordinal alpha reliability with 0.86 coefficient. A google doc (G suite) instrument was sent electronically to all the respondents via emails, Whatsapp and facebook groups. The descriptive statistics of Frequency counts, Percentages were used to answer the researcher questions while inferential statistics of multiple regression and univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of Alpha

Results of Findings

Research Question One: *What is the level of availability of institutional services in open-distance learning institutions?]*

In answering this question, data obtained were subjected to frequency count and percentages conducted through Statistical Package for Social Science version 25. However, for easy interpretation of availability of institutional programs, the level of “high or low” was based on the number of counts that indicated Yes or No to each of the item. Table presents the frequency count statistics as follows:

Table 2: Frequency Count showing Level of Availability of Institutional services

S/N	Availability of the Instructional Program	Yes Freq (%)	No Freq (%)	Level
1	Orientation	560 (66.7)	280 (33.3)	High
2	Feedback	354 (42.2)	486 (57.8)	Low
3	Administrative support	543 (64.7)	297 (35.4)	High
4	Counselling services	403 (48)	437 (52)	Low
5	Monitoring	659 (78.4)	181 (21.6)	Low

The above table remarked that 560 (66.7%) of the respondents claimed that orientation was available while 280 (33.3%) of them claimed not available. Considerable number of respondents 354 (42.2%) indicated that feedback is available while 486 (57.8%) of them showed that there was no feedback. Also, 543 (64.7%) of the respondents argued that administrative support was available while 297 (35.4%) of them said administrative support was not available. Few of them 403 (48%) submitted that counselling services are available while 437 (52%) of the respondents claimed the counselling services was not available while 659 (78.4%) of the respondent showed that monitoring were available while 181 (21.6%) of the respondents claimed it was not available. This implies that orientation and administrative support had positive influence on retention and completion. However, other indicators of institutional program such as feedback, counselling and monitoring were not evident in the ODL.

Research Question Two: *What is the level of usability of institutional services in open-distance learning institutions?*

To answer this question, descriptive statistics conducted through Statistical Package for Social Science version 25 for all the items were computed. Four-point Likert response scale of never (1) at one end and every time (4) at the other end was used to measure all the items. The descriptive statistics (frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation) for each of the item was computed. Table presents the descriptive statistics for usage of institutional programs. Thus, for easy interpretation, each item means was compared with the weighted average of 2.50. Item means less than 2.5 indicates low usage of institutional programs, whereas item mean greater than or equals to 2.5 indicates high usage of learner institutional program.

Table 2: Statistics showing Usability of Institutional services.

S/N	Frequency of usage of Instructional Techniques	Every time Freq (%)	Occasionally Freq (%)	Rarely Freq (%)	Never Freq (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Orientation	412 (49)	320 (38.1)	66 (7.9)	42 (5)	3.50	0.59
2	Feedback	206(24.5)	90 (10.7)	156(18.6)	388(46.2)	2.09	0.55
3	Administrative support	284 (33.8)	354 (42.1)	156(18.6)	46 (5.5)	3.10	0.58
4	Counselling services	231(27.5)	181 (21.6)	107(12.7)	321(38.2)	2.01	0.41
5	Monitoring	156 (18.6)	92 (10.9)	238(28.3)	354(42.2)	2.15	0.46

***Weighted Average = 2.50**

The table showed that 412 (49%) of the respondents indicated that orientation is used every time, 320 (38.1%) of them indicated that orientation is used occasionally, 66 (7.9%) of them indicated that orientation is rarely used and 42 (5%) of them has never used orientation, and overall, the item has (\bar{X} = 3.50, SD=0.59). Also, it was shown that 206 (24.5%) of the respondents used feedback every time, 90 (10.7%) of the respondents used feedback occasionally, 156 (18.6%) of the respondents rarely used feedback and 388 (46.2%) of the respondents has never used feedback and overall, the item has (\bar{X} = 2.09, SD=0.55). It was indicated that 284 (33.8%) of the respondents used administrative support every time, 354 (42.1%) of them used it occasionally, 156 (18.6%) of the respondents rarely used administrative support while 46 (5.5%) of the respondents has never used administrative support, and overall, the item has (\bar{X} = 3.10, SD=0.58). Furthermore, it was remarked that 231 (27.5%) of the learners used counselling services every time, 181 (21.6%) of the respondents used it occasionally, 107 (12.7%) of the respondents rarely used counselling services while 321 (38.2%) of the respondents has never used the counselling services, and overall, the item has (\bar{X} = 2.01, SD=0.41). While, 156 (18.6%) of the learners used monitoring every time, 92 (10.9%) of the respondents used monitoring occasionally, 238 (28.3%) of them rarely used monitoring while 354 (42.2%) of the respondents has never used it, and overall, the item has (\bar{X} = 2.15, SD=0.46). The result implies that items 1 and 3 were adequately used in completing the program while other institutional programs were rarely used. This might trigger attrition among the learners.

Test of hypotheses

Hypotheses One: *There is no significant composite contributions of institutional services (Orientation, Feedback, Administrative support, Counselling services and Monitoring) on retention and completion of learners in open and distance learning institutions.*

Table: 3. Regression Summary Showing Composite contribution of institutional programs on retention and completion of learners in open and distance learning institutions.

R = 0.355					
R square = 0.126					
Adjusted R square = 0.110					
Model	Sum of square	Df	Means square	F	Sig.
Regression	2151.755	5	268.969	7.957	0.001
Residual	14906.176	834	33.801		
Total	17057.931	839			

Table 3. Shows that multiple regression correlation coefficient indicating the relationship between the predictor variables (Orientation, Feedback, administrative support, Counselling services and Monitoring) and retention and completion of learners in open and distance learning institutions is 0.355. The adjusted R square is 0.110, this means that the predictor variables accounted for 11.0% variation in the retention and completion of learners in open and distance learning institutions. Also, it has been further ascertained using multiple regression ANOVA $F_{(5,834)} = 7.957$; $P < 0.05$. This indicated there is significant linear relationship between the predictor variables and retention and completion of learners in open and distance learning institutions.

Hypothesis Two: *There is no significant relative contributions of institutional services (Orientation, Feedback, Administrative support, Counselling services and Monitoring) on retention and completion of learners in open and distance learning institutions.*

Table 4: Coefficient of Relative Contribution of institutional services on retention and completion of learners in open and distance learning institutions.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	51.074	2.925		17.46	0.000		
Orientation	0.094	0.02	0.163	4.680	0.000	0.988	1.012
Monitoring	0.180	0.212	0.069	0.848	0.397	0.904	1.048
Counselling services	0.050	0.058	0.030	0.859	0.391	0.950	1.053
Feedback	0.278	0.802	0.016	0.347	0.729	0.875	1.042
Administrative support	1.298	0.060	0.767	5.569	0.000	0.946	1.057

Dependent: Retention and completion

Table 4. Showed that among the predictor variables, only orientation ($\beta= 0.163$, $t(835) = 4.680$; $p < 0.05$) and administrative support ($\beta= 0.767$, $t(835) = 5.569$; $p < 0.05$) were found to have significant relative contribution towards retention and completion of learners in open and distance learning institutions.

Discussion of Findings

The results of hypothesis one shows a relationship between the predictor variables (Orientation, Feedback, administrative support, Counselling services and Monitoring) and retention ,completion of learners in open and distance learning institutions. The adjusted R square is 0.110, this means that the predictor variables accounted for 11.0% variation in the retention and completion of learners in open and distance learning institutions. This indicated there is significant linear relationship between the predictor variables and retention and completion of learners in open and distance learning institutions. Kamau (2007) asserts thus: without an effective institutional support services that provides on-site face to face, timely feedback on student performance , counselling services and access to library services, student achievement will be undermined and dropout rates and procrastination will increase in ODL programmes .

The findings also showed that among the predictor variables, only orientation ($\beta= 0.163$, $t(835) = 4.680$; $p < 0.05$) and administrative support ($\beta= 0.767$, $t(835) = 5.569$; $p < 0.05$) were found to have significant relative contribution towards retention and completion of learners in open and distance learning institutions. This implies that these two institutional programs are the most potent variables that influence and translate to retention and completion of learners' various program. Furthermore, multicollinearity was examining using tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF). These are the two collinearity diagnostics factors that can help in identifying multicollinearity in the variables of the study. Based on the above result, there is no VIF value for determining presence of multicollinearity. Values of VIF that exceed 5 (that is $VIF > 5$) are often regarded as indicating multicollinearity. Consequently, none of the VIF values greater than or equal to 5. Thus, case of multicollinearity was not evident in this study. The finding was supported by Brownell & Swaner, (2010); Mayhew, Stipeck, & Dorow, (2011) that orientation programs are essential in helping students persist and they increase retention. They are also the bridge between the last stages of student recruitment and the first stage of retention (Shupp, 2014).

Conclusion

This study examined institutional support services has related to learners' retention and completion in open-distance learning institutions in south-west, Nigeria. The findings revealed low availability and usability of institutional support services in ODL. Counselling services, monitoring/mentoring were substantially low against the expectation that these should be available to enhance learners' retention and completion.

The study however established significant linear relationship between the predictor variables and retention and completion of learners in open and distance learning institutions. This implies the more institutional services are available and utilized in open-distance learning institutions the more learners' retention and completion will be

achieved. The study concluded that availability and utilization of institutional services are vital for learners to remain and complete programmes in ODL,

Recommendation

In view of the findings obtained and the conclusion reached is the following recommendations

1. Availability of institutional support services should be a criterion for approval for the running of ODL programmes by any institutions in Nigeria. This should be made critical in NUC approval guide line
2. Special intervention fund should be made available for all ODL institutions for the provision and running of inclusive learner support services

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