

OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING: PATHWAY TO SUSTAINBLE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines the level of commitment of Open and Distance Learning Institutions to the global development goals with emphasis on access to education in Nigeria. Documentary evidence pertaining to the demand and supply of university education as well as the level of enrolment and graduate output in the Distance Learning Institute (DLI), University of Lagos is presented. It is observed that the level of unsatisfied demand for university education has continued to rise over the past 15 years, reaching its highest value in 2014. Concomitantly, a steady rise in the level of enrolment in DLI was also found with the highest enrolment recorded in 2012. In effect, a significant relationship between the level of enrolment in DLI and that of unsatisfied demand for education was established. Also graduate output was significantly related to students' enrolment in the DLI, University of Lagos. On the other hand, the long term trend in enrolment was upward in all disciplines with Business Administration and Accounting recording the highest enrolment as opposed to Science Education. The paper thus recognises the fact that Open Distance Learning is a giant step towards providing greater access to university education and recommends that more Open Distance Learning centres should be established in Nigeria in order to further broaden the access to university education for all. Finally, more disciplines should be included in the Distance Learning Institute (DLI) University of Lagos programmes.

Keywords: Open Distance Learning, university education, sustainable development.

Introduction

The declaration of 2005-2014 as the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) by United Nations General Assembly reiterated the significant role of education in modeling values that are in support of sustainable development and capable of promoting sustainable societies (UN, 2005). In the Nigerian context, education is described as an instrument “par excellence” (NPE, 2013) , a veritable means of developing the full capacities and potentials of human resources as well as sound intelligent learning society fit and relevant to the 21st century. One of the ultimate goals of education is to assist individuals transfer the knowledge acquired in schools to real life situations in solving future problems and handling strategies to equip them for future challenges. Accordingly, the modern concept of sustainable development as derived from the 1987 Brundtland Report is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Hence, sustainable development is a concept of development, growth and lifelong learning for national development. University education includes all studies, training or training for research at the post-secondary level. This form of studies is geared towards the development of high level manpower within the context of the needs of the nation.

Correspondingly, Open and Distance Education refers to approaches to learning that focus on freeing learners from constraints of time and place while offering flexible learning opportunities (COL, 2000; Daniel, 2012; Open Society, 2007; Shabani & Okebukola, 2002). According to UNESCO (2002), Open and Distance Learning (ODL) reflects both the fact that all or most of teaching is conducted by someone removed in time and space from the learner, and

that the mission aims to include greater dimensions of openness and flexibility, whether in terms of access, curriculum or other elements of structure.

Distance learning universities all over the world have several hundred thousand of students on their rolls. Notably among them are University of Anadolu in Turkey, which caters for 577,000 students, the Radio and Television University in China with an enrolment figure of more than 500,000 students. Keegan (1994) records that there are 350,000 students in Terbuka University in Indonesia. Indira Gandhi National Open University has 500,000 on enrolment; Sukkothai Thammatirat Open University in Thailand has 216,000 students and Korea National Open University has 210,000 students. All these are single mode institutions (Peters, 2003). Similarly, the National Open University of Nigeria has well over 180,000 student population (Tenebe, 2013). The huge enrolment capacity of open and distance universities all over the world, justifies the need for their establishment as it provides a possible solution to the problem of access. Thus, Open and Distance Education (ODE) has emerged as a veritable alternative for broadening access to higher education for all manners of people in the world. Additionally, Open and Distance Learning has come to offer a mode that breaks down barriers erected by the 'closed' system (Okebukola, 2014). This is because carrying capacity is not an issue to Open and Distance Education (ODE).

Statement of the Problem

The demand for university education and on the job training remains persistent in Nigeria. Available statistics reveals the unsatisfied demand for university education in Nigeria as illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Demand and Supply of University Education in Nigeria and DLI Enrolment/Graduate output

Year	Number of applicants (JAMB)	Number Admitted (JAMB)	Percentage admitted	Number of applicant Not admitted	Percentage of unsatisfied demand	Student enrolment (DLI)	Graduate output (DLI)
2000/2001	467,490	50,277	10.76	417,213	89.24	1382	254
2001/2002	550,399	60,718	11.03	489,681	88.97	1853	481
2002/2003	994,380	51,845	5.21	942,535	94.79	1803	459
2003/2004	1,046,950	105,157	10.04	941,793	89.96	1721	716
2004/2005	841,878	122,492	14.55	719,386	85.45	None	None
2005/2006	916,371	76,984	8.40	839,387	91.60	1934	722
2006/2007	803,472	88,524	11.02	714,948	88.98	2102	813
2007/2008	911,653	107,370	11.78	804,283	88.22	2182	856
2008/2009	1,054,053	194,521	18.45	859,532	81.55	2605	1031
2009/2010	1,182,381	281,675	23.82	900,706	76.18	2655	1583
2010/2011	1,330,531	402,872	30.28	927,659	69.72	2601	1650
2011/2012	1,503,933	502,313	33.39	1,001,620	67.61	3315	1915
2012/2013	1,644,110	525,365	31.95	1,118,745	68.05	3281	1907
2013/2014	1,735,892	568,197	32.73	1,167,695	67.27	3179	2165
2014/2015	1,606,753	585,245	36.42	1,021,508	63.58	None	2290

Source: Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board and DLI (2000-2015)

The challenges faced by the multitude of students that have been unable to secure placement into the inadequate conventional tertiary institutions across Nigeria are inconceivable. Consequently, a substantial percentage of students are locked out of universities, in spite of their being in possession of the minimum entry requirement. Although, other countries have succeeded in using distance education to address the problem of access to higher education, that of Nigeria still remains uncertain. This is because the same admission requirements into conventional universities are still being used for admission into distance education institutions (Awe, 2012).

Therefore, distance education in Nigeria cannot be said to have fully reduced the issue of access. It is against this backdrop that the level of commitment of Distance Learning Institute, University of Lagos to the global development goals with emphasis on access to higher education in Nigeria is being investigated.

Research Questions

- (1) Is there any relationship between the level of unsatisfied demand for university education and that of students' enrolment in DLI?
- (2) How has the level of students' enrolment and graduate output varied over the last 15 years in DLI?
- (3) Is there any relationship between students' enrolment and graduate output over the last fifteen years?
- (4) How has the trend in students' enrolment across various disciplines varied over the years in DLI?

Methodology

A survey design was used to examine and compare the level of enrolment of students in DLI with the number of unsatisfied demand for education for years ranging from 2000 to 2015. Quantitative data obtained from secondary sources, mainly students enrolled in DLI as well as the number of unsatisfied demand for education during this period was used. The four research questions formulated were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Results

The striking feature in Table 1 is the increasing unsatisfied demand for university education as well as the apparent increase in DLI enrollment over the years. This highlights the significant role played by open and distance learning institutes in providing opportunities for students to acquire university education.

Research Question One

What is the relationship between the level of unsatisfied demand for university education and that of students' enrolment in DLI?

Figure 1 is a bar chart below showing the number of unsatisfied demand for university education and that of students' enrolment in DLI for the past 15 years.

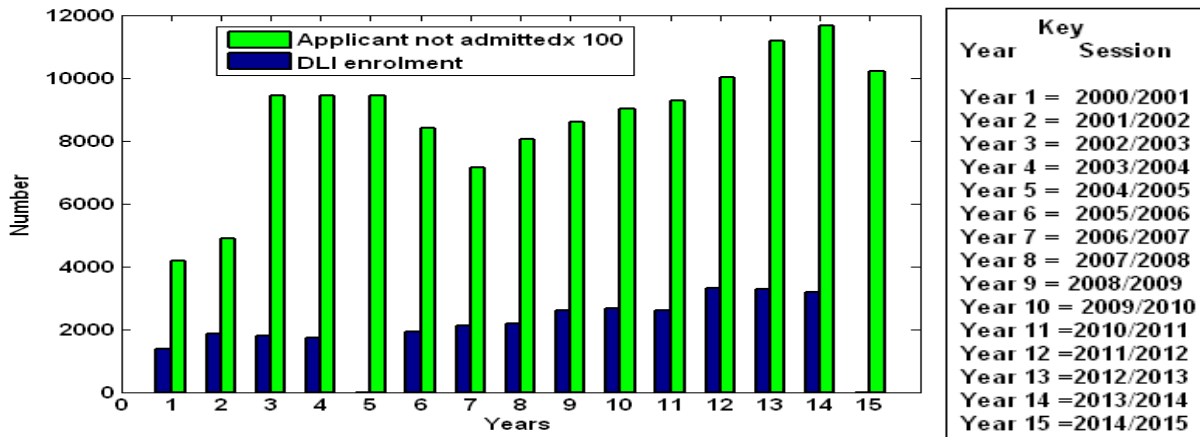


Figure 1: Bar chart of unsatisfied demand for university education and DLI students' enrolment

From 2000 to 2005, there has been a noticeable increased in the number of unsatisfied demand for university education (applicants not admitted, green colour) followed by a slight reduction from 2006 to 2008, and a sharp increase from 2008 to 2014. The greatest number of unsatisfied demand was recorded in 2014. Concurrently, there was a gradual increase in DLI enrolment with the greatest number of enrolment recorded in the year 2012.

The general trend from this figure is the increased in the number of unsatisfied demand and a concomitant increase in DLI enrolment over the past 15 years.

Research Question Two

How has the level of students' enrolment and graduate output varied over the last 15 years in DLI?

Figure 2 is a bar chart showing the level of students' enrolment and graduate output over a period of 15 years in DLI. Enrolment is in red while graduate output is in yellow.

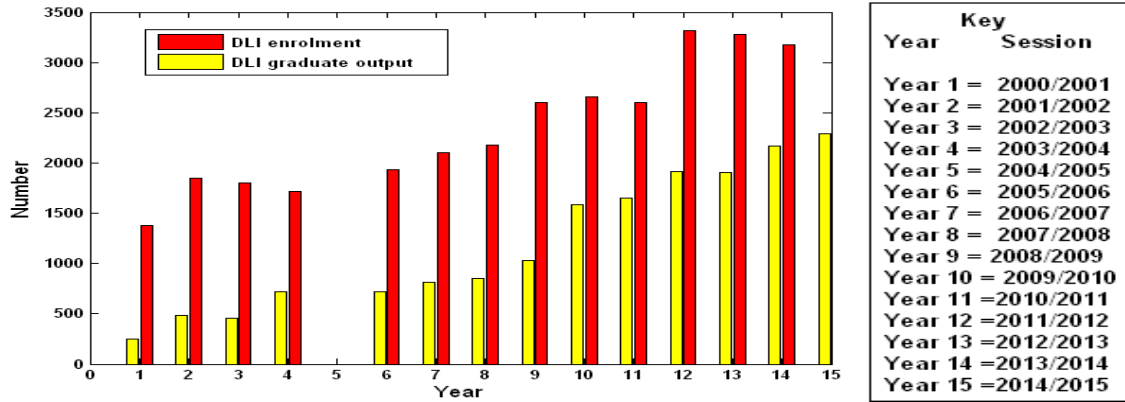


Figure 2: Bar chart showing the level of students’ enrolment and graduate output in DLI

The effectiveness of DLI is examined by comparing the number of students enrolled with the number of graduate turned out over the years. From the table above, as expected, the level of enrolment is higher than the level of graduate output. However, as the level of enrolment increased over the years, there was a corresponding increase in the number of graduate output. The highest enrolment was recorded in 2012 while the highest number of graduate turned out was in 2014.

Research Question Three

Is there any relationship between students’ enrolment and graduate output over the last 15 years?

Figure 3 is a scatter plot which examines the relationship between students’ enrolment and graduate output in DLI.

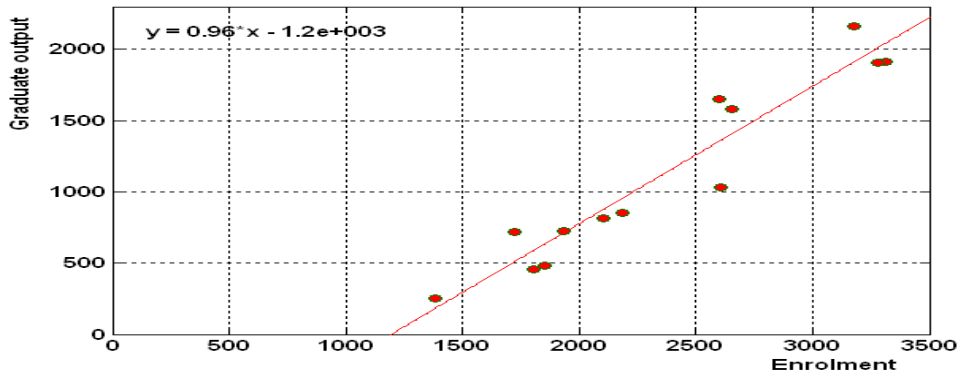


Figure 3: Scatter plot of student enrolment versus graduate output in DLI.

There is a positive relation (linear relation) between students’ enrolment and graduate output. In effect, as the students’ enrolment increased so did graduate output. The fitted linear line of equation $y = 0.96x - 12000$ gives the relationship between graduate output and enrolment. In this case, the variable x is the number of enrolment while variable y is the number of graduate output.

Research Question Four

How has the trend in students’ enrolment across various disciplines varied over the years in DLI?

Figure 4 which shows students’ enrolment per discipline in DLI in the past 15 years is used to answer this research question.

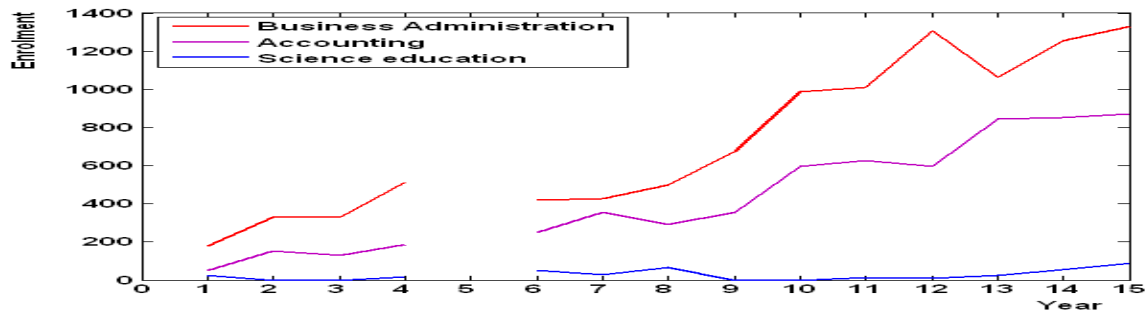


Figure 4: DLI student enrolment per discipline in the last 15 years.

As Figure 4 shows, the long term trend in enrolment is upwards across 5 disciplines, although apparently less in areas of Science. Business administration has the highest enrolment over the years followed by Accounting. Science Education which comprises of Physics, Mathematics, Chemistry and Biology courses has the least enrolment.

Discussion

Nigeria is the most populous African nation with a population that is constantly increasing. This population boom has led to a sudden growth in enrolment for higher education which in turn is putting more pressure on the university education system (Ajayi and Adeniyi, 2009). The aftermath is the increasing rate of unsatisfied demand for university education in Nigeria over the years. Okeke, (2009), Aluede and Odogho (2012) had earlier decried this alarming increase in the percentage of unsatisfied demand for university education in Nigeria. This undoubtedly has created a favourable environment for open and distance learning which has continued to provide a solution to the problem of access to university education.

The success of distance learning in the University of Lagos as evidenced in the increasing enrolment and graduate output over the years has to a large extent provided an alternative way for students to acquire university education. This is because open and distance learning has become popular for ensuring access, equity and quality education in a cost-effective manner (Khan, 2006). That is why Cdec (2009) recommended that effort needed to be made in order to harness the full potentials of Open and distance learning. He went further to propose among others that teachers' development must be supported and ICT applications improved upon. This to a large range justifies the relationship between increasing unsatisfied demand and students' enrolment in open and distance learning institute.

The National Open University of Nigeria has an enrolment of about 135,000 students (Tenebe, 2013). The highest students' enrolment recorded at the DLI, University of Lagos over the last 15 years is 3,315 in the year 2011/2012 with a highest graduate output of 2,290 students in 2014/2015. On the other, hand Terbuka University in Indonesia can boast of an enrolment of about 350,000 students (Keegan, 1994) while the Open University in Britain reached an enrolment of 24,000 students in its first year with a graduate output of more than 100,000 students during its second decade (Ayodele *et al.*, 2006). One can therefore realise that a lot still remains to be done given the poll of unsatisfactory demand for university education in the country. This also highlights the need to introduce a good number of attractive courses in order to increase enrolment in DLI, University of Lagos.

In effect, it has been observed that disciplines such as Business Administration and Accounting had the highest enrolment. The education sciences had the lowest enrolment but exhibited a steady although slow increase, especially towards the beginning of 2013. The introduction of science education disciplines (Physics, Chemistry and Biology Education), is in line with the national strategy to increase the enrolment ratio of Science to Humanities in tertiary institutions. Similarly, the steady increase in enrolment in Science Education courses falls in line with the idea of using Open and Distance Education as a channel for the production of quality science teachers which in turn will translate to positive transformation of Nigeria (Okebukola, 2014).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study examined the level of contribution of the Distance Learning Institute, University of Lagos, to the sustainable development goals on higher education. For this purpose, data from students enrolled in DLI as well as the number of unsatisfied demand for education was obtained and examined.

It was found that enrolment and graduate output in the DLI, University of Lagos increased over the years. The increase in enrolment was significantly related to a similar increase in the number of unsatisfied demand for

university education. Also, a linear positive relation was found to exist between the pattern of enrolment and graduate output. Finally, enrolment was higher for Business Administration and Accounting as opposed to the very low enrolment level in Science Education.

The Distance Learning Institute, University of Lagos has thus contributed its own quota towards the sustainable development of higher education in Nigeria as seen in the level of enrolment as well as the quality of graduate output in the past 15 years. Nevertheless, more disciplines (short and long term courses) can still be injected into the programme to further increase enrolment.

Based on the foregoing, the following recommendations are made: Appropriate mechanisms should be put in place to facilitate and sustain enrolment of students and absorb a large proportion of unsatisfied demand for university education. This can be achieved through the introduction of new and attractive courses (short and long term), moderating admission requirements, encouraging the establishment of more single and dual modes ODL universities, and establishing resource centres to increase students' access to information and communication technologies.

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