

Learners Assessment of the National Open University (Noun)

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Abstract: This study investigated Nigerians National Open University learner's assessment of the National Open University programme. The survey delves on the experience of 189 learners enrolled in the bachelor's programme of the University. The subjects, 100 males and 89 females were randomly selected from 4 of the 26 study centres located in the 6 geo-political zones of the country. The study centres used for the study were: Benin, Bauchi, Nekede and Umuahia. Subjects responded to a 17 item four point likert-scaled questionnaire eliciting their level of satisfaction with the course materials and support services provided in the programme. Findings indicated that learners on the whole were satisfied with the course materials most especially choice of modules. Levels of dissatisfaction were however indicated of feedback received; length of time to complete assignment, relevance to needs and contact time. On the support services provided learners were generally dissatisfied two main areas of dissatisfaction were library and counseling services they were however satisfied with support provided by facilitators as well as learner-learner interaction. There were significant differences in learners level of satisfaction with course materials and support services based on sex. Significant difference also exists in learner's level of satisfaction with course materials and support services in the four study centres. Library and Counseling services ranked highest on the list of areas of the programme to be improved. Implications for improvement were discussed.

Key words: Assessment, course materials, support services, facilitators, counselling, implication

INTRODUCTION

Education remains a very significant tool for human development in essence it plays vital role in determining the level of development of man and by implication the overall development of the society. The numerous benefits of education to the society no doubt suggest the need to make all its levels affordable to members of the society. Tertiary education which builds on primary and secondary levels plays substantial role in the development of human resources which constitutes the ultimate basis for the wealth of nations. This accounts for the huge investment in education by most countries.

It is however quite obvious that in Nigeria and other countries, provision of tertiary education via the conventional face to face system is becoming increasingly impossible in view of the yearly teeming population of people seeking admission into this level. As at 1996 in Nigeria, it was submitted that the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) could only admit less than 20% of the applicants seeking admission. The Table 1 shown a picture of University placement of students.

In the academic session 1987/88, out of the enormous number (210, 524) of applicants who sought University admission, only 32,839 were placed. Similarly in 1991/92 Academic session, only 61,212 applicants were admitted

Table 1: University placement of student in different sessions

Years	Applicants for University placement	Number placed
1987/88	210,525	32,839
1988/89	189,522	41,063
1989/90	246,264	36,616
1990/91	287,264	48,504
1991/92	3,370,061	61,212

Table 2: University admission (1987/88-1991/92) Adesola (2002)

Parameters	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Applications	367,645	419,807	321,368	593,670	467,490
Admissions	56,055	73,781	78,550	64,358	50,277
Admitted (%)	149.0	17.6	24.4	10.8	10.8

JAMB, Annual report, several years

out of the alarming 3,370,061 who actually sought placement into institutions in Nigeria. From the Table 2 within the 5 years period and glaring from the data, there was no year that Nigeria Universities altogether admitted up to 25% of the total number of applicants.

The two tables reveal beyond doubt the justification for the establishment of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) to address the issue of limited access to University Education in Nigeria and to provide an alternative for working adults who could not leave their jobs for conventional Universities in view of their roles in the society.

Open and distance education: Open and distance education have often been used interchangeably. While some scholars (Fagbamiye, 1999; Rumble, 1989; Lewis and Spencer, 1986) saw no distinction between the two, others (Garrison, 1990) maintain that the two concepts are not equivalent or synonymous. However, modern usage tends to blur this distinction. While distance education assumes a distance between learner and instructor, open learning does not necessarily assume this. In actual fact, face to face components are seen to be a legitimate part of open learning but would but necessarily be considered to be part of distance education. Open learning incorporates other methodologies in addition to distance education (Alhassan, 2004). Dodds (1991) defined distance education as any form of organized educational experiences in which teaching and learning take place with the teachers at a distance from the learners most of the time. It is a form of education which enables a limited number of teachers to reach a very large number of learners. Distance education is a brand of adult education which makes available an alternative form of learning which develops from an existing inadequate provision of learning in formal institution. It is an important aspect of life-long education which insists that every man must be educated; distance education serves as an alternative strategy aimed at broadening access to education. It could be rightly said to be one of the outstanding innovations in education. Its emergence has brought education to the reach and embraces of many people who would have been denied for obvious constraints such as time, location, limited vacancy etc. literature is replete on the foundation of distance education.

Chardles quoted on Fagbamiye (1999) saw no distinction between distance education and open learning. He views either as generic term to comprise all patterns of student-centred learning process in which the teacher has only a limited role. The old forms of correspondence education, external or extra mural studies and home based study come under this description. All of them have certain common characteristics that keep them separate from the traditional pattern of face to face learning. Portway quoted in Keegan (1999) saw distance education as teaching and learning situations in which the instructor and the learner or learners are geographically separated and therefore rely on electronic devices and print materials for instructional delivery.

Apart from the above definitions and many others which point to the physical separation of teachers and learners as a distinguishing feature of distance education, Keegan (1999) further identified five main characteristics of distance education as the separation of teacher and learner, the influence of an educational organization, the use of technical media (usually print) to unite the teacher

and learner and to carry may benefit from or even initiate dialogue and the possibility of occasional meetings for both didactic and socialization purposes. In line with the proposal in the National policy on Education, the National Open University got established in July 22, 1983; it was however, suspended on April 24, 1984 by the then Military head of state and later got resuscitated on October 1, 2002. The National Open University designed to increase the access of all Nigerians to formal and non-formal education in a manner convenient to their circumstance also caters for the continuous educational development of [professionals such as teachers, Accountants, Bankers, Lawyers, Nurses, Engineers, Politicians, Self-employed, businessmen and women. It is all embracing and subject to review to accommodate Nigeria's interminable needs.

The University utilizes the distance-learning mode and offers a choice of qualifications from certificate, Diplomas to Degrees. The University proposed to establish 771 study centres throughout the nation where distance learners lectures, submit and collect marked assignment and use Information Technology (ICT) facilities for varieties of learning purposes. At the moment, it has 26 study centres located in the six geo-political zones of the country.

Keys of components of open and distance learning: Imminent in the definitions of open and distance education earlier reviewed are the key components two of which are fundamental in this study. These are course materials and learner's services.

Course materials: These constitute significant aspect of distance education. It should be noted that in the absence of a tutor, learning materials play vital role, they should be written in accessible style and must encourage reflection for the objectives of teaching and learning. Swales quoted in Ndan (2005) opined that open and distance learning materials should be learner-centred rather than teacher centred where text books are focus. According to her, learners need to be involved and motivated by the materials.

Similarly, Bagualander et al quoted in Okwudishi (2004) viewed course materials as endeavouring to do more than merely presenting subject matter; they should contain directions and guidance for learners in their study of content and also provide a structural interaction between students and lecturers. The report also stated that the development of course materials for open and distance education demands that developer be fully aware of various logical need to be understood in order to ensure that the materials are both relevant and appropriate for the objectives of teaching and learning.

Learner's support services: Student support in open and distance learning is aimed at assisting students to learn successfully. It is based on the fact that students using this mode of study must be helped with their feelings of confidence and self-esteem in such a way that they will be energized for persistence and success. Student support has been categorized include advice/counseling, tutoring (individually or in groups), the learning of study skills, peer group support, feedback concerning assessment and progress, language support and administrative problem solving where the aim is to support student's individual learning whether alone or in groups (Tait, 1995). Timely student feedback on site support as well as access to library materials are the three key aspects of support services in distance learning.

Through the support services, institutional and social barriers can be identified and addressed. Potter quoted in Ryan (2001) defines learners support in distance education as the many forms of assistance that are designed to remove barriers (institutional, situational and informational and promote academic success). Examples of such services are pre-admission counseling, academic advising, financial and learning skills instruction, child care and much more.

To a large extent, an important aspect of open and distance learning is adequate and good provision of learner support services. Learners to be well oriented towards independent or self-learning they also require a lot of cope with the problem of isolation. The peculiarities of distance education demand that greater attention be focused at learners support. Many distance learners are faced with such problems as lack of motivation, difficulty in combining and balancing work, study and the family, lack of resources and equipment, poor study techniques and lack of confidence. All these and many more can be addressed by adequate learner's support services.

Variation has been reported to exist in the type of learner support services provided. In Deakin University Australia for example, the numbers of the community are linked through an integrated, interactive electronic communication environment known as Dekin exchange which provides users with e-mail services, computer conferencing, library and administrative data bases and services through the use of a consistent menu driven point and click user interface. In the same country in open access college, apart from the high quality courses materials with teacher contact and electronic learning strategies, counselling and resources centre service are also provided to support students in enrolment, personal concerns and future option decisions (Beagley, 1999).

Empirical studies on student's satisfaction in open and distance learning: A number of researchers (Beare, 1989; Jones, 1992; Hilgenberg and Tolone, 2000) have examined the issue of students satisfaction in distance education

and one of the most common problems associated with many distance learning programmes is the limitation of dialogue between teachers and learners and among learners themselves. Keegan (1999) identified sharp cut-off dates for tutor-marked assignments, rigidity of learning content and materials and flexible learning structures.

Kirkup and Jones (1996) summarized the most significant weaknesses of distance education as its inability to offer dialogue in the way that conventional face to face education does and the inflexibility of its content and study method and the isolation and individualization of the students. Again, Burge and Howard (1990) worked on audio conferencing in Canada graduate educations and found that the effective utilization of local tutors increases student's satisfaction with courses.

Researches also abound on some theoretical and empirical considerations in distance and open learning generally (Agboola, 2004; Alhassan, 2004; Ndan, 2005) but there is a dearth of research on the National Open University of Nigeria obviously because of its young age.

Granted that Sapon conducted a research making use of 22 multinationals and multilingual students enrolled in a Master in Education (M.Ed) distance learning programme administered by a British University, Oguntonade (1982) evaluated the operations of the study centres of the distance education system of the University of Lagos, no study of this nature to the best knowledge of the researcher has been conducted on the National University is a student-centred system, a characteristics feature of open and distance learning one of the best judges of the effectiveness of such a system are learners themselves.

This study therefore sets out to survey the experience of the learners at some of the study centre a period of over two academics sessions of take off. This is motivated by a desire to have a feedback directly from the learners as regards their level of satisfaction with the two key components course materials and learner's support. This study with a tool for quality assurance serves as a form of formative evaluation which would provide the new institution.

Research question: The following questions guide the study:

- How satisfied are the learners with the course materials?
- How satisfied are the learners with the support services provided?

- Is there any statistical significant difference between male and female learner's level of satisfaction with the course materials provided?
- Is there any statistical significant difference between male and female learner's level of satisfaction with the support services provided?
- Is there any statistical significant in learner's level of satisfaction with course materials in the four study centres?
- Is there any statistical significant difference in learner's level of satisfaction with the support services in the four study centre?
- What areas of the programmes should be improved?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design: The choice of design in research depends on the purpose of the nature of the problem and variable alternatives for investigating the problem of that nature. This study is descriptive hence the descriptive survey design was employed. The design is considered appropriate for the fact that it facilitated the collection of detailed factual information on learner's level of satisfaction with the course material and support services provided by the National Open University of Nigeria.

Population: The target population for this study is students of the National Open University in Nigeria. At the moment, there are 26 study centers located in the nation's six geo-political zones. Out of the six zones, three (North East South and South-South) were picked randomly from the study centres in the three zones selected four study centres (Bauchi, Umuahia, Nekede and Benin) were randomly picked. On the 189 learners participated in the study, 53, 48, 37 and 51 learners from Umuahia, Bauchi, Nekede Benin, respectively.

Research instrument: A research designed questionnaire developed from review of relevant studies were utilized to generate data from the respondents. The main instrument, Learner's level of Satisfaction with NOUN (LELOSAWN) is a 17 item questionnaire which measure the learners, level of satisfaction with the course material and support services.

Rust and Golombok (1992) have opined that there is the tendency for subject to shoe indecisiveness when answering questionnaire and either avoid agreement or disagreement with questions by opting for the middle (neutral/no option category). Again Waloniks submit that questions which exclude the middle option produce a greater volume of accurate data. Hence the researcher deliberately omitted the middle option so as to endure

relevant levels of statistics and dissatisfaction. Response for the statements were therefore keyed using a likert-type scale ranging 1-b = very dissatisfied to 4-satisfied.

The instrument was pilot tested to determine its reliability by administering it to 10 learners at a week internal. The test retest reliability coefficient was found to be 0.71 which signifies that the instrument was quite reliable.

Its validity was ensured though the criticisms of knowledge persons in the field of adult education and specifically those involved open and distance learning.

Data collection: The researcher paid visits to the selected study centres to garner information about their mode of operation. Outcome of the visits revealed the appropriated time many learners would be on ground. The researcher with the assistance of colleagues and some workers in the study centres administered the questionnaire having sought permission from appropriate quarters. The data collection process lasted 1 month.

Data analysis: In analysis the data, simple percentages, t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used. The t-test statistical tool was employed to determine whether the two groups (male and female learners) a represented by their means are significantly different. While the analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to enable the researcher compare means of many groups (the study centres) on a single statistic test.

RESULTS

Research question 1: How satisfies are the learners with the course materials provided? Learner's level of satisfaction with course materials (Table 3).

As high as 95 and 91.5% of the learners were either satisfied or very satisfied with the course materials and the choice of modules, respectively while 60.4, 58.8, 73.6, 65.1 and 57.7% were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with feedback received, length of time to complete assignment, relevance to needs, contact time, responses of tutors and feedback time, respectively.

Table 3: Learners responses to questions

Items	Very satisfied (%)	Satisfied (%)	Dissatisfied (%)	Very dissatisfied(%)
1	34 (18.0)	147 (77.8)	8 (4.2)	0 (0.0)
2	19 (10.0)	154 (81.5)	16 (8.5)	0 (0.0)
3	7 (3.7)	67 (35.4)	110 (58.2)	5 (2.6)
4	9 (4.8)	69 (36.5)	88 (46.6)	23 (12.2)
5	3 (1.6)	47 (24.9)	105 (55.6)	34 (18.0)
6	4 (2.1)	62 (32.8)	78 (41.3)	45 (23.8)
7	2 (1.1)	78 (41.3)	81 (42.9)	28 (14.8)

Research question 2: How satisfied are the learners with support services provided? Learners level of satisfaction with the support services provided is clear revealed in the responses to item 8-13 above.

About 52.4 and 61.4% of the subjects were either satisfied or very satisfied the support services provided by facilitators (item 8) and with learner-learner interaction (item 10), respectively (Table 4). About 45.5% of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the form of interaction they have with their facilitators (item 9).

As regards the library services provided, 9 item 11 as high as 61.2% are either dissatisfied or satisfied also 71.5% of the subjects were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the counselling services provided. Responses to item 13 revealed generally 70.3% of the subjects were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the support services provided.

Research question 3: Is there any statistical significant difference between male and female learners level of satisfaction with the materials provided?

From Table 5 the t-value calculated is (1.73) with the level of sign (0.09) which is >0.05 . This indicates that the difference is not significant at 0.05 levels of significant.

Table 4: Learner's level of satisfaction with support services provided

Items	Very satisfied (%)	Satisfied (%)	Dissatisfied (%)	Verydissatisfied(%)
8	10 (5.3)	89 (47.1)	50 (26.5)	40 (21.2)
9	17 (9.0)	69 (36.5)	56 (29.6)	47 (24.9)
10	48 (25.4)	68 (36.0)	42(22.2)	31 (16.4)
11	5 (2.6)	57 (30.2)	87 (46.0)	40 (21.2)
12	6 (3.2)	48 (25.4)	78 (41.3)	57 (30.2)
13	4 (2.1)	52 (27.5)	80 (42.3)	53 (28.0)

Table 5: Comparison of respondent's level of satisfaction with the course materials based on sex

Variables	N	X	SD	If	Tc	Sig.
Male	100	17.18	2.15	187	1.73	0.09
Female	89	16.65	2.03	-	-	-

Research question 4: Is there any statistical significant difference between male and female learner's level of satisfaction with the support services provided?

The Table 6 shows the value calculated (1.37) at 0.17 level of significance which is >0.05 ; it follows that the differences is not significant at 0.05; level of significance.

Research question 5: Is there any statistical significance in the level of satisfaction with course materials in the four study centres?

Table 7 shows that a significant difference exist in the level of satisfaction of the respondents on the course materials provided at the four study centres selected for the study ($F_{93, 185} = 28004$). The Table 8 shows the post Hoc test conducted to determine the direction of significance. From the Table 8, it is glaring that there is significant difference in level of satisfaction between Benin and Umuahia, Umuahia and Nekede and Umuahia and Bauchi over all, Nakede centre rated highest in terms of learners level of satisfaction with course materials provided followed by Benin then Bauchi and the least Umuahia.

Research question 6: Is there any statistical significant difference in the level of satisfaction with support services in the four study centres (Table 9)? The ANOVA

Table 6: Comparison of learners level of satisfaction with support services provided based on sex

Variables	N	X	SD	If	Tc	Sig.
Male	100	18.23	2.67	187	1.73	0.17
Female	89	17.70	2.70	-	-	-

Table 7: Statistical significance in the level of satisfaction with course material in four study centres

Parameters	Sum of squares	If	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	261.320	3	87.107	28.036	0.000
Within groups	574.786	185	3.107	-	-
Total	836.106	188	-	-	-

Table 8: Post test (Scheffe)

(I) Study centre	(J) Study centre	Mean difference (I-J)	SE	Sig.	95% Confidence interval	
					Lower bound	Upper bound
Benin	Umuahia	2.74*	0.378	0.000.000	1.67	3.80
	Nakede	-3.00	0.381	1.000	-1.11	1.40
	Bauchi	48.00	0.386	0.657	-.61	1.57
Umuahia	Umuahia	-2.74*	0.378	0.000	-3.80	-1.67
	Nakede	-2.77*	0.346	0.000	-3.74	-1.79
	Bauchi	-2.26*	0.351	0.000	-3.25	-1.27
Nakede	Umuahia	0.03	381.000	1.000	-1.04	1.10
	Nakede	-2.77*	346.000	0.000	1.79	3.74
	Bauchi	0.51	354.000	0.560	-.49	1.51
Bauchi	Umuahia	-.48	0.386	0.675	-1.57	0.61
	Nakede	2.26*	0.351	0.000	1.27	3.25
	Bauchi	-.51	0.354	0.560	-1.51	0.49

*The mean difference is significant at 0.05 level

Table 9: Summary of ANOVA table on the level of satisfaction of the respondents with the support services in the centres

Level of satisfaction	Sum of squares	If	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	520.874	3	173.625	38.466	0.000
Within groups	853.042	185	4.514	-	-
Total	1355.915	188	-	-	-

Table 10: Multiple comparison (scheffe)

(I) Study centre	(J) Study centre	Mean difference (I-J)	SE	Sig.	95% Confidence interval	
					Lower bound	Upper bound
Benin	Umuahia	3.54*	0.455	0.000	2.26	4.83
	Nakede	3.33*	0.459	0.000	2.04	1.63
	Bauchi	0.19	0.465	0.983	-1.12	1.50
Umuahia	Umuahia	-3.54*	0.455	0.000	-4.83	-2.26
	Nakede	-0.21*	0.455	0.968	-1.39	0.96
	Bauchi	-3.35*	0.432	1.000	-4.55	-2.16
Nakede	Umuahia	-3.33*	0.455	0.000	-4.63	-2.04
	Nakede	0.21	0.455	0.968	-0.96	1.39
	Bauchi	-3.14*	0.427	-	-4.35	-1.94
Bauchi	Umuahia	-0.19	0.465	0.983	-1.50	1.12
	Nakede	3.35*	0.423	0.000	2.16	4.55
	Bauchi	3.14*	0.427	0.000	1.94	4.35

*The mean difference is significant at 0.05 level

table reveals a high value of F (38.47) with a low significance (0.000). Since this is <0.05, the difference is significant at 0.05 level.

Post Hoc test: From the multiple comparisons, the difference in the level of satisfaction with support services is pronounced between Benin and Umuahia and Benin and Nakede. There is higher level of satisfaction in Benin than the other two centres. There is also significance in level of satisfaction between Umuahia centre and Bauchi centre with higher level of satisfaction in Bauchi. Terms of learners level of satisfaction with support services provided, Benin centre came up followed by Bauchi then Nakede and the least Umuahia (Table 10).

Research question 7: What areas of the programme should be improved? Table 11 shows learner's responses to an open ended question on areas of the programme to be improved. The three main areas of the programme include library services (46.2% responses) counselling (32.8% responses) and lecture hall (6.4) of the subjects. It is gratifying to note from the findings that most respondents (95.8 and 91.5%) were either satisfied or very satisfied with the course materials and the choice of modules, respectively.

This corroborates Sampson (2003) in his study, only 9% of the subjects indicated dissatisfaction with the course materials and choice of modules course materials have been revealed as constituting significant aspect of distance education. Findings that learners were very satisfied with course materials and choice of modules imply satisfaction with an integral part or aspect of the programmes. However, their dissatisfaction with feedback received and length of time is not impressive. Feedback

Table 11: Respondent's views on areas of the programme for improvement

Areas	Frequency	Percentage	Ranking
Library	145	46.2	1st
Counselling	103	32.8	2nd
Lecturer-learner relationship	11	3.5	4th
Teaching facilities	2	0.6	10th
Continuous assessment	8	2.5	6th
Semester exam	5	1.6	7th
Sport complex	11	3.5	4th
Lecture hall	20	6.4	3rd
Learning environment	2	0.6	10th
Lecture time table	3	1.0	8th
Lecturer's feed back	3	1.0	8th
Laboratory equip	1	0.3	12th
Total	314	100.0	-

has been said to play crucial role in opening and maintaining a dialogue between tutors and students, it also serves an important function in motivating and encouraging students (Hyland quoted in Sampson, 2003). These aspects of course materials should be enhanced vis a vis learner's satisfaction not only to motivate and encourage students but also to ensure their success. Finding regarding learner's level of satisfaction with support services provided revealed 52.4 and 61.4% responses in facilitators support and learner-learner interaction, respectively. It is quite interesting to note that many learners are satisfied and very satisfied with the support services provided by the facilitators, this is worthy of note because facilitators or tutors are vital to the effectiveness of any distance education. This is sustainable by Lewis (1995) who submitted that beyond the course materials, the tutor constituted the main source of support for the student.

A considerably high percentage of respondents (61.4%) also maintain that they are satisfied with learner-learner interaction. A characteristic of distance education

is the tendency for isolation. It is not unlikely that learners meet and interact on issues relevant to their courses, course materials and other issues peculiar to their situations and circumstances as distance learners. Such interaction is capable of enhancing learner's cohesion thereby reducing or removing isolation, all these increase learners motivation level in their self-study. This finding removes limitations of dialogue between and amongst learners themselves which some researchers have identified as the most common problems associated with many distance learning programmes (Beare, 1989; Jones, 1992; Hilgenberg and Tolone, 2000).

That 67.2 and 71.5% of the respondents are either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with library and counselling services, respectively is undesirable. Library and counselling services constitute vital aspects of support for distance learners. Learners from time to time, require library facilities to be able to access relevant texts to complement the course materials provided and also by hold on reference materials needed to complete their assignment. When there is no library or when the library is inadequately equipped (as the case may be in this study) to provide the needed support, learners may get frustrated and discouraged. The University should explore strategies of making key resources materials available. This could be by liaising with a local university with well equipped libraries or by encouraging the wide use of the internet which is at the moment the global trend. All the study centres should be connected to the Web and the viewing rooms well stocked with computer sets to enhance accessibility.

The broad objective of counselling is to help the individual clear away the entangling and hampering tentacle so that he can be what he really is and contribute more, both to self and to his fellow (Arbuckle, 1970) distance learners typically require a lot of counselling and guidance in order to be well adjusted in independent or self learning. There are a lot of psychosocial problems confronting distant learners which counselling services provided is alarming. This concurs with the finding of Sampson (2003) in which respondents claim that they were not well looked after and cared for. Concerted efforts should be put in place towards providing adequate counselling services to meet the myriads needs of the learners. Counselors should be provided the awareness must be created so that learners can tap or harness the vital services.

That at high as 70.3% of the respondents were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the support services provided substantiates an earlier study in which 18% of the subjects agreed to be generally satisfied with the level of support provided on the programme. This finding did

not come as a surprise since learner had also indicated their dissatisfaction with library and counselling services which are important aspects of support services in distance education. It is surprising to observe a significant difference in level of satisfaction among subjects in the four centres. Since these are study centres run by the same university (NOUN) one would expect that the mode of operation and provisions would be uniform consequently similarly in learners responses. On the other hand one may expect the difference which may be the consequence of proximity or otherwise to the headquarters. Relating this to the concept of core and periphery, the core is seen as surrounded by periphery is from the core the less the effect. The further away the study centres are from the headquarters (core) the less the effect or impact of the core on the centres.

Perhaps it would be expected that study centres to the headquarters benefit more than those far away in terms of services provided. It is therefore not a surprise that Benin centre has the highest level of satisfaction in the two components (course materials and support services) examined on this study is therefore not a surprise since it is the closest to the core or headquarters.

Learners are of the opinion that the two significant areas to improve upon in the programme are library (46.2%) lecture hall (32.8%). The need to put effective library and counselling support in place has been addressed. It is also important to ensure that adequate lecture halls are provided to comfortably accommodate learners during tutorials and end of semester face-to-face examinations.

CONCLUSION

No doubt, open and distance learning constitute an integral aspect of Adult and Non-formal Education. The particular, the National Open University (NOUN) has made life-long education most especially university education a reality. A considerable number of adults who would have been denied learning at this level already have access.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is hereby recommended that efforts be made to assess the programme continually to ensure its effectiveness and efficiency. Adequate Counselling services (as support) should be put in place to assist learners cope as well as proffer solutions to their problems. Learners should be linked with sources of effective library and information technology to enhance their studies. Findings of this study have revealed

learners level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction on some key aspects of the programme. Apart from the areas where suggestions for improvement have been made; concerted efforts should be made at probing further to garner additional responses or comments via other instruments to indicate reasons for their satisfaction and or dissatisfaction. The researcher is of the opinion that this would bring about steady improvement and development of the programme.

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