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Students' Perception of the National Open University of Nigeria Scheme: A Case Study of Calabar Centre (Pp. 347-354)

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Abstract

As the demand for admission in tertiary instructions rapidly outstripped available institutional space, it increasingly became doubtful whether the traditional institutions in their structure and resources capacity would cope with the aspiring thousands of Nigerians who sought tertiary education. Hence the need for distance education (National Open University of Nigeria) where those who are workers can snugly fit in also. The paper examines the students' perception of National Open University of Nigeria scheme using Calabar study centre as a case study. A sample of two hundred and fifty students was used and with a single hypothesis formulated, a t-test analysis of the scores derived from the respondents was done. The result shows that the calculated t was lesser than the critical t at 0.05 level of significance. Hence the conclusion that male and female students in National Open University of Nigeria, Calabar study centre do not differ in their perception of the scheme.

Introduction

Nigeria has continued to demonstrate an irrevocable and unwavering commitment to education as a tool for national development, and as an

inalienable right of her citizens (Jegade 2006). The socio-economic dimensions of providing education for all are huge, bearing in mind the population of the country and the competing basis for resources amongst the compelling needs of the society. The existing institutions of higher learning continue to witness a large population of frustrated candidates year after year. The facilities in the existing institutions could not continue to be elastic. At the same time, the need to upgrade some serving workers continues to rise. The government could not grant in-service status to many serving workers. It became essential to find a way through which workers could combine work and student in order to increase their productivity. The need to improve workers' knowledge without having to resign their job or inflict untold hardships on their dependents became evident.

It must have occurred to the then Federal government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari that the ever growing demand for education by her people can not be met by the traditional means of face to face classroom instructional delivery. It did appear that the way forward was to embrace open and distance education. Thus, by an Act of the National Assembly in 1983, the National Open University of Nigeria became established in July 1983.

Perception is a feeling taken from past experience. It is the act of interpreting a stimulus registered in the brain by more than one sense mechanism. What one perceives may not be what exist physically for two people many see a thing differently; but what each has seen is a reality and it is only this reality that guide behaviour. To Adeyemo (1985), perception is the process of locating sensation to a certain or particular part of the organism; that, the image which the sense organ sends into the feeling organ (brain) is resolved into reality by adaptation of past experiences. The headquarters of the feeling organism communicates the other members of the body as it receives the impression from the organ of sense. Perception fixes the new knowledge into our memories and helps to build up a body of connected knowledge stored in our mind in such a way that we can bring out the parts of it when ever we need it.

National Open University of Nigeria

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) which was established in 1983 was closed down a few months later in 1984 by the federal military government that overthrew the civilian government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari (Jegade 2006). Many years after the closure, the compelling reasons that

informed the earlier establishment of the University were still confronting the country. Several other reasons had also emerged, like: the need to fill the vacuum created by the profit oriented outreach programmes of many conventional Universities in the country; the necessitating needs for economic funding of education; and the need to take advantage of emerging developments in the field of information communication technologies which have revolutionalized the techniques and method of instructional deliveries in the distance learning mode. Thus, in 2002, the National Open University Act of 1983 which was suspended in 1984 was reactivated. This paved way for the resuscitation of the National Open University of Nigeria as we have it today by President Olusegun Obasanjo. This birth according to Peters (2006) has renewed the focus to make education available to as many people as have the ability and are willing and ready to benefit from the quality education provided through flexible and affordable distance learning. The programmes available under the National open University of Nigeria are essentially designed to widen the access to education and to ensure equity and equality of opportunities for all and sundry; to be used as an instrument for poverty alleviation especially in rural communities, by providing opportunities that support Education For All (EFA) and life long learning; to equip the Nigerian population for the emerging global culture of technological literacy through its programmes and the use of information and communication technology.

The National open university of Nigeria is a form of distance education, and Denga (1993), refers to distance education as the transmission of knowledge through various media such as programmed instructions, multi-media packages, home experiment kits, prepared lectures and notes. It enables students living in remote or isolated parts, or who are employees in a full-time job or suffer from some physical handicaps to carry on their education at home by lessons through the post, radio, television or telephone. Distance Education is defined by FRN (2004) as an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by some one removed in space and/or time from the learners; it involves the use of a range of media such as print, written correspondence, audio, video, computer based media and networks as well as multi-media facilities for presentation of information and for communication between the University and her students.

Significance of National Open University of Nigerian (NOUN)

The National Open University of Nigeria dedicates itself to preparing professionals in various disciplines through the distance learning mode. It

offers a choice of qualifications from certificate to Diploma to Degrees and stand-alone self development courses through flexible delivery, allowing learners the convenience to choose the time, place and what to study (Jegede 2006:6).

The institutional mode of NOUN provides opportunity for working people to acquire knowledge, skills and techniques which may be relevant to their present work situation or to future career prospects. The scheme allows for working people who are living in whatever location regardless of the types of job to do. It is also flexible in terms of age and time, allowing for enrolment at any time and age, and at a convenience of pace dictated by the student.

Noun provides education for all and promotes life long learning in Nigeria; fills the gap created by the closure of sub-standard outreach/satellite campuses across the nation. It improves on the economies of scale, that is, more Nigerians receive quality education but at a reduced cost.

It helps on the job worker training as more workers can receive education without leaving their immediate vicinity; hence it helps in poverty eradication. NOUN can help with the provision of National orientation and provide education to reach the “Un-reachable” that is, girls and women who cannot leave their homes regularly (as they live in Purdah).

NOUN responds effectively to the growing demand of working adults who have difficulties into conventional education because of lack of flexibility in the timing and duration of academic programmes.

NOUN can be used as a platform for promoting National ethics and values. It can also allow for the dissemination of knowledge and information to target groups, with respect to government policies and activities, thereby providing better understanding of government’s intentions at all times. This will improve general understanding, reduce misconceptions and promote social and political harmony.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this work is to find out the perception of students, in the National Open University of Nigeria, Calabar study centre towards distance Education (NOUN). It is obvious that people have various ways of looking at National Open University of Nigeria scheme. There is need to find out whether the students’ apprehension to NOUN scheme is influenced by sex.

Methodology

A sample of two hundred and fifty students from the Calabar study centre of the National open university of Nigeria was used. The respondents were gotten through the hat and draw technique. Six hundred pieces of papers were rapped and put in a plastic container; with three hundred pieces bearing "Yes" and the other three hundred carrying "NO". With the assistance of the study center manager, during his mid-semester briefing, the students that were present were made to pick a piece of paper each. At the end two hundred and fifty picked "yes" while one hundred and fifty picked "No" (those who attended the briefing were four hundred and five students. The students who picked yes were given the questionnaires to complete and the completed questionnaires were collected on the spot.

The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire developed by the researchers. The questionnaire had two sections. Section A requested of the respondents, their demographic information such as, the nature of work they are doing, sex, age, marital status, present educational qualification. Section B was a fourteen item of likert type scale that measured the respondents' perception of National Open University of Nigeria scheme.

The instrument was first given to two specialists in Educational Measurement and Evaluation in the Faculty of Education, Cross River University of Technology Calabar Campus to validate. Each of these experts adjudged the instrument as valid.

Data analysis was done to reflect the only hypothesis postulated to guide the study, which was:

There is no significant difference between male and female teachers in their perception of National Open University of Nigeria Scheme.

An independent t-test analysis of the scores derived from the responses to the items was done. This is to conform with the assertion of Denga and Ali (1998) that independent t-test should be used when we have two different groups of respondents in finding the significant difference. Here, we have two independent groups, which are, males and females.

The calculated t-value as shown in table 1 is 1.28 as compared to the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and at 248 degrees of freedom. In

this case the calculated t-value is lower than the critical t-value. As a result of this, the hypothesis is accepted. It is therefore evident that male and female students do not differ in their perception of National Open University of Nigeria Scheme.

Discussion

The result of the study reveals that male and female students in Calabar Study Centre perceive National Open University of Nigeria scheme the same way. This may be due to the students' exposure, experience, and their understanding of the gains of distance education. For instance, with the help of parents, distance education has been used with children as young as eight years of age. Similarly, with the aid of voluntary helpers, it has been used with adult illiterates. Distance education is a relatively less expensive, and Denga (1993) estimated that, it can cost less than half as much as residential education and less than three quarter the cost of conventional day schooling. Peters (2006) opines that, it maximizes the utilization of academic personnel and is therefore in the long run a cost saving measure in Nigeria.

This result was contrary to the findings of Nwagwu (1976), Forsyth (1975), and Abiri (1976) whose reports showed a sex difference between males and females in their perception of things. But Otung (1983) in his study found out that there was a positive perception of both male and female teachers in their apprehension towards teaching. Harris (1975) noted that perception is not a one directional exercise. Rather it may be positive or negative depending on situations and environmental factors. This is to say that sex has nothing to do with how students perceive distance education. Propping this, Bryant (1974) states that, perception is an individual's awareness of a reaction to stimuli. Individual's perception of the same event, person or thing may therefore vary depending on circumstances.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Perception is likely to be affected by mental set attitude, expectation or desire at a given moment so much that we sometimes perceive quite falsely that which we have been expecting to perceive. The egalitarian principle entrenched in the National Policy on Education. (2004), has made it necessary for more citizens to be educated. But the available institutions may not accommodate all who are yearning for education, hence the need for correspondence learning. Many workers have furthered their education

through the Open University option as they can sponsor themselves while they continue to maintain their families and dependents.

The idea of an Open University system for Nigeria as a separate and distinct institution to be organized nation wide was appropriately reflected in the National Policy on Education (2004:44), which stated emphatically and unambiguously that “maximum efforts will be made to enable those who can benefit from higher education to be given access to it. Such access may be through Universities or correspondence courses, Open University or part time and work study programme”. Male and female students in Calabar Study Centre have the same discernment of the National Open University of Nigeria Programme.

This study has succeeded to an extent in verifying students' perception of NOUN. To validate the findings of this study, further research is suggested to explore other areas which may include:

Determining the differentials in the perception of science and non science students towards NOUN Scheme; Assessing the relationship between students perception and their effectiveness; or finding out how teachers' perception of NOUN can influence their academic performance.

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Table 1: Mean, standard deviations and t-value relating to differences in students perception toward NOUN

Variable	N	X	SD	t-cal	t-crit
Male	138	95.5	82.9	1.28	1.96
Female	112	94.3	16.6		

Df = 248