Influence of Face-to-Face Facilitation on the Academic Performance of Postgraduate Diploma Students in Distance Education of the National Open University of Nigeria: Implications for Counselling

Okopi Fidel (PhD)
National Open University of Nigeria
okopifidel@yahoo.co.uk

&

Aminu Kazeem Ibrahim (PhD)
National Open University of Nigeria
aibrahim@noun.edu.ng

Abstract

The study investigated the influence of face-to-face facilitation on the academic performance of Postgraduate students’ in Distance Education of the National Open University of Nigeria. The study adopted an Ex-post facto research design. The sample consisted of 268 (134 facilitated students and 134 non-facilitated students). The instrument for data collection consisted of 2013/2014 first semester examination course result grades in four courses offered in the Postgraduate Diploma in Distance Education. The face, content and construct validities of these examinations were established by External examiners in the four subject areas appointed by the National Open University of Nigeria senate. The PGDDE examination course result grades were analysed using of t–test for independent samples at 0.05 level of significance. The finding showed that there were no statistically significant influence of face-to-face facilitation on the academic performance in Psychology of learning, Measurement and Evaluation and Good study Guide of facilitated postgraduate students’ and non-facilitated students. But face-to-face facilitation has a statistically significant influence on the academic performance in Sociology of Education between facilitated and non-facilitated students. The study recommended that since face-to-face facilitation seems to be ineffective mode of facilitation with PGDDE students, online modes of ODL facilitations should be made available on demand. Student counsellors should orient students on the two modes of facilitations so as to enable the students take informed decision based on their individual learning styles.

Key words: Face-to-face facilitation, Academic Performance, ODL, NOUN, PGDDE, and COL.

Introduction

Open and Distance Learning refers to education and training, making use of learning resources, rather than attending regular classroom session, is the central feature of the learning experience. (Col, 2002). Open and Distance learning does not depend solely on the day-to-day face-to-face classroom contact teaching and learning. Though there might be occasional face-to-face classroom contact, which is important and useful for learners to attend, it must be noted that attendance on the part of the students is not compulsory (National Open University of Nigeria, 2005). The term open and distance learning is an amalgam of two concepts, ‘open learning’ and ‘distance education, Dis-
tance Learning on one hand, refers to situations where learners are physically separated from the educational provider, communicating in writing (using letter mail, e-mail, fax or computer conferencing), verbally (by telephone, audio conferencing); or in face to face tutorial sessions. (COL, 2002). Open Learning, on the other hand, refers to situations in which learners use resources in a flexible way to achieve their goal. These resources may be print materials, audio or computer based. This can be used at home, at a study centre or in the work place; with or without the guidance of a tutor or mentor. The goals of ODL learners vary greatly from completing formal degree programmes at undergraduate or postgraduate levels, or even doing certificate and diploma programmes, to learning specific job related skills, to pursuing leisure interest (COL, 2003). These two broad models of delivering learning contents that is face-to-face and online facilitation are adopted by the National Open University of Nigeria but classroom face-to-face facilitation is practice at a lower degree when compared to on-line facilitation.

Many Open and Distance Learning institutions rely greatly on the On-line modes of facilitation because it allows learners to study when and where they choose. The ODL students continue learning while fulfilling commitments to work, family or community. Those living in remote areas or with limited transport can study courses that would otherwise be inaccessible to them. The On-line mode of facilitation also provide a variety of study opportunities, (academic, technical/vocational, personal and professional development, basic education) to a range of learners (young adults, adults returning to learning, people preparing to enter trades or professions, people acquiring new work-related skills, established professionals in health and education working towards further education (COL,2002).

Open and Distance Learning involves a rather low, if any at all, degree of interactivity between teacher and learner/student. That is why one of the features of ODL is the separation of learners and teachers in time or space or place, hence you may have students and teachers separated by perhaps thousands of kilometres. However, interaction is still considered vital and important in ODL. Single modes institutions like National Open University of Nigeria. In line with this, as of December 2013 National Open University of Nigeria has 54 study centres all over Nigeria (NOUN, 2013). One of the major roles of such study centres is to facilitate interaction between learners and the system i.e. the university through non-compulsory face-to-face facilitation.

While tutors may use different strategies to facilitate group and individual learning; the goal is the same as to enable learners to develop approaches to learning that meet their needs and are appropriate to the content and context (COL,2002). Facilitation in ODL therefore does not mean a face-to-face teaching as is done in conventional universities. It is not a substitute for lecturing, rather it is scheduled mainly on the basis of learners’ needs and meetings are conducted based on the complexities of the study material (Okopi, 2010). It is a support service which may or may not be used by the learners. Attendance at tutorials in ODL is therefore not compulsory. Tutorial Facilitators form an important segment of Learner Support Services in NOUN. Facilitators provide the much needed face to face opportunities for learners, they bridge the gap between the “faceless Lecturer and Professor” or the study material writer and, the Learners’.

But the most widely and consistent concern against ODL is the lack or non-regular face-to-face facilitation. This argument has extended to the occasional face-to-face facilitation provided to the students of NOUN even the postgraduate students, that the academic performance of students who enjoined face-to-face facilitation are better than those who do not, especially many who have been away from formal learning for some time. This concern has resulted in extensive re-
search into the factors that affect the quality of these programmes. Consequently, a plethora of new scholarly articles on the subject emerged, examining various aspects of teaching and learning in a comparative face-to-face versus distance education setting in diverse topics / subjects and across academic. These can be seen in the following related studies on differences between students who were facilitated through classroom face-to-face and those who were not facilitated in open and distance learning. For example, Shachar (2002); Shachar & Neumann (2003); Bennard et al. (2004) and the United States Department of Education report (2009), contributed to the on-going debate over the quality of ODL education (modes of facilitations) and consequently whether ODL should be accepted as a respectable and feasible option for education and is it quality relative to face-to-face facilitation. Desler (1997); Mondy, Noe & Premeaux (1999); Westwood (2001) cited in Mickey & Yoram (2010) and Mickey & Yoram (2010) in their twenty years meta-analysis and trend study estimated compared differences between the academic performance of students enrolled in distance education courses, relative to those enrolled in traditional settings, as demonstrated by their final course grades / scores between 1990 to 2009 period comprised of 20,000 students and provided effect sizes, clearly demonstrated that: 1) In 70% of the cases, students taking courses by distance education outperformed their students counterparts in the traditionally instructed courses; 2) The overall effect size was higher in favour of students from distance education; 3) distance education is not comparative to traditional instruction, but proportion of studies with positive effect sizes to the total number of studies per period, demonstrated a continuous growth from 63% in period 1 to 84% in period iv. Malik (2009) study on On-line versus face-to-face learning discovered no significant difference after the study examined numbers of instruction in Master’s level courses of students in an on-line course in cognition, learning and assessment and compared it with the performance of students in a face-to-face classroom setting of the same course. Wilson (1997) in his study of facilitation in on-line learning environments. The study discovered that tutors responses favoured the on-line presentation of the course as compared to face-to-face teaching. Tacer, Mccomell & Kogan (2004) study compared the effects of delivery medium (online vs. face-to-face) and facilitation content expertise on academic outcomes in a problem – based learning (PBL) course in anatomy for pre-health / medical majors. The content of online PBL sessions was examined to gain insight into the problem-solving process taking place in these situations. Neither the delivery medium nor the facilitator’s content expertise had any statistically significant impact on students’ quiz performance.

Although, students initiated most of the questions during online PBL sessions, the majority of these questions were at the lower levels of Bloom’s taxonomy and focused primarily on gathering information about the cases. Vivalariam (2011) study on the effects of social facilitation on individual performance showed that the average participants mental performance increase in the average participant’s physical performance. This finding was said to be related to Triplet: findings in revealing that social facilitation affects a person’s performance. In line with this finding, a replication experiment and triplet’s study, in both suggested that peer presence and encouragement (social facilitation) increases performance.

All these findings are similar, but studies on differences in academic performance among open and distance learning students who received the ODL form of face-to-face facilitation and On-line facilitation can hardly be traced. Based on this, this present study investigated whether there are significant differences in the academic performances of
postgraduate diploma in distance education students of the National Open University of Nigeria who were provided with ODL form of face-to-face facilitation and their peers who were not facilitated in Postgraduate Diploma in Distance Education (PGDDE) of the University.

Statement of the Problem

The study is designed to investigate the influence of face-to-face facilitation on the academic performance of postgraduate students in Distance Education off the National Open University of Nigeria. This became necessary by the persistent fear and complaints by the Open and Distance learning students of the National Open University of Nigeria students that the lack of constant face-to-face facilitation by the University is responsible for their drop-out, poor academic performance cumulating into their poor academic achievement. This fear and complaints cut across undergraduate and postgraduate students of the University. To buttress this points, the University recently introduced a postgraduate programme in Distance Education for the interested staff of the University without the staff paying any tuition fee but among the six hundred and thirty-seven staff that registered for the programme only two hundred and sixty-eight staff sat for first semester examination due to excuses related to lack of face-to-face facilitation for the staff outside the headquarters in Lagos. The suggestions by Mickey &Toram (2010) that the future in ODL Education call for research to examine Distance Education learning by academic subjects, asynchronous / synchronous / blended methods etc. also necessitated this research. In addition, the global context of education is changing. Globalization is having an impact on higher education similar to its influence on Open and Distance Education. One measure of this is the way universities have had to become responsive and attentive to students complains and fear that may have negative impact on academic performances, achievements and completion of the programme. The University system of open and distance education worldwide particularly, the National Open University of Nigeria is more concerned about their mode of facilitation so as to cater for the diverse students in the system.

Research Objectives

The following research objectives were formulated for the study:

1. To determine whether there is a significant difference in the academic performance in Psychology of Education between facilitated and non-facilitated PGDDE students of NOUN.
2. To determine whether there is a significant difference in the academic performance in Measurement and Evaluation between facilitated and non-facilitated PGDDE students of NOUN.
3. To determine whether there is a significant difference in the academic performance in Sociology of Education between facilitated and non-facilitated PGDDE students of NOUN.
4. To determine whether there is a significant difference in the academic performance in Good Study Guide between facilitated and non-facilitated PGDDE students of NOUN.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated for the study:

1. Is there a significant difference in the academic performance in Psychology of learning between facilitated and non-facilitated PGDDE students of NOUN?
2. Is there a significant difference in the academic performance in Measurement and Evaluation between facilitated and non-facilitated PGDDE students of NOUN?
3. Is there a significant difference in the academic performance in Sociology of
Education between facilitated and non-facilitated PGDDE students of NOUN?

4. Is there is a significant difference in the academic performance in Good Study Guide between facilitated and non-facilitated PGDDE students of NOUN?

**Research Hypotheses**

The following null-hypotheses were formulated for the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the academic performance in Psychology of Education between facilitated and non-facilitated PGDDE students of NOUN.
2. There is no significant difference in the academic performance in Measurement and Evaluation between facilitated and non-facilitated PGDDE students of NOUN.
3. There is no significant difference in the academic performance in Sociology of Education between facilitated and non-facilitated PGDDE students of NOUN.
4. There is no significant difference in the academic performance in Good Study Guide between facilitated and non-facilitated PGDDE students of NOUN.

**Methodology**

**Research Design**

The research design adopted for this study was an Ex-post factor design. In the study, the design was used to collect academic performances through examination and tutor-marked assignments (TMA) course result grades in Psychology of learning, Measurement and Evaluation, Sociology of Education and Good Study Guide after the students’ end of semester examination in postgraduate diploma in distance education. The end of semester examination Course result grades contained the addition of individual students total in Tutor-Marked Assignment and Examination scores all over 100%.

**Population**

The population consisted of six hundred and thirty-seven (637) postgraduate students of the National Open University of Nigeria (School of Postgraduate Studies, NOUN, 2013).

**Sample and Sampling Technique**

The sample consisted of two hundred and sixty-eight (268) students. This falls into two groups. Group one is made up of one hundred and thirty-four (134) facilitated students’ and group two is made up of one hundred and thirty-four (134) non-facilitated students’. The facilitated students comprised of the Headquarters staff and three other NOUN study centres in Lagos. The non-facilitated students spread across other NOUN study centres outside Lagos.

The sampling techniques used were purposive and simple random sampling techniques based on the nature of this investigation.

**Data Collection Instrument**

The instruments used for data collection consisted of semester examination course result grades for both facilitated and non-facilitated students in four courses (Psychology of learning, Measurement and Evaluation, Sociology of Education and Good Study Guide) offered in the Postgraduate Diploma in Distance Education of the University (School of Postgraduate Studies, NOUN, 2013).

**Validation of the research Instrument**

The face and content validity of these examinations were established by External Examiners in four subject areas appointed by the National Open University of Nigeria senate.

**Administration of Research Instruments**

The researchers were personally involved as tutor of postgraduate diploma in distance education of the National Open University of Nigeria and therefore, personally collected and compiled the required data.
Methods of Data Analysis

The researchers employed both descriptive and inferential statistics for data analysis. The end of semester examination course result grades were analysed at 0.05 level of significance with the use of t-test for independent samples. SPSS version 20.0 was utilized in the computation.

Results

The results of the study were presented below:

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the academic performance in Psychology of Education between facilitated and non-facilitated PGDDE students of NOUN.

Table 1 shows the test for difference between the academic performance in Psychology of learning of facilitated and non-facilitated students of NOUN.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
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<td>133</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>0.017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychology of learning of non-facilitated students’</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>51.396</td>
<td>7.45</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: t-test analysis of academic performance in Psychology of learning of facilitated and non-facilitated PGDDE students of NOUN (N=268)

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the academic performance in Measurement and Evaluation between facilitated and non-facilitated PGDDE students of NOUN.

Table 2 shows the test for difference between the academic performance in Measurement and Evaluation of facilitated and non-facilitated students. The analysis shows t-test of 1.93 at asymptotic level of 0.056 is not statistically significant.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference in the academic performance in Sociology of Education between facilitated and non-facilitated PGDDE students of NOUN.

Table 2: t-test analysis of academic performance in Measurement and Evaluation of facilitated and non-facilitated PGDDE students of NOUN (N=268)
Hypothesis Four: There is no significant difference in the academic performance in Good Study Guide between facilitated and non-facilitated PGDDE students of NOUN.

Table 4 shows the test for difference between the academic performance in Good Study Guide of facilitated and non-facilitated students. The analysis shows t-test of 1.001 at asymptotic level of 0.319 is not statistically significant.

Discussion

The research findings indicated no significant difference between the academic performance in Psychology of learning, Measurement and Evaluation, and Good Study Guide except Sociology of Education of facilitated and non-facilitated postgraduate students of Distance Education in National Open University of Nigeria. Overall, the results of the non-statistically significant influence of face-to-face facilitation on students’ academic performance in Psychology of learning, Measurement and Evaluation, Good Study Guide and significant influence of facilitation in Sociology of Education in Diploma in Distance Education of the National Open University of Nigeria respectively could be attributed to other extraneous factors. Such factors include the delivery medium, the facilitator’s content expertise, presence and encouragement of peer groups during face-to-face facilitation.

The present study findings agree with Malik (2009) study on On-line versus face-to-face learning as earlier mentioned. But the finding that a significant difference existed in academic performance in Sociology of Education between facilitated and non-facilitated students disagrees with the finding of Wilson (1997) study on facilitation of on-line learning environments. The present study
disagrees with the finding of Tacer, Mccomell & Kogan (2004) study that compared the effects of delivery medium (online vs. face-to-face) and facilitation content expertise on academic outcomes in a problem-based learning course in anatomy for pre-health/medical majors. These findings also disagree with Desler, 1997; Mondy, Noe & Premaeus, 1999; Westwood, 2001 quoted from Micky & Yoram (2010) and Mickey & Yoram (2010) findings of study on twenty years meta-analysis and trend study that estimated and compared differences between the academic performance of students enrolled in distance education courses, relative to those enrolled in traditional settings, as demonstrated by their final course grades/scores that falls between 1990-2009.) In 70% of the cases studied, students taking courses by distance education outperformed their students counterparts in the traditionally instructed courses; 2) The overall effect size was higher in favour of students from distance education; 3) distance education is not comparative to traditional instruction, but proportion of studies with positive effect sizes to the total number of studies per period, demonstrated a continuous growth from 63% in period 1 to 84% in period iv, but similarly agree with the finding that there was statistically significant difference in academic performance in sociology of education between facilitated and non-facilitated PGDDE students of NOUN. Also the finding of significant influence of facilitation in Sociology of Education PGDDE programmes agrees with Vivalaraiam (2011) study which revealed that social facilitation affects a person’s performance. In line with this finding, a replication experiment and triplet’s study in both suggested that peer presence and encouragement (social facilitation) increases performance. This also supported by the finding of this study that there was statistically significant difference in academic performance in sociology of education between facilitated and non-facilitated PGDDE students of NOUN could be attributed to the extraneous factor of presence and encouragement of peer groups during face-to-face facilitation.

**Recommendation**

The study recommended that since face-to-face facilitation seems to be an ineffective mode of facilitation with PGDDE students, online modes of ODL facilitations should be made available on demand. Student counsellors should orient students on the two modes of facilitations so as to enable the students take informed decision based on their individual learning styles.

**Conclusion**

Findings of this research work discovered that there were no statistically significant differences of the influence of face-to-face facilitation on the academic performance in Psychology of learning, Measurement and Evaluation and Good Study Guide between the facilitated and non-facilitated postgraduate students in the Distance Education programme of the National Open University of Nigeria., but there was a statistically significant difference in academic performance in Sociology of Education. The researchers are of the opinion that the significant difference in the academic performance of facilitated and non-facilitated PGDDE students in Sociology of Education could be attributed to extraneous factors such as delivery medium, the facilitator’s content expertise, presence and encouragement of peer groups during face-to-face facilitation, which were not considered in this study.

**Implications for Counselling**

To facilitate learning, the student counsellors should liaise with ODL university institutions and make sure students are provided with other options of facilitation apart from face-to-face or online modes of facilitation so as to enable the students take informed deci-
sion based on their individual learning styles and also to cater for diverse students’ characteristics in the ODL institutions. During induction/orientation programme, student counsellors are expected to orient the students on the availability of different modes of facilitation and other support services. Also it is incumbent on the part of the student counsellor to teach the students the skills for students’ centred organised study circle such as facilitation, active listening etc. and help them, not only in organising study circle that is facilitated by the students themselves but making them understand the rudiments of facilitation either face-face or e-facilitation. The student counsellors should inform the University to allow the students to make a choice or select their preferred form of facilitation without been imposition. In cases where the two or more different modes of learning delivery systems are provided, Student counsellors should assist the students to make choices or select their preferred forms of facilitation based on their individuals’ learning styles.
References:


