

## **The Distance Education**

Distance education has been defined as a field of education that focuses on teaching methods and technology with the aim of delivering teaching to students who are not physically present in a traditional educational setting, such as the classroom. It is a system aimed at creating access to learning when time or distance or both separate the source of information and the learners.

## **Open and Distance Learning**

Open learning is an innovative movement in education that emerged in the 1970s. It refers mainly to activities that either enhance learning opportunities within formal education systems or broaden learning opportunities beyond the formal education systems (Wikipedia).

The educational philosophy of open learning emphasizes giving learners choices about: medium or media of learning, place and pace of study, support mechanisms as well as entry and exit points.

The combination of the philosophy of open learning and distance education gave birth to open and distance learning. Open and distance learning is one of the most rapidly growing fields of education and its potential impact in all educational delivery has been greatly accentuated through the development of Internet-based information technologies, and in particular the World Wide Web (UNESCO, 2002).

The development of the open and distance learning in Nigeria is rooted in a policy. The 1977 National Policy on Education (NPE) has anticipated the coming of open and distance learning. The 1977 edition of the NPE states: “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, or open universities, or part-time and work study programme”. It is unknown however if this was as a result of the role of distance education in the lives of some early Nigerians.

However, in 2002, a new Open University, with the name, National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) was established during the tenure of another civilian president, Chief Olusegun

Obasanjo. It has to be on record that Chief Obasanjo not only established the NOUN, he demonstrated the relevance of the university by enrolling as a student of the university immediately he left office as the President. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo started with the Post Graduate Diploma in Christian Theology after which he went ahead to the Masters' Degree and capped it up with a Doctor of Philosophy degree. Today, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo has made history by becoming the first doctoral graduate of Christian Theology and of NOUN.

## **Characteristics of Open and Distance Learning**

### **1. Separation of Teacher and Learner**

One major distinguishing feature of open and distance learning system from the conventional system is the distance between the teachers and the learners. This separation occurs in two planes: place and time. By place, we mean that the teachers and the learners do not live or meet at any time. Let us take NOUN as an example, while the headquarters, which houses most of the faculties where the lecturers are, is situated at Abuja, the students are literally scattered across the country. In fact, most of the

students may never meet any of the lecturers till they graduate from the university. This is distance in place.

## **2. Accessibility**

Apart from accessibility due to relaxation of entry requirements discussed under openness, open and distance learning offers “learning opportunities to individuals who are disadvantaged because of their location or gender or economic constraints” (p. 11). The disadvantaged people include prisoners.

NOUN has study centres in many prisons in Nigeria and some of the prisoners have graduated from their chosen courses. Hitherto, prisoners in Nigeria have no access to higher education due to the closed nature of universities and the closed nature of the prison too. Apart from prisoners, women in purdah too have been securing access to higher education because of the accessibility offered by the open and distance learning.

## **3. Technologically Driven**

Even in the days of distance education, technological advancement had always contributed to the development of the educational industry. We have also stated in Unit 1 that technological development accelerated the coming of open and distance learning. Fozdar (2015) also says that the advancement of information and communication technologies “have given rise to new opportunities for sharing information, resources, and experiences, as well as providing network opportunities with student peers, tutors, and the instructors”

#### **4. Use of Mixed Media Courseware**

The use of various types of media to pass on instruction to the learners is a major feature of the open and distance learning system. The mixed-media courseware includes print, radio, television broadcast, audio, video, computer-based instruction and telecommunications. Though we have to admit that this feature is just partially operated in NOUN currently, it has been clearly stated in the university’s blueprint that it is the way to go about instructional delivery. We also have to admit that the university is striving to ensure that this is done in the nearest time possible.

## **5. Interactivity**

One of the major criticisms against all odds is the lack of contact between students and lecturers on the one hand between learners on the other. To resolve this problem, practitioners of open and distance learning have touted interactivity. Speaking in this vein, Nakpodia (2010) believes that the separation of student and teacher imposed by a vital link of communication between these two important stakeholders in open and distance learning.

## **Learning Characteristics of ODL Learners**

### **1. Motivated**

Most learners in the open and distance learning institutions are said to be intrinsically motivated and thus do not require a lot of motivation to get them interested in their course of study. It has been argued that the physical absence of the teacher and other peers usually leads to distraction and discouragement, therefore, as a student in the open and distance learning institution you need

to keep yourself motivated. To successfully keep yourself motivated, it is important to connect with other classmates (Littlefield, 2012). Also, “collaborating with peers in the discussion groups can be an effective way to motivate learners to stay on task (Seckel, 2007:23).

## **2. Adaptation to Technology**

For most of the young adults who have found their way into the open and learning institutions, working in an online environment may not be a problem as they are all digital natives. However, if you are above the age of 50 (you belong to the group that are either digital illiterates or digital migrants), there is the need for you to adapt to the use of technology. As you would have discovered, there is no way you can survive in NOUN if you are not computer literate or computer savvy. From your admission process to registration for courses and examination registration, you have to go through an automated process. Apart from this, all Tutor Marked Assignments as well as the 100 and 200 levels, examinations are administered electronically.

### **3. Discipline**

If you want to be successful as a distance-learning student, you must be able to discipline yourself. As Cheurprakobkit et al. (2002) reports, students in online learning environments must possess “self” behaviours such as “self-discipline, self-monitoring, self-initiative, and self-management”. For example, as a result of the physical absence of a lecturer, it is very easy for learners to feel tired and skip reading assignments. It takes a lot of self-discipline to be able to read, complete assignments or participate in online discussion forums that may be demand usually on a daily basis.

### **4. Active Participation**

This means that as a student you must participate actively in all the demands of the course as directed by your facilitator. This includes participation in the discussion forums as well as the chat forums. To participate actively means you would have to make you comments on the discussion topic as well as comment on the contributions of the other students. This is an essential process of learning in the open and distance learning environment.



## **5. Reflective Skills**

Reflective skill is one of the important skills expected of an open and distance learning institution's student. Dabbagh (2007) defines reflective skills as the ability to apply frequent and substantive consideration and assessment of one's learning process and products. Through this process, the learner can identify their strengths and weaknesses and then build up an improvement. As Seckel (2007) says, these types of assessment takes the form of "diaries, online blogs, or [reflection assignments](#) and are useful in revisiting the material they have covered in the course, and reflect on what was gained from the experience and from the materials covered" (p. 25).

## **Learners' Support Services**

Garrison and Bayton (1987) define learners' support services as the resources that learners can access in order to carry out the learning process. Garrison (1989) observes that in distance education, "support is concerned with a range of human and non-human resources to guide and facilitate the educational transaction"

Simpson (2002) offers another beautiful definition. He approached the definition of learners' support from a broader sense and he sees it as all measures beyond the production of study materials that support students in their learning process. However, he brought in another dimension by differentiating between academic and non-academic support. On academic support, he wrote:

Academic support consists of: defining the course territory; explaining concepts; explaining the course; feedback-both informal and formal assessment; developing learning skills such as numeracy and literacy; chasing progress, following up students' progress through the course; enrichment-extending the boundaries of the course and sharing the excitement of learning (p.9).

## **Function of Learners' Support Services**

### **1. Cognitive Function**

Cognitive support facilitates learning through the mediation of the standard and uniform elements of course materials and learning resources for individual settings (Tait, 2000).

## 2. Affective Function

Affective services provide an environment that supports students, creates communities and enhances self-esteem (Tait, 2000:28).

## 3. Systematic Function

Systemic support services establish administrative processes and information management systems that are effective, transparent and student-friendly.

noungeeks.com

## **Types of Learners' Support Services**

### 1. Teaching and Learning Services

According to Bowa (2008), teaching and learning services consists of the following activities:

- a. Teaching and learning contacts,

- b. Network and learner support centres
- c. Compulsory residential schools

## **2. Social and Personal Support Services**

Social and personal needs services includes the following activities:

- a. Pre-course registration and counselling
- b. Internet and e-mail support
- c. Peer support/study groups

noungeeks.com

## **3. Information Support Services**

Chattopadhyay (2014) opines that learners should be provided all necessary information prior to admission of their course so that they can make appropriate decisions about their studies and also have access to all resources and support services. Information support services include the following:

- a. Information on fees and financial support

- b. Information on administrative procedure and regulations
- c. Information on registration and admission

### **Meaning and Guidelines for Selecting Assessment**

Assessment occupies a vital position in the process of teaching and learning, certification and acquiring knowledge and skills, whether in a conventional system, or an ODL system. Assessment is a sub-system of the total ODL system. A vast mechanism works for managing students' assessment.

All activities an instructor carries out in order to ascertain the level of achievement and ability of any learner is a form of assessment. Nitko and Brookhart (2007) described assessment as a process for obtaining information that is used for making decisions about students, curricula, programme, schools and educational policy. Assessing students' competence involves collecting information to help decide the degree to which the student has achieved the learning targets. Assessment is classroom research to provide useful feedback for the improvement of teaching and learning.

**Assessment** is feedback from the student to the instructor about the student's learning.

Assessment is conducted in the ODL system mainly:

1. To provide feedback to learners starting from assignments to the term-end examination; to get an idea about what they are really doing and what they are supposed to do to complete the programme; and to generate a spirit of consciousness to connect the concept of written materials with the varieties of practices carried out by the learner.
2. To reach at summative evaluation based on formative assessment, which helps learners to examine their performance at every stage of their study and progress successfully to attain the course objectives.
3. Assessment in ODL is not only meant for students to earn a grade, it is equally helpful for monitoring the effectiveness of academic programmes and adopting appropriate strategies to accomplish institutional objectives.

4. The practice of assessment in ODL is not only for certifying students, it also impacts their learning improvement and helps learners to develop a positive attitude towards the institutional system (Commonwealth of Learning, 1999).

## **Definition of Evaluation**

**Evaluation** is a continuous process of inquiry concerned with the study, appraisal, and improvement of all aspects of the educational programmes. Evaluation also leads to decision-making among several alternatives. The **scope** of evaluation involves value judgement, ascertaining the extent to which educational objectives have been ascertained, effectiveness of appraisal of instructions and identifying learners' strength and weaknesses.

## **Importance of Evaluation/Assessment**

1. Instructional Management

Assessment helps you to make decisions on how to plan instructional activities, placing students into learning sequences, monitoring students' progress, diagnose learners' learning difficulties, providing students and parents with feedback about achievements, evaluating teaching effectiveness and assigning grades to students.

## 2. Selection

In Nigeria, learners are often considered and selected or rejected for admissions into various schools and institutions based in their performance in approved assessment bodies like Federal, State, National examinations council (NECO), West African examination Council (WAEC) given to them. When institutions use assessment for selection purpose, it is necessary to show the candidates that results on the assessment bear a significant relationship to success in the programme or job for which the institution is selecting persons.

## 3. Placement

People are assigned to different levels of the same general type of instruction, education or work; no one is rejected, but all remain



within the institution to be assigned to some level (Cronbach, 1990).

## **Types of Assessment**

### **1. Assessment for Learning**

Assessment for learning is given for diagnosing learners' problems and difficulties during instructional processes. It is administered to provide remediation to alleviate such difficulties. It is referred to as [formative assessment](#).

Formative assessment leads to judgement of students' about the quality of students' achievement made while students are still in the process of learning. Its result is used to improve teaching and to help to guide students' learning. It provides feedback for deriving appropriate intervention. Assessment for learning is especially useful for teachers as they develop, modify and differentiate teaching and learning activities. It is continuous and sustained throughout the learning process and indicates to students their progress and growth.

## **2. Assessment of Learning**

Assessment of learning is cumulative in nature. It is used to confirm what students already know and what they can do in relation to the program of studies outcomes. Assessment of learning is an essential part of your study and it focuses on all kinds of ways you would have to undergo to test your abilities and achievement during the course of your study.

It is otherwise called [summative assessment](#). This helps your instructors to evaluate students after you have finished one or more units of study. Summative information is needed about a students' achievement that counts towards grades for a marking period. It comes at the end of a semester or session to ascertain what you have attained in course or programme with a view to awarding you with a degree in the institution. Summative assessment is also carried out to check whether an educational programme is successful or not.

## **3. Assessment as Learning**

Assessment as learning focuses on fostering and supporting metacognitive development in students as they learn to monitor and reflect upon their own learning and to use the information

gathered to support and direct new learning. This involves taking assessment as a field of study that one can specialise on and on which one have in-depth knowledge. As a discipline assessment makes one to become an expert in order to contribute to that area of the body of knowledge.

noungeeks.com