



Administrators Roles in Enhancing Performance of Facilitators in Open and Distance Learning Study Centers in Rivers State

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to understand the role of administrators in enhancing the performance of facilitators in open and distance learning centers in Rivers State. The study involved 73 facilitators, 41 males and 32 females, from study centers in Port Harcourt and Iribe. A structured questionnaire was used, validated by experts in Measurement and Evaluation and the Department of Educational Management at Rivers State University. Key findings revealed that facilitators lack proficiency in using information and communication tools, irregular allowances undermine motivation, and inadequate facilities do not align with the increasing student population. The study recommends effective collaboration between administrators and facilitators to improve facilitator performance.

INTRODUCTION

Education is seen as one of the major instruments for preparing human resources needed for enhancing development in various sectors of the society. The result of globalization has led to high enrollment for many tertiary institutions. With the increasing demand for higher education, it has become clear that individuals need to constantly learn new skills so as to remain employed, relevant and competitive in a knowledge driven and digital economy. This educational aspiration of learners can be fulfilled through open and distance learning. The Nigerian government realized the contribution of education to national development, so introduced open and distance learning, with a view to create opportunity for those who missed the chance of acquiring education. This led to the introduction of programmes such as part-time, sandwich, corresponding programmes etc. According to Boyi (2013) these programmes were designed to bridge the educational gap that exist in the country.

Aderinoye and Ojokheta (2004) contended that open and distance learning serves as an effective tool to address gaps in educational provision. Consistent with this perspective, the Federal Republic of Nigeria incorporated provisions for open and distance education in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014). This mode of educational delivery is defined as one where physical contact between learners and teachers is not necessary, offering a highly adaptable learning environment utilizing diverse media and technologies to deliver quality education to a large audience. The policy outlines its objectives as ensuring access to quality education and promoting equity in educational opportunities for those who may otherwise be excluded, addressing employers' specific needs by offering specialized workplace certificates, fostering the internationalization of higher education institution curricula, and mitigating the effects of brain drain in tertiary institutions.

Open and distance education is recognized as an investment in human capital development (Tekeli & Gunsoy, 2014). Ojokheta (2010) supported the notion that open and distance education enables individuals from various backgrounds to acquire knowledge and skills that enhance their productivity, creativity, and societal contributions. Similarly, Jimoh (2013) described open and distance learning as a form of education distinct from the traditional schooling system, accessible to students without direct interaction with teachers. This approach has been embraced to address the growing demand for higher education. However, achieving these goals depends on effective administration to manage and monitor the progress of the process.

Distance learning administrators are individuals who are saddled with the responsibilities of overseeing and coordinating all distance learning activities. A school administrator must be a support leader who is adaptable, creative, takes initiative and formulates internal educational policies. The coordination and execution of these educational policies cannot be achieved by just the administrator but must be in collaboration with the effort of the facilitator. A facilitator in open and distance learning is a teacher who does not

operate under the traditional concept of teaching, but rather is meant to guide and assist students in learning for themselves.

Roles of the Administrator

The administrators of open and distance learning centers are required to be innovative, have imaginative skills, problem solving and risk taking skills as well as flexibility to adapt to changes. These skill will help them develop strategies to enhance facilitators' performance for quality delivery. Furthermore, it is expected that the administrators monitor progress, success, reward and development or training of the facilitator. According to Falcinelli and Moscetti in Osuji and Bakpo (2022), facilitators' training must be centered on innovation taking into account digital technologies as a support for the realization of new educational paradigms. Furthermore, Anderson and Dexter (2012) stated that the provision of information and communication tools such as computer laptops and internet will assist the teacher (facilitator) to communicate, create, disseminate store and manage information to the understanding of the 21st century students.

The administrators should make provision for ICT training for facilitators and also make provisions for information and communication tools to effectively enhance quality delivery in a mediated learning system like the open and distance learning. Jimo (2013) emphasized on the need for administrators to encourage facilitators on self enhancement or training to enhance digital knowledge. He further stated that timely provision of adequate course materials and adoption of more interactive instructional methods will enhance facilitators' performance in open and distance learning. Osuji, Epelle and Alabere (2023) opined that in order to withstand or overcome the challenges, administrators must ensure that facilitators are equipped with functional technological skills and knowledge to carry out their duties effectively. Achuonye (2018) sharing the same view noted that administrators should ensure that facilitators acquire necessary ICT skills, integrate ICT facilities fully into day-to-day instructional process and produce course-wares which are indigenous in the implementation of open and distance learning curriculum content.

Historical Background of Distance Education in Nigeria

The origin of distance education in Nigeria can be traced back to correspondence education, aimed at preparing candidates for the General Certificate in Education, a prerequisite for the London Matriculation Examination (Omelewa, 2012). The inception of indigenous distance learning programs began with the English by Radio program of the Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation after the country gained independence in 1960. Initially targeted at primary and secondary school levels, this program focused on core subjects, with particular emphasis on Science, Mathematics, and English. Concurrently, technology-driven distance learning initiatives emerged, such as the Educational Television Programs of the National Television of Nigeria (NTV) and Schools Education Broadcast by Radio Nigeria.

Over the past 31 years, significant changes have occurred in the instructional delivery modes of university education programs in Nigeria. The Correspondence and Open Studies Unit (COSU) of the University of Lagos, established in 1974 and later renamed Correspondence and Open Studies Institute (COSI), now known as the Distance Learning Institute, pioneered university-affiliated distance education in Nigeria. Similarly, the National Teachers' Institute (NTI), founded in 1976 with UNESCO's support, initially trained Grade Two Teachers (TC II) and later introduced the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) program in 1990, along with the PDGE program in 2005.

Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) initiated its distance education through the Teachers-in-Service Education Programme (TISEP) for Grades Three and Two teachers, subsequently offering the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE). In addition, the University established a University of the Air Programme for secondary school teachers and teacher training colleges in November 1972. The Distance Learning Institute of the University of Ibadan, which commenced in 1979 as the External Degree Programme, also adopted the distance learning approach.

The establishment of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) in July 1983 marked a significant milestone as the country's first distance learning tertiary institution. Recognizing the limitations of traditional face-to-face classroom instruction to meet the growing demand for education, the government established NOUN. However, the institution was temporarily closed shortly after its establishment in 1984 by the Federal Military Government. The Act establishing the university was reinstated in 2002, prompted by the need to address the demand for education, regulate the proliferation of outreach study centers by conventional universities, and capitalize on advancements in ICT that have revolutionized distance education instructional methods. This led to the revival of NOUN.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive survey design, focusing on a population of 73 facilitators, consisting of 41 males and 32 females from study centers in Port Harcourt and Iribe. Due to its manageable size, the entire population was included in the study, indicating a census approach. The research instrument, titled "Administrators' Roles in Enhancing Performance of Facilitators in Open and Distance Learning Questionnaire (AREPFODLQ)," underwent validation for both face and content by two experts in Measurement and Evaluation and the Department of Educational Management at the Faculty of Education, Rivers State University. The questionnaire utilized a structured format with a 4-point modified rating scale, ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD), corresponding to scores of 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively. The reliability of the instrument was evaluated using Cronbach Alpha Statistics, yielding a cumulative reliability coefficient of 0.72. Mean and standard deviation were utilized to address the research questions, while hypotheses

were tested using the z-test at a significance level of 0.05. A criterion mean of 2.50 was employed to differentiate between "Agree" and "Disagree" for the research questions, with mean scores below 2.50 categorized as "Disagree" and those at or above 2.50 as "Agree." The null hypothesis was either rejected or upheld based on whether the calculated z-value exceeded or fell below the z-critical value of ± 1.96 .

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: What roles do administrators play in enhancing performance of facilitators in open and distance learning in Rivers State?

Table 1. Mean Responses of Male and Female Facilitators on the Roles Administrators Play in Enhancing Performance of Facilitators in Open and Distance Learning Centers in Rivers State.

S/ N	Items	Male Facilitators N =41			Female Facilitators N = 32		
		\bar{X}	SD	Rmks	\bar{X}	SD	Rmks
1	Administrators encourage facilitators on the need for self enhancement or training to enhance digital knowledge	2.65	0.03	Agree	2.51	0.01	Agree
2	Regular payment of facilitators allowances, motivates facilitators for higher performance.	2.60	0.01	Agree	2.52	0.01	Agree
3	Adopting of more interactive instructional method will help facilitators.	2.63	0.02	Agree	2.53	0.01	Agree
4	Timely provision of adequate course materials will enhance facilitators performance.	2.62	0.01	Agree	2.53	0.02	Agree
5	Involving facilitators in decision making on the presentation of course materials for effective learning.	2.65	0.01	Agree	3.60	0.02	Agree
	Grand \bar{x} and SD	2.63	0.01		2.54	0.19	

Table 1 shows that all the items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 had grand mean scores of 2.63 and 2.54 for both male and female facilitators. This infers that the respondents are on the same agreement on the roles administrators play in enhancing performance of facilitators in open and distance learning in Rivers State.

Research Question 2: How does provision of ICT training enhance performance of facilitators in open and distance learning in Rivers State?

Table 2. Mean Responses of Male and Female Facilitators on How Provision of ICT Training Enhance Performance of Facilitators in Open and Distance Learning Centers in Rivers State.

S/ N	Items	Male Facilitators N =41			Female Facilitators N = 32		
		\bar{X}	SD	Rmks	\bar{X}	SD	Rmks
6	Organizing training and workshops frequently for facilitators will enhance their performance.	2.52	0.02	Agree	2.51	0.02	Agree
7	Effective Information and Communication Technology (ICT) capacity building programmes for facilitators will enhance their performance.	2.43	0.01	Disagree	2.07	0.01	Disagree
8	Monitoring how facilitators manage communication between and among students will motivate facilitators to work.	2.60	0.03	Agree	2.57	0.02	Agree
9	Provision for adequate feedback mechanism so as to get students to participate during online sessions.	2.60	0.03	Agree	2.53	0.02	Agree
10	Sustaining effective collaboration between administrators and facilitators	2.65	0.03	Agree	2.56	0.02	Agree
	Grand \bar{x} and SD	2.56	0.01		2.50	0.02	

Table 2 shows that all the items except item 7 have mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. With grand mean scores of 2.56 and 2.50 for both male and female facilitators, this infers that the respondents are on the same agreement on how provision of ICT training enhance performance of facilitators in open and distance learning in Rivers State.

Hypotheses

Ho₁ There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female facilitators on the role of administrators in enhancing performance of facilitators in open and distance learning centers in Rivers State.

Table 3. z-Test Analysis of Difference in the Mean Responses of Male and Female Facilitators on the Roles Administrators Play in Enhancing Performance of Facilitators in Open and Distance Learning Centers in Rivers State.

Variables	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	α	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Male facilitators	41	2.63	0.01					
				71	0.05	0.02	± 1.96	Failed to reject
Female facilitators	32	2.50	0.19					

The data presented in Table 3 above illustrated the results of a z-test analysis comparing the mean ratings of male and female facilitators regarding the role of administrators in enhancing the performance of facilitators in open and distance learning centers in Rivers State. With a significance level of 0.05 and 71 degrees of freedom, the calculated z-value of 0.02 was found to be less than the critical z-value of ± 1.96 . Consequently, the null hypothesis, which posits that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female facilitators regarding the administrators' role in enhancing facilitators' performance, was retained.

H₀₂ There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female facilitators on how provision of ICT training enhance performance of facilitators in open and distance learning centers in Rivers State.

Table 4. z-Test Analysis of Difference in the Mean Responses of Male and Female Facilitators on How Provision of ICT Training Enhance Performance of Facilitators in Open and Distance Learning Centers in Rivers State

Variables	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	α	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Male facilitators	41	2.56	0.01					
				71	0.05	0.01	± 1.96	Failed to reject
Female facilitators	32	2.50	0.02					

The data presented in Table 4 above depicted the results of a z-test analysis comparing the mean ratings of male and female facilitators regarding the impact of ICT training provision on enhancing facilitators' performance in open and distance learning centers in Rivers State. With a significance level of

0.05 and 71 degrees of freedom, the calculated z-value of 0.01 was determined to be less than the critical z-value of ± 1.96 . Consequently, the null hypothesis, which asserts that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female facilitators regarding the effectiveness of ICT training provision in enhancing facilitators' performance, was upheld.

The results from research question 1 in Table 1 indicated that respondents are in agreement regarding the roles administrators play in enhancing facilitators' performance in open and distance learning in Rivers State, with grand mean scores of 2.63 and 2.54. Similarly, the findings from hypothesis 1 in Table 3 revealed no significant difference in the mean ratings between male and female facilitators concerning the administrators' role in enhancing facilitators' performance, as the z-calculated value of 0.02 was lower than the z-critical value of ± 1.96 . This finding aligns with the assertion made by Osuji, Epelle, and Alabere (2023) that administrators must ensure facilitators are equipped with functional technological skills to effectively address challenges in open and distance learning.

Regarding research question 2 as shown in Table 2, respondents demonstrated agreement on how the provision of ICT training enhances facilitators' performance in open and distance learning in Rivers State, with grand mean scores of 2.56 and 2.50. Likewise, the results from hypothesis 2 in Table 4 indicated no significant difference in the mean ratings between male and female facilitators concerning the effectiveness of ICT training provision in enhancing facilitators' performance, with a z-calculated value of 0.01 falling below the z-critical value of ± 1.96 . This finding is consistent with the assertion by Anderson and Dexter (2012) that providing information and communication tools such as computer laptops and internet aids facilitators in effectively communicating, creating, disseminating, storing, and managing information for the understanding of 21st-century students.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that facilitators who are to prepare students in a digitalized environment lack the proficiency and skills in the use of information and communication tools for teaching and learning in a mediated learning environment. However, provision for ICT training and information and communication technology tools are administrators' roles to enhance performance of facilitators in open and distance learning centers in Rivers State.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Administrators in open and distance learning centers should ensure that facilitators are equipped with functional technological skills and knowledge by making provisions for ICT training to enable them carry out their duties effectively.
2. Administrators in open and distance learning centers should make provisions for information and communication technology tools such as computer laptops and internet to assist facilitator to communicate, create,

disseminate store and manage information to the understanding of the 21st century students.

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