

STAKEHOLDERS PERCEPTION ON SOME SELECTED CRITICAL ISSUES IN OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper investigates stakeholders' perception on some critical issues in Open and Distance Learning institutions (ODL) in Nigeria. It also seeks to clarify whether there is any significant difference in stakeholders' perception between staff of dual-mode and unimodal institutions.

The scope covers institutions in Nigeria that operate dual-mode instructional delivery where regular face-to-face university instructional system co-exists with online delivery mode, and unimodal institution. The dual-mode institutions are Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife; University of Ibadan, University of Lagos; Maddibo Adama University, Yola; Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; and University of Abuja, while the uni-mode is National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN).

The research adopted a quantitative survey design of the ex-post-facto. Staff of the institutions constitute the study population, while purposive sampling method was used to select the respondents which include the management of the institutions and staff involved in teaching online courses. A validated questionnaire was used to obtain data from the respondents. The questionnaire was physically administered by the researchers to one hundred staff of one dual-mode institution and NOUN.

The findings show that stakeholders have positive perceptions of how ODL is managed in Nigeria, and there is no significant difference in perception based on stakeholders' institutional affiliation. Stakeholders also hold similar perception on procedure for staff engagement, types of courses to be offered, funding, targeted audience, and procedure for quality control.

Key words: *Perceptions, Management, Open and Distance Learning.*

Introduction

The history of university education in Nigeria commenced with the establishment of the University College Ibadan in 1948. The University was affiliated to the University of London. In 1962 however, the institution became a full-fledged university, and was re-designated to the University of Ibadan. Other institutions that were established shortly in 1962 after Nigeria obtained independence in 1960 are the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; University of Nigeria, Nsukka; University of Lagos, Akoka Lagos; and University of Ife, now Obafemi Awolowo University. These institutions are often euphemistically referred to as first generation universities. At present, there are one hundred and twenty seven (127) universities, forty one (41) are federal institutions, and twenty five (25) are state owned institutions, whereas sixty one (61) are private universities.

Technology has stimulated a shift toward the Open and Distance Learning. A Few institutions were given permission by National Universities Commission (NUC) to operate open and distance education alongside the conventional face- to-face regular system and thereafter regarded as dual-mode institutions. These institutions include Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, University of Lagos, University of Ibadan, Madibo Adama University of Technology, Yola, University of Abuja, Ladoke Akintola University, Ogbomosho and University of Benin.

The National Teachers Institute (NTI) is a dedicated institution as an educational provider to distance learners, but does not operate an open and distant mode – their delivery mode is face-to-face. The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) is the only institution that provides educational services to distant learners using open and distance learning mode. The NOUN was initially established during the Second Republic Government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari led administration between 1976 – 1980. The Second Republic was however terminated by the military government of Buhari/Idiagbon on December 31st 1980 and proscribed the institution. It was re-established by the Obasanjo government in 2004.

Dual-mode learning institutions established a separate unit to cater for distance education. The nomenclature varies from university to university, but largely with the same service focus. However, structure differs between unimode and dual-mode institutions

The goals of Distance learning in Nigeria as stated in the National Policy on Education, section 9 (92) include:

- a. The provision of access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied;
- b. Meeting special needs of employers by mounting special certificate courses for their employees at their work places;

- c. Encouraging interaction especially of tertiary education curricular; and
- d. Ameliorating the effect of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing Nigerian experts as teachers regardless of their locations or places of work.

Statement of the Problem

The usual practice of part-time/distance learning programme for learners is the operation of study centres and holiday programmes which is not explicitly stated in the National Policy on Education (NPE). The NPE canvasses for technology driven distance education. The landscape is gradually changing among dual-mode institutions. There is a shift in focus from face-to-face to e-learning delivery mode.

If the platform for education delivery is changing, it is expedient to investigate the perception of stakeholders on some critical factors in operation of open and distance education across uni-mode and dual-mode institutions in Nigeria. Key decisions need to be taken to analyse the cost-benefit, do-ability-non-do-ability, prospects and challenges of the open and distance learning, and whether to reject or accept changes. Given this background, this article seeks to examine if there is any significant difference in the perceptions of stakeholders in the management of open and distance education learning by uni-mode and dual-mode institutions in Nigeria. The issues being investigated are (1) targeted audience (prospective learners), (2) courses being offered, (3) funding, (4) staff engagement policy and (5) quality control.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to:

1. explore the perception of stakeholders on the management of Open and Distance Learning in Nigeria
2. determine the stakeholders' significant difference based on institutional affiliation on their perceptions on some critical factors in managing open and distance learning in Nigeria.

Research questions

1. What is the perception of stakeholders on some critical issues such as funding quality control, courses being offered, staff policy in the management of Open and Distance Learning in Nigeria?
2. Is there any significant difference in perceptions of some critical factors in ODL in Nigeria based on institutional affiliation?

Methodology

The study employed a survey design of the ex-*post-facto* method. The university administration, senior faculty members, staff of Open and Distance Learning Centres, Senior Staff members of the university (Non-Academics) served as population. The respondents consist a sample of one hundred staff members were separately drawn from National Open University of Nigeria, Lagos and Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, both in Nigeria. A self-designed, validated questionnaires were used to obtain data, having undergone reliability and validity tests. The researchers personally administered the questionnaire on the respondents over a period of three months. The data obtained were analysed with descriptive methods of analysis (percentage) and inferential statistical analysis (ANOVA).

Results and Discussion

Research Question 1

Perception of Stakeholders on the Management of Open Distance Learning in Nigeria

This focuses on how stakeholders perceive relevant issues in ODL and how they relate to positive running of the Open and Distance Education in Nigeria, and its viability as an alternative platform of learning. Data collected through the administration of questionnaire were analysed using Analysis of Variance and the results in Table 1 was obtained.

Table 1: Perception of Stakeholders on the Management of Open Distance Learning in Nigeria

Stakeholders' Perception	Frequency(f)	Percentage (%)
Unfavourable	24	24.7
Favourable	73	75.3
Total	97	100.0

The study show that stakeholders who have favourable perception are 75.3 percent of the respondents while 24.7 percent were unfavourable. It is then inferred that stakeholders have a favourable perception of the issues investigated. The study further investigated the relative perception across institutional affiliation between Unimode and dual-mode institutions and the results show that there was no significant influence of institution on their perception of open and distance learning as an alternative platform for learning and the existing management structure. The result is stated as follows: Open ($M = 91.000$, $SD = 4.93$) and OAU instructors, $M = 87.754$, $SD = 5.13$; $t(95) = 2.854$, $p < .05$. Since the p-value is less than 0.05 significant level, the result therefore implies that

institutional arrangement either from a dual-mode or uni-mode institution has no significant influence on respondents' perception of managing online learning. However, it can be observed that instructors from the Open University had a higher mean than their counterparts from the OAU, indicating that instructors from the Open University perceived managing online learning more favourably than the instructors from the OAU. This is shown in the table 2.

Stakeholders' Relative Perception of Management Structure of Open and Distance Learning

Table 2: t-test of significant difference between respondents in Uni-Mode and Dual-Mode Institution' perception of managing of online learning

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T	df	Sig.
OPEN	28	91.00	4.9291	.93152	2.854	95	.0000
OAU	69	87.75	5.1347	.61814			

Research Question 2 (a)

Relative Perception of Dual-Mode and Uni-Mode Stakeholders on some Critical Factors in ODL (Courses Offered)

The focus here is to clarify whether stakeholders from Uni-mode and Dual-Mode institutions are significantly different in their perceptions of courses to be offered in ODL and how it should be administered.

The result is shown in the table 3.

Table 3: t-test of significant difference in perception of stakeholders' based on institutional affiliation on courses to be offered in ODL programmes

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	P
OUN	28	11.429	1.5736	.29738	-.683	95	.496
OAU	69	11.696	1.8093	.21782			

The results show that institutional affiliation does not significantly affects stakeholders' perceptions as there was no significant difference in the perceptions of stakeholders from the NOUN and the OAU on courses being offered in online mode. For the NOUN ($M = 11.429$, $SD = 1.57$) and OAU ($M = 11.696$, $SD = 1.81$; $t(95) = -.683$, $p > .05$). Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, the result therefore implies that stakeholders' institutional affiliation has no significant influence on instructors' perception of courses offered.

On the structure of courses, Chiyongo (2010) observes that students at the University of Zambia are allowed to transfer credits along delivery mode. In this arrangement, students can commence studies in distance mode but can convert to full-time mode. The management decisions have key role in ensuring quality across the modes (distance and full-time). The writer observes further that out of all five institutions that run distance education in Zambia, only Zambia Open University operates full distance modes, while other dual-mode institutions operate blended approach. With reference to staff, both part time and full time lecturers are used for instruction (facilitate courses).

Research Question 2 (b)

Relative Perception of Dual-Mode and Uni-Mode Stakeholders on some Critical Factors in ODL (Staff Engagement and Utilization)

The study seeks to examine if stakeholders differ in their perception with respect to staff to use of ODL, weather to use the existing regular face-to-face staff or use a new set of instructors or the combination of the two. From the findings, respondents seek to toe the same line of thought as there is no significant difference in their opinions. This is shown in the table 4.

Table 4: t-test of significant difference in perception of stakeholders based on institutional affiliation on staff engagement.

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	P
OPEN	28	7.7500	1.32288	.25000	2.288	95	.024
OAU	69	7.0725	1.32086	.15901			

Table 4 shows the significant difference in the perception of stakeholders based on institutional affiliation on staff engagement. It can be observed from the table that there was a significant influence of institutional affiliation on instructors' perception of managing online learning in terms of staff engagement, Open ($M = 7.750$, $SD = 1.32$) and OAU instructors, $M = 7.073$, $SD = 1.32$; $t(95) = 2.288$, $p <$

.05. Since the p-value is less than 0.05 significant level, the result therefore implies that institutional affiliation has significant influence on instructors' perception of managing online learning in terms of staff engagement for the programme.

Kearsley (2013) highlights some roles that staff needs to occupy in distance education. While some distance education institutions use their staff to man (play) these roles, some may be outsourced. The most important is the adequacy and competence of staff.

Research Question 2 (c)

Relative Perception of Dual-Mode and Uni-Mode Stakeholders on some Critical Factors in ODL (Funding)

Funding is an integral and important consideration in ODL programmes. The result here show that instructors do not significantly differ in their opinion. This is shown in the table 5.

Table 5: t-test of significant difference in perception of stakeholders base on institutional affiliation on funding.

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	P
OPEN	28	25.5714	2.65872	.50245	.134	47.727	.894
OAU	69	25.4928	2.51830	.30317			

Table 5 shows the **significant** difference in perception of stakeholders' based on institutional affiliation on funding of the programme. It can be observed from the table that there was no significant influence of institution affiliation on instructors' perception of managing online learning in terms of funding of the programme, Open (M = 25.571, SD = 2.66) and OAU instructors, M = 25.493, SD = 2.52; $t(47.73) = .134$, $p > .05$. Since the p-value is greater than 0.05 significant level, the result therefore implies that institutionall affiliation has no significant influence on instructors' perception of managing online learning in terms of programme funding.

Research Question 2 (d)

Relative Perception of Dual-Mode and Uni-Mode Stakeholders on some Critical Factors in ODL (Targeted Audience – Prospective Learners))

Table 6: t-test of significant difference in perception of stakeholders' based on institutional affiliation on targeted audience.

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	P
OPEN	28	12.7857	1.77132	.33475	2.835	68.666	.015
OAU	69	11.5217	2.44714	.29460			

Table 6 shows the significant difference in perception of stakeholders' based on institutional affiliation on targeted audience. It can be observed from the table that there was a significant influence of institutional affiliation on instructors' perception of managing online learning in terms of targeted audience, Open (M = 12.786, SD = 1.77) and OAU instructors, M = 11.522, SD = 2.45; $t(68.67) = 2.835$, $p < .05$. Since the p-value is less than 0.05 significant level, the result therefore implies that institutional affiliation has significant influence on instructors' perception of managing online learning in terms of targeted audience. Majorie and Sosulski (2011) identified various categories of online learners and their characteristics. They include the "digital pros", the "digital evolved, the "digital adopters", the "pre-digital", the classic (young) learner, and adult (working class) who have additional responsibilities at home or career. To manage these diverse groups requires sound management skills. Managing learners in terms of learning styles, learners' characteristic is a key to success in e-learning, it provides clues as to planning courseware, strategies, higher participation and robust completion rate (Beaudoin, 2013)

Research Question 2 (e)

Relative Perception of Dual-Mode and Uni-Mode Stakeholders on some Critical Factors in ODL (Quality Control))

Table 7: t-test significant difference in perception of stakeholders' base on institutional affiliation on quality control.

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	P
OPEN	28	6.9286	1.21499	.22961	1.949	95	.054
OAU	69	6.3623	1.32810	.15988			

Table 7 shows the significant difference in perception of stakeholders' based on institutional affiliation on quality control. It can be observed from the table that there was no significant influence of institutional affiliation on instructors' perception of managing online learning in terms of quality control, Open ($M = 6.929$, $SD = 1.21$) and OAU instructors, $M = 6.362$, $SD = 1.33$; $t(95) = 1.949$, $p > .05$. Since the p-value is greater than 0.05 significant level, the result therefore implies that institution affiliation has no significant influence on instructors' perception of managing online learning in terms of quality control.

Conclusion

The study shows there is no significant difference in the perception of respondents from the two different institutions on courses to be offered; structure of delivery mode in terms of face-to-face, online, and blended approach; quality control; staff; and funding. However, there are differences on the nature of targeted audience. The probable explanation for this is the philosophy of each of the universities which are significantly different. The OAU is traditionally a face-to-face institution with a rich culture of excellence on this platform before exploring online delivery mode, while the NOUN is a dedicated institution focusing largely on the working class.

The NOUN has a higher positive perception of online programme in agreement with her nature of delivery mode in open and distance learning, while the OAU main instructional delivery is face-to-face.

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