
**STUDENTS' CONCERNS AND VIEWS ON EFFECTIVENESS OF
IMPLEMENTATION OF A POST-DIPLOMA IN BASIC EDUCATION DISTANCE
LEARNING PROGRAMME**

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ABSTRACT: *This study sought to find out issues of serious concern to Post-Diploma students at the Kumasi Study Centres of the University of Education, Winneba, distance education programme. It also solicited their views on how to address those concerns. A descriptive cross-sectional quantitative survey using a self-designed structured questionnaire was employed to randomly select 291 respondents from a population of 1,200. The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was 0.73. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 16.0 version). The study identified inadequate feedback and contact with lecturers/instructors, poor facilities and conditions at the study centres, high cost of programme, delay in the supply of modules, absenteeism of instructors, among others, as issues of serious concern to students. The number one issue of concern was delay in the supply of modules. It was revealed that early supply of modules, ensuring improvement in facilities and conditions at the centres, among others, would address students' concerns on the programme. The study contributes to the importance of student involvement in successful implementation of distance education programmes.*

KEYWORDS: Students Concerns, Distance Learning, Programme, Students Involvement, Effective Implementation, Views.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary times, Distance Education (DE) has become a major means of providing university education all over the world for varied reasons. In the last decade, the idea of DE has accordingly become ubiquitous among Ghanaian Universities as a complement of the residential system of education; especially teacher education. The residential/campus-based system had been effective in meeting the educational needs of the country until economic constraints and the rapid growth in student numbers necessitated the adoption of DE as a supplement to the tertiary placement crises (Lawoe, 2005). Constraints like insufficient residential facilities, lack of infrastructure and logistics, and inadequate number of lecturers are other important reasons for the implementation of the DE policy/programme among Ghanaian Universities in recent times.

Undoubtedly, DE has brought much relief to the enrollment problems of tertiary level education institutions in Ghana. Apart from DE providing access to those who could not join the mainstream of University students in the residential systems, it is helping many, especially teachers and the working class, to upgrade and enhance their professional skills and career

development opportunities. Another benefit of the DE programme is that it provides self-support and arguably less expensive University education to people living in distant locations, who cannot leave their jobs, home and family, to go to school.

Despite its merits and role in addressing major challenges that confront residential university education, students who are the ultimate beneficiaries of the DE programmes, are in many cases plagued with a lot of concerns. These concerns are usually the result of inadequate involvement of students in the planning and implementation of DE programmes/policy by university administrators and faculty.

Keegan (1986) also opined that distance students have concerns and that their concerns fall into several distinct categories such as costs and motivation, teacher contact and feedback, student support services, alienation and isolation, lack of experience and training. A study by Oberg and Henri (1999) in two distance learning programs in teacher-librarianship at the University of Alberta in Canada, and Charles Sturt University in Australia indicated that, students were concerned about the issue of equivalent standard, credibility, costs, equity, practicality, student community, and student support. In a position paper, Koomson (1998) pointed out that high cost of DE programmes to students, inadequate supervision, loneliness and denial of moral support of an on-campus environment, having to cope with domestic responsibilities and learning at the same time, are matters of concern to distance learners in Ghana. However, the present researchers are not aware of any empirical study on the concerns of distance learners in the Ghanaian context.

LITERATURE

Arguments in favour of students' involvement in the planning and implementation of DE programmes

Alleen (1995) argues that if a nation is serious about empowerment in the provision of any form of education, (for instance distance education) then students should be encouraged to voice their concerns and opinions about curricula, participate in decisions, and talk and act in the planning and implementation of the programme like citizens in a democracy. Furthermore, if students become active participants in decision making, then more positive collegial relationships will develop between teachers and students (Grace, 1999; Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Fullan (1991) suggests that "we must start treating students as people – we should stop thinking of students just in terms of learning outcomes and start thinking of them as people who are being asked to become involved in new activities" (p.189). The argument for students' involvement in planning and enacting curricula is further advanced by the fact that the experiences of students are primarily what education is about; hence, firsthand accounts of the experiences of students is an extremely valuable source of information for planning and implementing a curricula package (Banks,1994; Goodlad & Oakes, 1998; Sapon-Shevin, 2001). Students have the right to negotiate and evaluate what they learn as clients of the school (Marsh and Willis, 2007). In business dealings, clients (students) have specific expectations and rights. In virtually every human endeavour, clients decide what services they want and whether these services have been provided satisfactorily.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the reality is that in many cases students are not afforded the rights of clients; there appears to be an unequal distribution of status and authority between

teachers and students. Many studies suggest that distance students are alienated from schools because of such inequalities (King, 1990). Allowing the distant student participation in planning, implementing and evaluating what they do in school is one way of ending their alienation and other concerns they might have so far the distance programme is concerned.

The University of Education Distance Education Programme

The University of Education, Winneba (UEW) is the pioneer of university level distance education programmes in Ghana. The University started its programme in 1996 ahead of other Universities like the University of Cape Coast (UCC), University of Ghana (UG), and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), upon the adoption of the Distance Education Policy (DEP) in the country based on the recommendations of a number of sponsored surveys between 1991 and 1994 to assess Distance Education needs of Ghana (www.od.org/worldreview/volume6.htm). The University of Education, Winneba, with support from the then United Kingdom Overseas Development Agency (ODA) now Department for International Development (DFID) started the distance education programme ahead of others in 1996 by admitting its first batch of 196 students to pursue Post-Diploma Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) degree in English Education, Life Skills Education, Mathematics Education, and Science Education. Today, the University runs distance education programmes in diploma in basic education, post-diploma degree in basic education, post-graduate diploma in education, and postgraduate Master of Arts degree in English in over 50 centres across Ghana (Graduation brochure, 2015). The Institute for Educational Development and Extension (IEDE) is mandated by the University to run its Distance Education programmes. The mission of the Institute is to provide leadership in the development, provision, and maintenance of effective extension services in education to prepare teachers, educational professionals, and people from other professions and industries for service to the nation.

Few studies have been conducted on the University of Education, Winneba, Distance Education programme since its introduction. Adra (2000) researched into the profile of distance education students of the University Education, Winneba. Owusu-Mensah (2006) also researched into Learner support for University Distance Education in Ghana, focusing on students and providers' perceptions at the University of Education, Winneba and the University of Cape Coast. Akrofi (2010) investigated the challenges and prospects of the programme by focusing on students and tutors at the Koforidua Study Centre. The ongoing research interest in the UEW Distance Education programme is a justification that there are more issues that warrant research investigation to contribute to the effective running of the Distance Education programme as many other important issues remain unaddressed by these previous studies. The problem of DE planners not adequately involving students in the planning and implementation of distance programme could cause the distant learner to have concerns about pertinent issues. However, there is no empirical study to find out the concerns students have on the University of Education Winneba, Distance Education programme. The current study therefore sought to investigate Issues of serious concern to students on the University of Education Winneba, Distance Education programme, as well as their views on how these concerns could be effectively addressed.

Challenges of Distance Education/Learning

The literature is replete with several examples of challenges of distance education. According to Bishop and Spake (2003), policymakers are confronted with an array of choices relating to planning DE, such as infrastructure, student support, support to academics for their changing

role as distance educators, and costs, to name a few. In addition to this, distance education delivery is faced with changes such as the movement from correspondence-type delivery to open access and technology-enhanced learning where technology is changing constantly (Bishop & Spake, 2003).

The history and evolution of Distance Education (DE) is well documented, but the planning process of a DE unit within a university and how to ensure quality education to students in the DE mode are vague. The literature available deals with certain aspects of planning and implementation of DE. What matters most is that consideration must be given to the different challenges when a DE unit is planned (Watkins & Kaufman 2003).

Distance Education continues to face challenges and criticisms from faculty and its publics. Badu-Nyarko (2000) opines that distance learners are bound to face various challenges including lack of motivation, ineffective methods of teaching and learning, adjustment to family life and work demands and management of time. According to Kim and Shih (2003), the evaluation criteria for distance learning programmes affect instructional quality and performance of students, which in turn influence how much potential employers trust distance education. Afzaal and Israr (2011) pointed out that many people in Pakistan perceive distance learning as of poor quality and they believe the performance of the distance learning students is poor compared to the performance of the traditional (regular) students.

According to Galusha (1997) the major challenges to distance education can be grouped into student-related challenges, faculty-related challenges, organizational-related challenges, and course-related challenges. Challenges encountered by the students fall into several distinct categories such as costs and motivation, feedback and teacher contact, student support services, alienation and isolation, lack of experience and training (Keegan, 1986). Teachers in developing countries are low income earners and they find it difficult to pay their fees and also meet family responsibilities (Adentwi, 2002). According to Adentwi and Sarfo (2009) family problems, inability to contact other members, lack of interaction, lack of motivation, lack of extra curricula activities and complacency on the part of students are major challenges of distance education. Amanor (2005) found that the major problems facing the students were lack of access to library facilities, isolation in the learning process, difficulty in managing the disposable study time and lack of encouragement, especially among those in the remote rural areas. He further observed that many of the students needed personal help to remain in the programme. Support services provided by distance institutions to facilitate teaching and learning include tutoring, counseling, library services, feedback, provision of modules and face-to-face tutorials (Rowntree, 1992).

Keegan (1986) in a study in Mongolia indicated that students did not receive adequate student support services such as access to electronic or telephone communication and feedback from instructors.

A study conducted at Athabasca University (AU) by Coldeway et al (2003) indicated that distance learners were motivated when they had frequent contact with their instructors. Thus, lack of adequate contact with course instructors is an issue of serious concern to students in distance education. Feelings of alienation and isolation are another challenge facing distance students (Badu-Nyarko, 2010). Geographical isolation has been identified as one of the major problems for distance students (Oaks, 1996). Usually, on-campus learners do not feel isolated because they interact with other learners, have access to their lecturers and instructors, spend time in the library, and can draw on the varied support systems provided when necessary. But

the how to effectively replicate the support systems enjoyed by the on-campus students for those studying by distance mode poses a continuing challenge for tertiary providers. Studies in Ghana by Adra (2000); Amanor (2005); and Badu-Nyarko (2000) however revealed that the Ghanaian student learning at a distance is not completely isolated. This is because apart from the modules (learning materials) given to them, they occasionally interact with either peers or course instructors during face-to-face tutorials organized fortnightly or on monthly basis.

Research by Owusu-Mensah (2006) identified the following from the perspective of both students and providers to be the needs of Distance Education students. These are: Library facilities; financial support; proximity to centre; counselling; effective communication; more tutorial hours; cooperation from their peers; sleeping accommodation; study skills; and time management. One can logically deduce from Owusu-Mensah's finding that students would likely have serious issues of concerns on the UEW Distance Education programme if these needs are not met on the programme. However, the same study indicated that UEW provides support services to students on the programme in the form of face-to-face tutorials; general academic advise; tutor-marked assignments; personal counselling; library; student loan, and telephone tutorials.

Even though there is much literature on challenges of distance education, literature on students concerns is hard to find. The researchers assume the challenges students face on distance education programmes are also their concerns.

Compared to traditional students, distance learners are more likely to have learning insecurities. Cost issues, disruption of family life, and lack of support from family and employers have effects on distance learners resulting in higher dropout rates (Knapper, 1988). Moreover, employers and the society as a whole have been slow to accept distance education graduates as equivalent to those having degrees conferred by universities through the traditional conventional system (Kim & Shih, 2003).

Effective organization and management is a must for a successful distance education programme. In an instance where an institution fails to involve students in the planning and implementation of the distance programme and in addition combines the programme with the residential programme as in the case of UEW, additional responsibilities are added to instructors and administrators which make the organization and management of such an institution become more complex (Bates, 1995). In such a situation, the organization and management of the distance education programme in all probability is not likely to receive the same degree of attention from the lecturers/instructors and administrators as the regular residential programme and invariably this is a recipe for students to have serious concerns with the implementation of a Distance Learning programme.

Though some few researches have been conducted into the University of Education Distance Education programme, the focus was not to investigate into the concerns of the students on the programme. Owusu-Mensah (2006) for instance used a mixed method approach to study Learner support for University Distance Education in Ghana, focusing on students and providers' perceptions at the University of Education, Winneba (UEW) and the University of Cape Coast (UCC) using a sample of 381 from six centres for UEW and 530 from seven centres for UCC respectively. Among the key findings with respect to UEW Distance Education programme were that; students need Library facilities, financial support, proximity to centre, counselling, effective communication, more tutorial hours, cooperation from their peers, sleeping accommodation, study skills, and time management. Also, the study revealed that the

University provides support services to students in the form of face-to-face tutorials; general academic advising; tutor-marked assignments; personal counselling; library; student loan, and telephone tutorials.

However, Akrofi (2010) used a quantitative descriptive survey to research into the challenges and prospects of the UEW Distance Education programme at the Koforidua Study centre using a total sample size of 381. The study found inadequate feedback, inadequate modules, inadequate support, delayed supply of modules and inadequate tutor motivation as major challenges confronting the programme. The study also found higher professional training, teacher efficiency, teacher accessibility to University education, reducing pressure on regular admission, and potential to attract more teachers as the prospects the UEW Distance Education programme offers. Akrofi however, acknowledged that though Distance Education at UEW presents several issues of concern that need investigation, his focus was to only study the challenges and prospects of the programme but not the broader issues of concern to students. To contribute to what Owusu-Mensah (2006) and Akrofi (2010) have done, this study therefore seeks to ascertain in broader scope some common issues of concern to the UEW Post-Diploma in Basic Education Distance students and perspectives of students to address learners concerns at the two study centres in Kumasi. This study is important as it will strengthen empirical knowledge and understanding of effective implementation of distance education curriculum.

Research Questions

RQ1. What are the issues of concern to students on the UEW Post-Diploma in Basic Education Distance Learning Programme at the Kumasi study centres?

RQ2: What is the number one issue of concern to students on the UEW Post-Diploma in Basic Education Distance Learning programme at the Kumasi study centres?

RQ3. What suggestions/measures from students' perspective can be adopted to address students concerns on the UEW Post-Diploma in Basic Education Distance Learning programme at the Kumasi study centres?

METHODOLOGY

The study was a descriptive cross-sectional quantitative survey. The population consisted of post-diploma students' on the UEW Basic Education Distance Learning Programme at the Kumasi study centres as at February, 2018. The total population was 1,200 made up of 500 first year and 700 final year students respectively. The sample size was 291. This was statistically estimated in relation to the 1,200 population using Krejcie and Morgan's sample size table based on the formula developed by the National Education Association (NEA, 1960). The data gives 95% confidence interval with 5% margin of error. A Self-designed structured questionnaire (SDSQ) was used to collect data. All the items were closed-ended, except two items. The structured items were measured on a five point Likert-type scale, and ranged from very little important to very important, coded 1 to 5 respectively. The instrument was subjected to expert judgment for content, construct and face validity. The improved draft was pilot- tested with 17 distance students to ascertain the reliability of the instrument for use. The Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient for the instrument was 0.730; an indication that the instrument was reliable. Through simple random sampling technique, the instrument was self-administered to the respondents in the month of February, 2018, during the students' face-

to-face meetings. Two hundred and ninety-one questionnaires were administered in the process and were all returned and analyzed. The responses from the two open ended questions were summarized and coded together with the closed ended responses to facilitate analysis of the data. The data from the questionnaires were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 16.0 version). The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results are presented in tables and a pie chart.

RESULTS

Research Question 1

Table 1: Issues of Concern to Students on the UEW, Kumasi Centres, Post-diploma Basic Education Distance Programme

No	Variable	N	Min Max	–	Mea n	SD	Skwnes	Sum
X ₁	Inadequate feedback and contact With Lecturers	291	1	5	3.94	1.144	-1.292	1,147
X ₂	Poor facilities & conditions at the study centre	291	2	5	3.88	1.054	-.830	1,129
X ₃	Delayed supply of modules	291	1	5	4.30	1.409	-1.449	1,198
X ₄	Modules not user friendly	291	1	5	2.43	1.320	-.915	707
X ₅	Inadequate student support	291	1	5	3.88	1.409	-1.133	1,129
X ₆	Inadequate face-to-face tutorial meetings with Lecturers/Tutors	291	1	5	3.71	1.404	-.941	1,080
X ₇	Lecturers/Tutors absenteeism	291	3	5	4.29	.686	-.456	1,248
X ₈	Overwhelming assignments	291	1	5	2.21	.985	-1.546	643
X ₉	Low integration of Technology	291	2	5	4.00	1.061	-.707	1,164
X ₁₀	Societal perception of poor students' performance	291	2	5	3.71	.920	.125	1,080
X ₁₁	Low regard by Employers	291	1	5	3.88	1.166	-1.084	1,129
X ₁₂	Lack of co-curricular activities	291	1	5	3.82	1.074	-.978	1,112
X ₁₃	High Cost	291	2	5	4.00	1.000	-.850	1,164
X ₁₄	Isolation & Alienation	291	2	5	4.25	1.183	-1.380	1,237
X ₁₅	Quality of Instruction	291	1	5	2.88	1.219	-.219	838
X ₁₆	Organization of Programme.	291	1	5	2.88	1.185	-.639	838
X ₁₇	Duration of Programme	291	2	5	3.35	.996	.031	975
X ₁₈	Quality of Course Structure	291	1	4	2.82	1.185	-.639	821
X ₁₉	Programme Uncompetitive	291	1	5	3.71	1.160	-.707	1,080

Scale: Very Little Important (VLM, 1) to Very Important (VM, 5)

A look at the results of the mean responses and the standard deviations in Table 1 shows that, a number of issues are of serious concern to the post-diploma students on the UEW, Post-Diploma in Basic Education Distance Programme. The important issues of concern as indicated by the respondents' were: Inadequate feedback and contact with Lecturers/Instructors ($\bar{x}= 3.94$, $SD =1.144$), Poor facilities and conditions at the adopted study centres ($\bar{x}= 3.88$, $SD =1.054$), Delayed supply of modules ($\bar{x}= 4.12$, $SD = 1.409$), Inadequate student support services ($\bar{x}= 3.88$, $SD = 1.409$), Inadequate face-to-face tutorial meetings with Lecturers/Instructors ($\bar{x}= 3.71$, $SD = 1.404$), Lecturers/Instructors absenteeism ($\bar{x}= 4.29$, $SD = .686$), Low integration of Technology ($\bar{x}=4.00$, $SD =1.061$), Societal perception of poor students' performance ($\bar{x}= 3.71$, $SD = .920$), Low regard by Employers ($\bar{x}=3.88$, $SD =1.166$), Lack of co-curricular activities($\bar{x}=3.82$, $SD =1.074$), High Cost of fees ($\bar{x}=4.00$, $SD =1.000$), Isolation and Alienation ($\bar{x}=4.25$, $SD =1.183$).

Contrary to the literature, the students did not find the volume/number of assignments given them on the programme, and the modules not being user friendly, as issues of important concern ($\bar{x}=2.21$, $SD =.985$); ($\bar{x} = 2.43$, $SD = 1.320$). Students were however neutral about their perception of the quality of instruction ($\bar{x}=2.88$, $SD =1.219$); the organization of the programme ($\bar{x}=2.88$, $SD =1.185$); the duration of the programme ($\bar{x}=3.35$, $SD =.996$); and the quality of the course structure ($\bar{x} = 2.82$, $SD = 1.185$) as issues of very serious concern to them.

Research Question 2

Students' Number one Issue of serious Concern on the Distance Education Programme

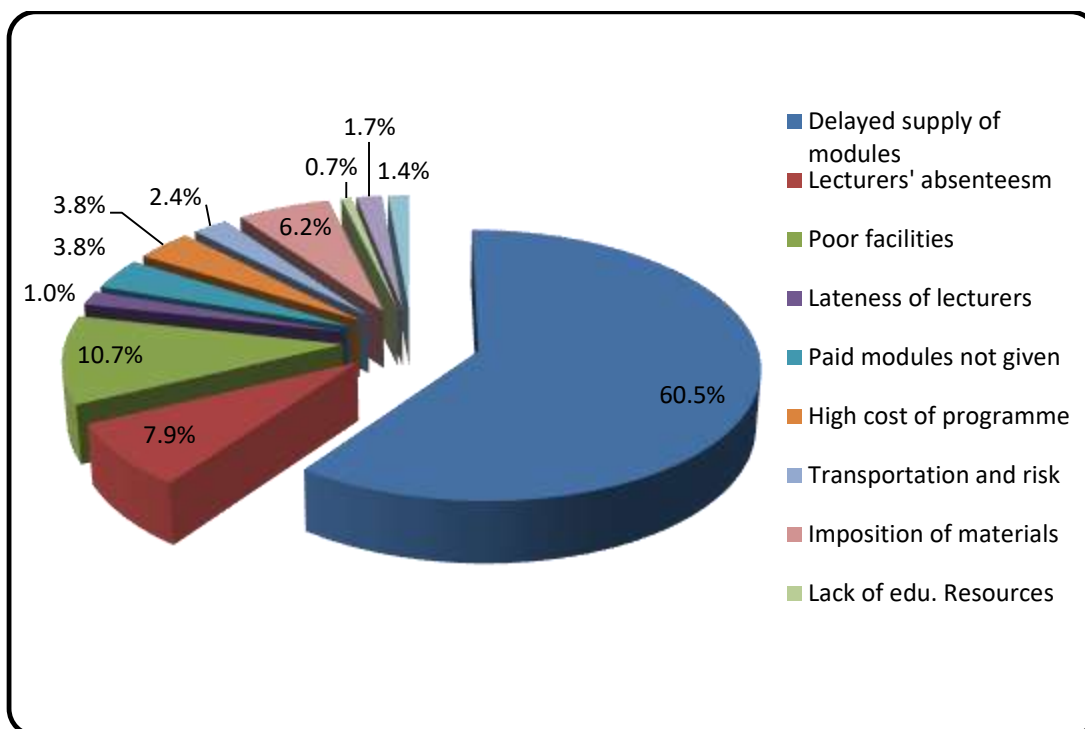


Fig.1: Students' number one Issue of Concern on the Programme

Figure 1 shows the percentage distribution of issues of concern to students' on the programme. The responses revealed that majority (60.5%) of the respondents perceived and reported delay

in the supply of modules to students as the number one issue of concern. This was followed by poor facilities and conditions at the study centres (10.7%), lecturers/instructors absenteeism (7.9%), and imposition of materials (6.2%). Thus, the results indicate that delayed supply of modules is the issue of most serious concern to students on the programme.

Research Question 3

Table 2: Rank of Suggestions/Measures to address Issues of Concerns to the Post-Diploma Basic Education Distance Students at the Kumasi Centres of UEW.

Measures	Response	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1. Early Supply of Modules	255	11.1
2. Improving lecture facilities at the centres	249	10.6
3. Ensuring Instructor regularity & punctuality	247	10.3
4. Increasing tutorial meetings	210	9.1
5. Avoiding imposition of materials	205	8.9
6. Reducing the cost of the programme	190	8.1
7. Payment of fees by installment	183	7.9
8. Financial support from government	155	7.0
9. Prompt feedback on quizzes & examination results	136	6.1
10. Serious supervision of project work	133	5.9
11. High integration of technology	81	4.0
12. Building permanent lecture halls	75	3.2
13. Providing adequate student support	66	3.1
14. Involving students in co-curricular activities	58	2.9
15. Making course outlines available	50	1.9
Total	291	100

Note: $Rf\% = f/\Sigma f \times 100$

Table 2 presents results on suggestions/measures to address students' issues of serious concern on the programme. Based on the frequency of responses, the four most important measures suggested by the respondents' were that: there should be early supply of modules to students (11.1%); there should be improvement in the facilities and conditions at the study centres (10.6%); instructors should be punctual and regular (10.3%); the University should increase the number of tutorial meetings with the students (9.1%); avoiding imposition of materials (8.9%); Reducing the cost of the programme (8.1%); and among other important suggestions, payment of fees by instalment (7.9%)

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate in broader perspective some common issues of concern to the UEW Post-Diploma in Basic Education Distance students and their perspectives on suggestions to address learners concerns at the two study centres in Kumasi. Three main

research questions were formulated to guide the study. The research questions were; One: What are the issues of concern to students on the UEW Post-Diploma in Basic Education Distance Learning Programme at the Kumasi study centres? Two: What is the number one issue of concern to students on the UEW Post-Diploma in Basic Education Distance Learning programme at the Kumasi study centres?

Three: What suggestions/measures from students' perspective can be adopted to address students concerns on the UEW Post-Diploma in Basic Education Distance Learning programme at the Kumasi study centres? The major findings are discussed here.

In respect of research question one; the results indicated that delay in the supply of modules was an issue of important concern to the students. This finding is consistent with Akrofi's (2010) finding that delay in the supply of modules was a major challenge facing the UEW distance education programme. Bampo (2008) attributed the delay in the supply of distance learning materials to lecturers who teach both regular and distance students but who are engaged in the writing of distance materials. For Adentwi (2002), the delay in the supply of modules may be attributable to the fact that distance learning institutions sometimes subcontract the production of modules to local firms most of whom do not have the capacity to produce them on time. In our educational system today where students virtually rely on study materials provided to them by their lectures/instructors and do very little or virtually no research on their own, delay in the supply of modules will bring much discomfort to the students' and they are not very likely to excel in their examinations. The problem of delay in the supply of distance study materials is not peculiar to UEW. A UNESCO (2002) report indicates that most distance institutions in Africa do not supply modules on time and even when they do, the materials are usually inadequate.

It was also found that inadequate feedback and contact with instructors was a serious issue of concern for the students on the programme. This supports Akrofi's (2010) finding that feedback and contact with lecturers is a major problem to students on the UEW distance education programme. The finding also confirms a study conducted at the Athabasca University by Coldeway, et al., (2003) which revealed that distance learners were found to be motivated when they had frequent contact with and feedback from their instructors. No doubt, the lack of it or its inadequacy is an issue of important concern to the students. This finding has a common sense appeal. Clearly, because distance learners have a profound feeling of isolation, the logical consequence is that they will always cherish the opportunity of more contact and feedback from their instructors. The feedback needs to be copious and swift to help them address nagging questions and lack of understanding of issues that they encounter through their self-instructional readings. Learners require feedback for direction as to what to do to enhance their learning, to correct their mistakes and to acquire more detailed and accurate knowledge about what they study.

Another issue of serious concern revealed by the study was the poor facilities and conditions at the adopted study centres for the programme. The poor state of facilities and conditions at the study centres may be attributed to the fact that the venue is not under the direct control and supervision of management of the University. One is likely to conclude that the University is reluctant to improve facilities and conditions at the venue because it might see it as a waste since the facility does not permanently belong to the University. But has the University thought of the negative effects this issue can have on students' motivation and performance as well as how it can affect future participation on the programme?

The results further indicated that lecturers'/instructors absenteeism was an issue of serious concern for the students'. Students may lose a lot of contact hours due to lecturers' absenteeism and the effect of this on students' performance is very obvious. This finding confirms Kim and Shih's (2003) observation that many students who partake in distance education programmes do not get much out of their courses.

The study also found that an inadequate face-to-face meeting with instructors was an issue of serious concern to students'. This finding suggests that even though the UEW distance programme provides for face-to-face meetings with the students, this is woefully inadequate in relation to the expectations of the students.

The results again show that the societal perception that distance students' performance is poor is an issue of serious concern to the students. In reality there is a general feeling by the public that the performance of distance students is poor compared to regular students. For example as pointed out, Afzaal and Israr, (2011) observed that most people in Pakistan perceive the performance of distance learning students as poor compared to traditional students. The results of this study seem to corroborate this finding. This concern requires that the University embarks on a systematic strategy to enhance the image of its distance education programme by playing by the rules of the game. This is because if this issue is not addressed, it will go a long way to impact on the sustainability of the programme if its graduates are persistently refused employment.

The study also indicated that, the low regard for distance education students and graduates by employers and the society was an issue of serious concern to the students. This finding supports Kim and Shih's (2003) observation that potential employers have low trust for distance students. Another finding indicated that the students were concerned about the lack of co-curricular activities in the distance education programme. This finding confirms Sarfo and Adentwi's (2011) assertion that, the lack of co-curricular activities in distance education does not help learners to experience complete school life as compared to traditional students. The co-curricular activities also play a useful role in the form of developing students fitness, leadership skills, socialization skills, positive values and attitudes, as well as developing other innate talents of learners to make their education complete. The fact that distance education usually fails to provide learners with this opportunity, justifies their concern because they are denied this important aspect of school life as it is not given attention in the implementation of a distance education curriculum.

The low level of technology involvement was another issue of important concern. In this 21st century, technology happens to be one of the important drivers of distance education. It facilitates and makes learning easier and convenient. Modules, syllabuses, course outlines, assignments, and quizzes can be made available via technology (internet) to facilitate teaching and learning to make the distance programme more effective. The problem of inadequacy of technology use can be dissected into two facets: lack of access and lack of computer literacy skills. At the Kumasi study centres access to computers is virtually nonexistent. There is also insufficient exposure to computer literacy and information retrieval skills. Both are required to make the UEW distance learning programme effective and acceptable to employers of their graduates.

The results again indicated that inadequate support services were an issue of serious concern to the students. Studies by Bampo (2008) and Owusu-Boateng, et al., (2001) support this finding. According to Wood (1996), lack of support for students can lead to learning problems

which may result in students' dissatisfaction with distance programmes. It is imperative that the faculty or planners of distance education pay attention to student support services such as counseling, library services, feedback, provision of modules and face-to-face tutorials to promote effective distance education delivery (Rowntree, 1992; Holmberg, 2002). To strengthen the support services and enhance their effectiveness, Quaigrain (1994) suggests that the materials should reach distance learners in time.

The study also indicated that, high cost of the distance education programme was an issue of serious concern to the students. This finding contradicts the literature (Devine, 2006) that one of the key factors influencing people to turn towards distance education is the low cost of the programme. However, the finding supports a finding of Koomson (1998) that most distance education students are faced with the problem of meeting the financial obligation of the programme. He opined that teachers in developing countries are low income earners and they find it difficult to pay their fees and also meet family responsibilities. Again, Knapper (1988) said that the issue of cost is a real problem facing distance learners. There is no gainsaying the fact that the issue of cost still remains a major issue for many distance education students even though the literature (Perraton, 1991) suggests that ample records of many institutions such as the Zimbabwe Integrated National Teacher Education Course (ZINTEC) and the Open University of the United Kingdom show that comparatively, distance education is generally believed to be much cheaper than programmes offered in conventional residential teacher education institutions (Adentwi and Baafi-Frimpong, 2010)

The results further indicated that, there is a feeling of alienation. This finding supports studies by (Badu-Nyarko, 2010) and (Oaks, 1996) which revealed that a feeling of alienation and isolation is a problem facing distance students. However, studies in Ghana by Adra (2000), Amanor (2005), and Badu-Nyarko (2000) revealed that the Ghanaian student learning at a distance is not completely isolated. They cited the face-to-face tutorials organized fortnightly or on monthly basis for the students as the reason that accounted for that.

With regard to research question two, the study revealed that the delayed supply of modules to students is the number one issue of serious concern to students on the University's distance education programme. The University therefore needs to pay much attention to finding out factors that leads to the late supply of the modules to the students with the view of helping address the concerns students have with respect to the module supply.

For research question three, the major findings are that: Early supply of modules to students' can help address students concerns on the distance education programme. This finding makes a lot of sense because if students get the study materials early, it will help them to have enough time to study thoroughly the content of the materials to prepare them well for their assignments, quizzes and end of semester examinations. As a result, this remedy may enhance the academic performance of distance learners to correct the wrong perception created by the public out there that performance of distance learning students is poor (Afzaal and Israr, 2011).

Another suggestion from the students to address their concerns was that the University should ensure improvement in the facilities and conditions at the study centres. This will address the expressed concerns of the students since they were very emphatic in starting their dissatisfaction with conditions at the centres. As an alternative, the University could consider putting up its own infrastructure to run the programme. This may be a more prudent decision as the University will be obviously more comfortable to spend monies on its own property rather than to spend so much on rented premises.

Another finding of the study suggested by the students to address their concern was that the University should ensure that instructors are punctual and regularly attend face-to-face sessions. Though the University provides face-to-face tutorial meetings for the distance students, the students have expressed serious concern about its adequacy. When the instructors become punctual and regular at least it will ensure that students receive adequate instruction during their face-face-to meetings.

Increasing the number of tutorial meetings with the students was also identified from the students' perspective as one surest way to address their concerns on the distance education programme. The potential of this remedy is that it will increase instructional time and in effect performance of the students. This suggestion proposed by the students also suggests that though the University provide support in the form of face-to-face tutorials, students are not only interested in this arrangement but more importantly its adequacy to help them get the maximum instruction on the programme.

Last but not the least; the students suggest that the University should avoid imposition of materials. For example, even though the students thought that the modules supplied to them were very useful, they were not happy that the University supplied them with tablet at a fee without their consent. They complained that such impositions added to the cost of their fees. They expressed that they should be allowed to buy their own study materials without being forced to.

CONCLUSION

The Post-Diploma Basic Education Distance Students at the Kumasi Centres of UEW have a number of serious concerns on the effectiveness of implementation of the Distance Learning programme. Some of these issues of concern are delay in the supply of modules, inadequate feedback and contact with instructors, poor facilities and conditions at the study centres, inadequate face-to-face meetings with instructors, absenteeism of instructors, low level of technology involvement, and many others.

Among all the issues, the study found the delay of modules as the issue of most serious concern to the students. The problem with the supply of the modules can affect the students' performance since today's students' rely heavily on materials prepared by their lecturers/instructors and hardly research on their own. The study also found out that measures such as ensuring early supply of modules to students, improving facilities and conditions at the study centres, ensuring lecturers'/instructors' punctuality and regularity, increasing the number of face-to face meetings with students, among others, if put in place by the University can potentially address the issues confronting the students' on the programme. The main contribution of this study to knowledge is that it helps to understand, from students' view point, the importance of student involvement as a necessary antidote to address students' concerns on effective implementation of distance education curriculum/programme.

Limitations and Suggestion for further Studies

While findings could be used by practitioners and scholars in similar context, findings reported in this paper are limited to the specific context of the University's two Distance Education Study Centres in Kumasi, Ghana. The two Centres were chosen by the researchers because of the access and proximity they provide for data collection. Therefore, it is cautioned that

generalization of the findings may not be applicable to other Universities in Ghana or even other Study Centres of the University of Education, Winneba.

We suggest that the study be replicated in other Study Centres of the University using different methodology in order to ascertain whether these findings permeate the other Study Centres of the University of Education, Winneba. This is necessary to enhance the generalisability of the findings.

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