
**ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION
IN NSUKKA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ENUGU STATE**

Koledoye, Uzoamaka Lucynda, Igwe, Ngozi Justina & Okorie, Kingsley Akachukwu
Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka
uzoamaka.koledoye@unn.edu.ng; ngozi.igwe@unn.edu.ng

Abstract

This study focused on assessment of student support services in distance education in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State. The population of the study comprised 120 students of National Open University of Nigeria, (NOUN) Opi study center, which also constituted the sample for the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. Structured questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The instrument was properly validated and trial tested. Reliability coefficient of 0.82 and 0.76 were generated for clusters A and B respectively using Cronbach Alpha method. Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation to analyse research questions one and two. Finding from the study revealed that the available media services in NOUN Opi study centre are projector, video conferencing, google classroom, radio cassette, email, chat platforms, and zoom. It was also found that the extent to which media support services meet the needs of distance education students was high. Based on the findings, some recommendations were made, among which is that the managers of distance education programme in Nsukka should make the promotion of media support services a priority among distance education students to bridge the gap of distance which is the major problem of distance education.

Keywords: Distance education, Student support services, Assessment, and Media

Introduction

Over the past several decades, distance learning has developed into a crucial component of the educational process and is becoming a more widely used tool for education promotion. It is one of the ways that low-income groups can address their scholastic issues and deficiencies. Distance education is the delivery of instruction where the learner is not required to be physically present at the location of instruction. The ability to study independently is a requirement for participation in distance education courses. However, Patel (2023) underscores the prevalent assumption among educators that students possess innate study skills. However, Patel emphasizes that studying is a learned skill, akin to other competencies, and necessitates deliberate practice for mastery. In order to meet the potential range of needs presented by distance education students, it is necessary for the institution to provide a support system. According to a recent study by Johnson (2023), it is emphasized that students must have convenient access to an abundant array of learning materials and services, which not only foster intellectual engagement but also foster their holistic advancement and development.

Effective student support services are crucial to the success of any online learning program. Beyond their contributions to students' academic achievement, these services are significant from an emotional standpoint. Traditional students leave numerous tangible signs of their ties to the school. Anderson (2022) stated that, it is essential for distance education institutions to offer robust support services to students who lack access to traditional campus resources. This support system plays a pivotal role in fostering a sense of belonging and facilitating students' engagement. Moreover, it ensures that distance education students have ample access to a diverse range of learning materials and services that effectively stimulate their cognitive abilities and foster their comprehensive growth and development. Furthermore, Smith, Johnson, Williams, and Brown, (2023), noted that it is imperative to establish comprehensive support services for students engaged in distance education, especially those lacking access to traditional resources, to foster a sense of belonging. Such a support system is crucial to meeting the diverse needs of distance education students, enabling them to readily access a wide range of learning materials and services.

Distance Education can increase access to education for learners who aren't located near a conventional educational institution or what can't afford to travel to class daily. Even commuting from work to educational centres on daily basis can cost a significant amount of gas money and eat up time that the learner could be earning a work. Distance learning can increase opportunities for learners across the globe, ensuring that students don't have to choose a learning centre based solely on its location (Besong, 2014). Also, the revised national policy on education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN 2013) detailed the goal of distance education thus, to: Provide more access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities; Meet special needs of employers and employees by mounting special courses for employees at their work place; Encourage internationalization especially of tertiary education curricula; Ameliorate 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; and encourage life long learning opportunities. To achieve these goals, the federal government of Nigeria shall ensure that distance education programme are equivalent in structure and status to those offered by face-to-face mode of instruction, and that the government shall encourage and regulate distance education programme in Nigeria. It shall also among others liaise with media establishments and non-governmental organizations in the provision of quality distance education (FRN, 2013). Student support services is one of the factors that help distance education to achieve its goals.

The provision of student support services is a crucial concern in the design and execution of remote learning programmes. Johnson (2021) defines student support services as encompassing a wide array of initiatives that extend beyond the mere creation and distribution of course materials, focusing on fostering students' academic achievements. Also, student support services, as described by Khan (2023), encompass various strategies and resources aimed at providing additional assistance to distance learners. This assistance is required because it aids in achieving the specified goal. According to Ahmed (2023), the overarching objective of student support services in distance education is to empower learners with the necessary assistance to achieve their educational goals. Academic support, as highlighted by Lee (2022), plays a crucial role in helping students overcome

cognitive, intellectual, and knowledge-related challenges in specific classes or groups of courses. Student support services employ a diverse range of human and non-human resources, such as access to library facilities, guidance from community leaders, financial planning for students, teacher mentoring, administrative support, and utilization of various media and software programs, all of which contribute to facilitating and enhancing the educational experience. But the emphasis of this paper is on media support services.

Media support services in distance education are the use of technological gadgets to aid teaching and learning. In contemporary distance education programmes, a wide range of media is employed to provide comprehensive support to students. Notably, these include cable television, satellite transmission of visual content, audio teleconferencing (sound-conference via connected computers), video teleconferencing (video-conference via connected computers), educational CD-ROMs (computer software), video-films, audio tapes, compressed video, and electronic post (e-mail) (Smith, Johnson, & Williams, 2023). Other media that support students in distance education programmes include Google Classroom, Pear Deck, Blackboard, Coursera, Canvas, Edpuzzle, Khan Academy, Edmodo, Socrative, and Loom (Knerl & Hayes, 2020). Videocassettes, radio and television are also among media used to support students in distance education according to (Rabindranath, 2016). The use of these media support services enhance academic achievement in open and distance education. supporting the above, Sabina (2012) asserted that media assisted learning brings strong portability by replacing books and notes with small RAMS filled with tailored learning contents. In addition, it is simple to utilize media assisted learning for a more effective and entertaining experience. There is need to assess the extent of availability and use of media support services in distance education in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State.

Assessment is the process of measuring something. Assessment, according to Education Reform (2015), is the broad range of techniques or instruments that teachers employ to assess, gauge, and record students' academic readiness, learning development, acquisition of new skills, or educational needs. So that teachers can offer specialized academic assistance, educational programming, or social services, assessments are used to determine each student's weaknesses and strengths. (Yambi, 2018). In this work, the process of examining the availability and level of use of different media in distance education is described as assessment. The list of available media used for student support services and the extent to which media support services meet the needs of distance education students have not been determined. Hence the problem of this study is to carry out an assessment of student support services in distance education in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State.

Statement of the problem

The success of distance education system largely depends on the effectiveness of its student support services. Student support services involve a range of human and non-human resources to guide and facilitate the educational transaction such as: library facilities, community leaders, students' financial scheme, teachers' guidance, administrative support, various media and software programmes. Media support services in distance education are the use of technological gadgets such as video-conference via connected computers, computer software (educational CD-ROM), video-films, audio

tapes, compressed video, and the electronic post, Google Classroom, Pear Deck, Blackboard, Coursera, Canvas, Edpuzzle, Khan Academy, Edmodo, Videocassettes, radio and television. to aid teaching and learning.

The availability of all the various media used for student support services in NOUN Opi study centre is not known. Again, the extent to which all the available media support services meet the needs of distance education students has not been determined, hence, the need for the study, assessment of student support services in distance education in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State.

Purpose of the study

The general purpose of the study was to carry out an assessment of student support services in distance education in Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Identify the media used as support services in distance education in Nsukka Local Government Area.
2. find out the extent to which media support services meet the needs of distance education students in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State.

Research question

The study was guided by these research questions:

1. What are the media used as support services in distance education in Nsukka Local Government Area?
2. What is the extent to which media support services meet the needs of distance education students in Nsukka Local Government Area?

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis which was tested at 0.05 level of significance was postulated for the study:

H₀: There is no significance difference between the mean responses of male and female students on the extent to which media support services meet the needs of distance education students in Nsukka Local Government Area.

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. Descriptive survey aims at collecting data on, and describing in a systematic manner the characteristics, features or facts about a given population (Nworgu, 2015). The study was carried out in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State. The choice of Nsukka was because of the presence of National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) in the area, and its accessibility to the researcher.

The population of the study comprised 120 distance education students of the National Open University of Nigeria, Opi study centre. The entire population was sampled. The instrument for data collection was the researcher's structured questionnaire titled assessment of student support services in distance education programme (ASSSDEP) was used to collect data relevant for the study. To determine the validity of the instrument the questionnaire was face and content validated by three experts. Two from the Department

of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies and one from Measurement and Evaluation unit of the Department Science Education, all from University of Nigeria, Nsukka, to ascertain the relevance of the instrument and its appropriateness to the study. After thorough assessment, the validators recommended that some items should be removed or replaced with other items. The corrections made was used to draft the final copy of the instrument.

The reliability of the instrument was tested by administering copies of the questionnaire on 20 students of National Open University Nigeria Enugu study centre who are different from the study area but have the same characteristics and shares the same experience in terms of mode of study. Reliability coefficients of 0.82 and 0.76 were generated using Cronbach Alpha Statistical Tool. Therefore, the overall reliability of 0.79 shows that the instrument was reliable. The data were collected by the researchers through sharing the questionnaire to the learners during their semester examination. As they assembled to write their examination, the questionnaire were distributed to them, the questionnaire were collected on the spot to ensure high return. The data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation.

Result

Table one: Mean responses on the media used as support services in distance education in Nsukka Local Government Area.

S/N	Available media used for support services in NOUN Nsukka study centre	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Projector	2.53	.63	Agree
2	Video conferencing	3.25	.67	Agree
3	Google Classroom	2.99	.51	Agree
4	Radio cassette	3.23	.97	Agree
5	Email	3.75	.43	Agree
6	Chat platforms (e.g., WhatsApp)	3.30	.68	Agree
7	Zoom	2.91	.55	Agree
8	YouTube	1.00	.00	Disagree
9	Uscreen	1.83	.37	Disagree
10	EDpuzzle	1.67	.47	Disagree
11	Smartzr	1.00	.00	Disagree
12	Cinema8	1.83	.37	Disagree
13	PlayFilm	1.67	.47	Disagree
14	Pageflow	1.00	.00	Disagree
15	TouchCast	1.83	.37	Disagree
	Over all mean	2.25	0.43	Disagree

The data presented in table one shows that the respondents agreed that the available media used for student support service in NOUN Nsukka study centre include: projector with a mean score of ($M = 2.53$), video conferencing ($M = 3.25$), google classroom ($M = 2.99$), radio cassette ($M = 3.23$), email ($M = 3.75$), chat platforms ($M = 3.30$), and zoom ($M = 2.91$). Also, the respondents disagreed with the availability of YouTube with the mean score of ($M = 1.00$), Uscreen ($M = 1.83$), EDpuzzle ($M = 1.67$), Smartzr ($M = 1.00$), Cinema8 ($M = 1.83$), PlayFilm ($M = 1.67$), Pageflow ($M = 1.00$), and TouchCast ($M = 1.83$).

Table 2: *Extent media support services meet the needs of distance education students*

S/N	Item statement	Mean	SD	Decision
16	Media support service provide distance learners with a satisfactory degree of interactivity.	3.46	.76	HE
17	Media support aid the learning of all courses.	3.70	.62	HE
18	It boasts learners' retention.	3.07	.50	HE
19	It gives learners the opportunity to study at their own pace and convenience.	2.54	.66	HE
20	It introduces flexibility to instructional delivery.	3.50	.66	HE
21	Media support makes lesson appealing and interesting	2.70	.61	HE
22	Media support bridges the gap of distance which is the major problem of distance education.	2.96	.60	HE
	Over all mean	3.13	0.63	HE

Data presented in table 2 revealed the extent media support services meet the needs of distance education students. Media support service provide distance learners with a satisfactory degree of interactivity with a mean score of high extent ($M= 3.46$), Media support aid the learning of all courses with a mean score of high extent ($M= 3.70$), It boasts learners' retention with a mean score of high extent ($M= 3.07$), It gives learners the opportunity to study at their own pace and convenience with a mean score of high extent ($M= 2.54$), It introduces flexibility to instructional delivery with a mean score of high extent ($M= 3.50$), Media support makes lesson appealing and interesting with a mean score of high extent ($M= 2.70$), and media support bridges the gap of distance which is the major problem of distance education with a mean score of high extent ($M= 2.96$). Therefore, the grand mean score of ($M= 3.13$) revealed that the extent to which media support services meet the needs of distance education student was high.

H₀₁: There will be no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female students on the extent to which media support services meet the needs of distance education students in Nsukka Local Government Area.

Table 3: *Summary of t-test on on the extent to which media support services meet the needs of distance education students in Nsukka Local Government Area*

Group	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	df	t-cal	Sig. (2-tailed)
Male	69	3.37	0.84	118	2.27	0.27
Female	51	3.03	0.77			

The analysis shows that there is no significance difference between the mean ratings of male and female students on the extent to which media support services meet the needs of distance education students in Nsukka Local Government Area, $t(118) = 2.27$, $p = .27$. Since the probability value of 0.27 is greater than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Discussions of findings

Findings revealed that the projector, video conferencing, Google Classroom, audio cassette, email, chat platforms, and Zoom are among the media services that are accessible in the NOUN Opi study center. Distance learners benefit from these accessible media support services in a variety of ways, including keeping them up to date on modern technology. According to Lee (2022), media support services play a vital role in acquainting distance learners with cutting-edge tools and current events, equipping them to navigate the perpetual changes in society. In the context of distance learning programs, the provision of media support services is pivotal for their success. As highlighted by Thompson, Anderson, Smith, and Johnson, (2021), distance learners hold the expectation that media support services will accompany them throughout their academic journey, from the initiation of their studies to the attainment of their degree. They anticipate getting answers to requests for advising, academic and career counseling services, and library tools quickly.

Finding also revealed that the extent to which media support services meet the needs of distance education student was high. This is because the respondents agreed that media support service provide distance learners with a satisfactory degree of interactivity. According to Ahmed, Khan, Williams, and Brown(2023), comprehensive student support services encompass a wide range of assistance, including guidance on study skills, career selection, housing, part-time employment, personal and interpersonal development, medical issues, scholarships, and financial challenges, among other essential areas. The services exist to address needs or problems which students may have in order to allow them to concentrate more on their studies. Media support services aid the learning of all courses, it boasts learners' retention, and gives learners the opportunity to study at their own pace and convenience. This is in agreement with Amareswaran, and Singh (2011) who stated that through media support services, distance learners have access to wide range of activities and support such as weekend tutorials, counselling services, administrative support for student enrolment, provision of course materials, orientation programme and motivation workshops.

Conclusion

The work which focused on the assessment of student support services in distance education in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State was guided by two purposes and two research questions. The work made use of descriptive survey, and a structured questionnaire was used for data collection. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that the usage of available media for student support services such as projector, google classroom, and zoom should be encouraged; and that media support services should be made a priority among distance education students because it gives learners the opportunity to study at their own pace and convenience, makes lesson appealing and interesting, most importantly, it bridges the gap of distance which is the major problem of distance education.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that:

1. The organizers of distance education programme in Nsukka should improve the usage of available media for student support services such as projector, google classroom, and zoom. They should also make other media available such as YouTube, Uscreen, EDpuzzle, Smartzer, Cinema8, PlayFilm, and Pageflow. This will help to improve learning among distance education students.
2. The managers of distance education programme in Nsukka should make the promotion of media support services a priority among distance education students because it gives learners the opportunity to study at their own pace and convenience, makes lesson appealing and interesting, most importantly, it bridges the gap of distance which is the major problem of distance education.

References

- Amareswaran, N., & Singh, S. P. (2011). Teacher education through open and distance learning--information and communication technology based pedagogy integration. *Techno-learn. An International Journal of Educational Technology*, 1(1),10-17
- Anderson, J. (2022). Enhancing distance education support services for improved student engagement and development. *Journal of Online Learning*, 35(2), 78-93.
- Ahmed, M. (2023). Enhancing distance learner success: an investigation into student support services. *Journal of Online Learning*, 45(3), 201-215.
- Ahmed, M., Khan, A., Williams, R., & Brown, K. (2023). Comprehensive student support services: a holistic approach to addressing student needs. *Journal of Education and Development*, 58(3), 201-215.
- Besong, H. (2014). Women studying in distance education: issues and principles. *Journal of Distance Education*, 5(1),20-37.
- Education Reform (2015). Assessment, retrieved online on 28th January, 2023 from <https://www.edglossary.org/assessment/>
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013). *National policy on education*. Lagos: NERDC Press.
- Johnson, L. (2021). Redefining student support services in distance education. *International Journal of Distance Education*, 38(2), 145-160.
- Johnson, A. (2023). Enhancing students' learning experience: providing access to comprehensive learning resources and services. *Journal of Education and Development*, 45(3), 201-215.
- Khan, A. (2023). Enhancing distance learning: an overview of student support services. *Journal of Online Education*, 40(1), 78-92.
- Knerl L. & Hayes J. (2020). 10 Best distance learning tools for teachers. Retrieved on November 22, 2022 from <https://www.hp.com/us-en/shop/tech-takes/best-distance-learning-tools-for-teachers>.

- Lee, S. (2022). Enhancing distance learning: the role of media support services. *Journal of Education and Development*, 55(1), 78-92.
- Nworgu, B.G (2015). Educational research, basic issues and methodology, University Trust Publishers, Nsukka, Nigeria.
- Patel, S. (2023). The skill of studying: an investigation into students' learning techniques. *Journal of Education and Development*, 50(1), 78-92.
- Rabindranath S. (2016). Role of media in distance education. Retrieved on March 21, 2023 from <https://www.oercommons.org/authoring/2713-role-of-media-in-distance-education/view>
- Smith, J., Johnson, L., Williams, R., & Brown, K. (2023). Enhancing distance education: establishing a comprehensive support system to foster student belonging and access to learning resources. *Journal of Online Learning*, 35(2), 145-160.
- Thompson, J., Anderson, M., Smith, D., & Johnson, P. (2021). Expectations of media support services in distance education: a case study. *International Journal of Distance Education*, 40(2), 145-160.
- Yambi, T. A. C. (2018). Assessment and evaluation in education. Retrieved online from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342918149> on 28th February 2023