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# **Perspectives of Librarians on Quality Assurance Measures for Admission of Students in Distance Education Programme in Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

The quality assurance measures for admission of students into Distance Education (DE) programs in Nigeria were evaluated in this study. The study employed a descriptive survey design, with a total population of Librarians and learners in distance learning centers in Southeast in Nigeria, of which 206 librarians were used in the study. The librarians and learners were chosen using a multi-stage sampling technique. The data gathering instrument was a questionnaire. Three professionals independently validated the instrument. The questionnaire's reliability index was 0.97. The data was analyzed using the mean, standard deviation, and analysis of variance. The findings revealed that quality is highly assured for students admitted to DE programs ( $X = 2.87$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ). In South East Nigeria, significant variations in the mean assessments of students and librarians on how quality is ensured in the admission of students to DE programs were discovered. It was suggested that prospective students be provided greater opportunities to enroll in distant education programs in order to minimize illiteracy among the population.

**Keywords:** *quality assurance, distance education programmes, admission, librarians*

## **Introduction**

In 1955 and 1957, respectively, the Western and Eastern regions of Nigeria designated education as a method of increasing the quality of life and development in all segments of society. The Nigerian government has been concerned about the lack of decent education, especially since the country's independence in 1960. Since then, population growth has created a critical problem of unmet educational need. Furthermore, working adults who have completed secondary education find it challenging to continue their study full-time. Many of these adults are unable to enroll in traditional Nigerian education, while the working class is denied the opportunity to further their education due to the demands of their jobs.

However, in the current reality of diminishing financial resources, failing to give good education to individuals has become a monumental undertaking. As a result, giving education to all people regardless of their location or time has made it necessary for Nigeria to look for new solutions to address the growing demand for education. According to Jegede (2008), the search for alternative methods led in remote education, which is a more adaptable, viable, reliable, comprehensive, cost-efficient, and cost-effective system of education.

The phrase "remote education" has been challenged by academics from a variety of angles. As a result, Nwahunanya (2004) defines distance education as "any type of organized educational experience in which professors are separated from students for the majority of the time." Perraton (1991) defined it as an educational procedure in which a major portion of the instruction is provided by someone who is physically and chronologically distant from the student. In Nigeria, the main purpose of distance education is to enhance access to education for those who are already working and need various types of formal and continuous education to improve their job performance. According to the Nigerian National Policy on Education, education is the most important tool for change, and policies must be geared toward ensuring equal access and adequate educational opportunities at all levels (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014).

To ensure that these policies are carried out, the Nigerian government adopted an educational philosophy that states that citizens should be able to choose between continuing to work while studying or entering full-time employment at any time after primary school without losing the opportunity to return to school later. The policy also stated the need for increased access to higher education and resolved to make every effort to ensure that those who would benefit from it have it; this access, according to the policy, could be provided through universities, correspondence courses, open universities, part-time, and work-study programs. As a result,

remote education programs have been developed by a number of Nigerian universities, polytechnics, and schools of education (Adesoye, 2011). The objectives of DE, according to National Policy in Education (2014), are to provide for Nigerians who, for one reason or another, are unable to access regular higher education; to provide for Nigerian workers, particularly those at the top echelon of their establishment, who are unable to access regular higher education; and to provide for others who wish to acquire new skills that will enable them to transition from their current job to a more rewarding one. According to Ayorinde (2001), one of the purposes of the DE program is to make course materials available to a large audience because the courses are primarily provided face to face and via the internet.

Quality assurance is required to achieve these objectives, which is especially crucial for distance education programs in the twenty-first century, when knowledge and ideas are at the center of economic and social growth. Many developing countries, such as Nigeria, are concerned about the supply of high-quality education as poverty, corruption, and ignorance continue to rise (Imogie, 2010).

Quality in distance education implies different things to different people. Various experts and organizations that commonly utilize the phrase have opposing viewpoints. Quality, for example, refers to a product's standard in comparison to other similar products. According to Babalola, Adedeji, and Erwat (2006), quality refers to education's ability to meet consumer needs, the learning environment, and student outcomes. As a result, whether in education or other professions, quality is a wide attitude that pervades all aspects of a system's operation. Quality assurance, in other words, refers to the extent to which a standard may be utilized to assess a company's operations, performance, and goods. The quality benchmarks of a normal education system, according to Maduewesi (2005), are oriented on program development, which includes,

among other things, access and equity (enrolment). Distance education institutions must develop internal procedures that ensure the creation of high-quality graduates for national progress in order to achieve their aims and objectives. As soon as the student is accepted into the program, the quality assurance method should begin.

It is impossible to overestimate the relevance of quality assurance procedures in the admissions process for DE programs. This is because the admitted students' prior knowledge will have an impact on the quality of the graduates produced. In support of the aforementioned, Holmberg (1989) claimed that in every educational activity, students' prior knowledge and proficiency must be the basis of selection. As a result, DE providers must select their students by requiring a certain degree of competency prior to enrolment, according to Nwizu (2001). However, with Nigeria's DE program, this is not always the case. According to Nwizu (2001), one of the criticisms leveled against Open University in Nigeria is that students with inferior qualifications are admitted to their programs. This could be one of the factors contributing to the poor quality of DE program products (Ukeje, 1994). As a result, DE graduates may find it difficult to compete with graduates of standard university programs. As a result, quality assurance measures for students applying to DE programs are required. As a result, the goal of this study was to see how well quality assurance methods are followed in the admissions process for distance education programs in South East Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the extent of adherence to quality assurance in students' admission to distance education programs in South East Nigeria?
2. What is the extent of adherence to quality assurance in the admission of students to distance education programs based on ownership of institution?

## **Hypotheses**

1. Librarians and learners do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on quality assurance in the admission of students to distance education programs.
2. Librarians and learners in state and federal universities do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on quality assurance in the admission of students to distance education programs.

## **Methods**

The study was conducted using a descriptive survey research approach. According to Nworgu (2015), a descriptive survey research design is a study that aims to collect data and describe in a systematic manner the characteristic qualities or facts about a certain community. This approach is suited for this study because it aims to gather and describe data from distance education learners and facilitators in DE in order to determine quality assurance measures through admittance to distance education programs in Nigeria's South East. In similar studies, this design has been adopted by Eze et al. (2020), Ezema et al. (2021), Ezeaku et al. (2021), Okeke et al. (2020), Okeke, Ugwuanyi and Mufutua (2020), Ugwuanyi et al. (2020), Okenyi et al. (2021).

A total population of Librarians and learners in distance learning centers spread across 40 locations in the five South East states was the target audience for this research. There were 206 respondents comprising 60 librarians and 146 learners were used in the study. The librarians and learners were chosen using a multi-stage sampling technique. The 'Quality Assurance in Distance Education Questionnaire,' created by the researcher, was used to collect data for this study (QADEQ). The instrument was divided into two sections: "A" and "B." The purpose of Section A was to extract pertinent background information on the respondents. The purpose of Section B was to elicit information on the entrance standards for students enrolled in a distance education

program. The response possibilities for the items in section B were Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE), and Very Low Extent (VLE) (VLE). The four-point scale was used to determine the respondent's level of assurance of quality measures for admittance into higher institutions' distance education programs. Three professionals independently validated the instrument. The Cronbach alpha statistic was used to determine the instrument's dependability. The obtained dependability coefficient was 0.94. The data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation, and the null hypothesis was evaluated using a t-test with a significance level of 0.05. The true boundaries of the number of replies were utilized to categorize the mean rating of the respondents for the choice rule. A mean rating of 3.50 – 4.00 was very high extent; a mean rating of 2.50- 3.49 was high extent; a mean rating of 1.50 – 2.49 was low extent; and finally, a mean rating of 0 – 1.49 was very low extent.

## Results

**Table 1:** Respondents' mean ratings on the extent to which quality is guaranteed in the admission of students to distance education programs

Item Statements	Librarians N = 60		Leaners N = 146		Total		
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	DEC
1. Accepting students into the Distance Education program based on their admission exam results	2.42	0.65	2.30	0.63	2.33	0.63	LE
2. Using fundamental qualifications as an admissions criterion	2.68	0.96	3.12	0.94	3.01	0.97	HE
3. Using job experience as a criterion for acceptance into a distance learning program.	2.91	1.01	3.03	0.97	3.00	0.98	HE
4. Obtaining at least 5 WAEC or NECO equivalent credits in appropriate areas in order to be admitted to a Distance Education program.	2.69	1.01	3.03	0.98	2.95	0.99	HE
5. Admission to a distance education program using a Teachers Grade II certificate in a suitable academic area.	2.77	0.96	3.20	0.94	3.10	0.96	HE
6. Adoption of a diploma certificate with at least a merit grade in order to be admitted to DE.	2.89	1.02	3.29	0.90	3.19	0.95	HE
7. Admission to DE using NCE with at least a merit grade in relevant subjects.	2.81	0.97	3.38	0.85	3.24	0.91	HE

8. Age of the candidate is a factor for admission to a tertiary distant education program.	2.86	0.96	3.33	0.87	3.21	0.92	HE
9. Admission to DE is based on the applicant's country of origin.	2.03	0.89	1.67	0.87	1.76	0.89	LE
<b>Cluster Mean</b>	<b>2.67</b>	<b>0.58</b>	<b>2.93</b>	<b>0.44</b>	<b>2.87</b>	<b>0.49</b>	<b>HE</b>

**Key:** HE = High Extent, LE-Low extent

The mean ratings and standard deviation of the respondents on the extent to which quality is secured in the admission of students in distance education programs in South East Nigeria are shown in Table 1. The study found that the mean values of items 2 to 9 for both students and librarians varied from 2.68 to 3.38, with standard deviations ranging from 0.65 to 0.98. The mean values show that in distance education programs in South East Nigeria, quality is largely assured in the admission of students based on basic qualifications and age. The closeness of SD revealed a consistent response in the application of basic education and age in the admission of students to Distance Education. Also considered for admission were performance on the entrance examination ( $M = 2.33, SD = 0.63$ ) and state of origin ( $M = 1.76, SD = 0.89$ ) to a lesser extent.

**Table 2:** Respondents' mean ratings on the extent to which quality is ensured in the admission of students to distance education programs, according to the institution's ownership

Item statement	State (n = 599)			Federal (n = 607)		
	$\bar{X}$	SD	Dec	$\bar{X}$	SD	Dec
1. Accepting students into the Distance Education program based on their admission exam results	1.42	0.65	VLE	2.30	0.63	LE
2. Using fundamental qualifications as an admissions criterion	2.50	0.96	HE	3.12	0.94	HE
3. Using job experience as a criterion for acceptance into a distance learning program.	2.22	0.47	HE	1.88	0.41	LE
4. Obtaining at least 5 WAEC or NECO equivalent credits in appropriate areas in order to be admitted to a Distance Education program.	2.51	0.81	HE	3.67	0.76	VHE
5. Admission to a distance education program using a Teachers Grade II certificate in a suitable academic area.	2.58	0.66	HE	3.56	0.59	VHE
6. Adoption of a diploma certificate with at least a merit grade in order to be admitted to DE.	3.88	0.69	VHE	3.57	0.78	VHE
7. Admission to DE using NCE with at least a merit grade in relevant subjects.	3.44	0.84	HE	3.81	0.80	VHE

8. Age of the candidate is a factor for admission to a tertiary distant education program.	1.90	0.79	LE	1.10	0.75	VLE
9. Admission to DE is based on the applicant's country of origin.	2.54	0.77	HE	2.18	0.72	LE
<b>Cluster Total</b>	<b>2.55</b>	<b>0.74</b>	<b>HE</b>	<b>2.80</b>	<b>0.71</b>	<b>HE</b>

**Key:** VHE = very high extent; HE = high extent; LE = low extent VLE = very low extent.

The mean ratings of respondents on the extent to which quality is secured in the admission of students in Distance Education Programs in South East Nigeria, according to institution ownership, are presented in Table 2. The findings demonstrated that quality assurance is good in the admission of students to Distance Education Programs at both State and Federal Universities ( $M = 2.55, SD = 0.74; M = 2.80, SD = 0.71$ , respectively). However, the Table revealed that for state universities, using a Diploma certificate with at least a merit grade for admission into DE was very common ( $M = 3.88, SD = 0.69$ ); for federal universities, using at least 5 Credits in WAEC or NECO its equivalent in relevant areas for admission into Distance Education programme ( $M = 3.67, SD = 0.76$ ); and using NCE with at least a merit grade in relevant areas for admission into DE ( $M = 3.67, SD = 0.76$ ). Teachers Grade II certificate in an appropriate subject area for entrance into distance education program ( $M = 3.56, SD = 0.59$ ), and Diploma certificate with at least a merit grade for admission into DE program ( $M = 3.57, SD = 0.78$ ), were both used extensively.

**Table 3:** t-test analysis of the difference in mean ratings of student and librarians on how quality is assured in the admission of students in DE Programs

Variable	Type of University	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-cal	df	p-value
Quality assurance in admission	Learners	146	2.93	0.44	-7.88	204	0.00
	Librarians	60	2.67	0.58			

Table 3 shows that there are disparities in learners' and librarians' mean judgments of how quality is ensured in the admission of students to distance education programs in South East Nigeria. The mean student ratings ( $M = 2.93, SD = 0.44$ ) are higher than the mean staff ratings ( $M = 2.67, SD = 0.58$ ) with a t-calculated value of -7.88, as shown in the table. The null hypothesis is rejected since

the p-value of 0.00 is less than the 0.05 criterion of significance. That is, according to student and librarians' ratings, there is a statistically significant difference in how quality is assured in the admission of students in distance education programs in South East Nigeria.

**Table 4:** t-test analysis of the difference in mean ratings of state and federal university respondents on how quality is assured in the admission of students in DE Programs

Variable	Type of University	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-cal	df	p-value
Quality assurance in admission	State	599	2.42	0.65	3.03	1204	0.001
	Federal	607	2.30	0.63			

The mean assessments of learners and librarians of state and federal institutions in South East Nigeria on how quality is ensured in the admission of students in distant education programs are shown in Table 4 ( $t = 3.03, p = 0.001$ ). Because the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean ratings of learners and librarians of state and federal institutions on how quality is assured in the admission of students in distance education programs in South East Nigeria is not accepted. As a result, in terms of how quality is assured in the admission of students in distance education programs in South East Nigeria, there is a statistically significant difference in the mean evaluations of learners and librarians of state and federal universities.

## Discussion

The study's findings revealed that, to a large extent, quality is assured in the admission of students to distance education programs in South East Nigeria ( $M = 2.87, SD = 0.49$ ). The study also revealed that fundamental qualifications were used to a great amount for DEP admission. This is not surprising, but it is to be expected because admissions are open to all students who meet the basic requirements for distance education programs as set forth by normal institutions (NUC, 2020). This is because, like traditional institutions, most open universities have severe admissions

requirements (Lungu, 2007). To be admitted into a degree program (whether conventional or distance education), applicants must have a credit level in at least 5 departmentally appropriate disciplines, including English and Mathematics, according to the University of Abuja (2020). The findings revealed that access to educational opportunities is a right that is widely available to all persons with a basic education. Entrants entering distance education degree programs must achieve the minimum national criteria for university registration, according to NUC (2020). The findings also demonstrate that, on an item-by-item basis, a significant degree of consideration of basic qualification as a criterion for admission is seen. This is because the National Universities Commission made it clear that students enrolling in tertiary distance education degree programs must achieve the minimum national criterion for university registration (NUC, 2020).

Work experience was also heavily weighted in the admissions process for tertiary online education programs, according to the data. This is also to be expected, as DE programs were designed with working people in mind; the National Open University of Nigeria's (NOUN) motto is "work and learn" (NOUN, 2020).

For example, the University of Abuja (2020) requires applicants to have a credit level in at least 5 departmentally appropriate disciplines, including English and Maths, in order to be admitted into a degree program (whether regular or distance education). The data revealed that entrance examinations are only used to a limited extent. This is unsurprising given that entrance is free to everybody (NUC 2020). This is most likely due to the fact that they admit the majority of these pupils via direct entry.

The hypothesis testing revealed a substantial difference in the mean ratings of students and staff, as well as private and state institutions, in terms of how quality is assured in the admission of students in distance education programs in South East Nigeria. The large disparity in admission

standards for students in distance education programs is to be expected, as distance education institutions have policies in place that guide student admittance. They are also required to follow these policies without exception. This conclusion is consistent with Okopi and Ogunleye (2016), who found significant disparities in the ratings of learner support services in NOUN between staff and students.

## **Conclusion**

The underpinning for ensuring that excellent graduates of distance education programs are produced is adequate quality assurance mechanisms for admission of students. This research has revealed the extent to which quality assurance measures for student admission to distant education programs are adhered to. The study found that in South East Nigeria, quality assurance standards for remote education admission are strictly followed. This conclusion implies that prospective students should be provided more opportunities to enroll in remote education programs in order to reduce the population's illiteracy rate.

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