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Quality assurance in distance learning teacher preparation institute in Nigeria

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Abstract: In Nigeria, Open and Distance Education has grown over the decades as yearning of desired individuals for education increases. This has resulted into a paradigm shift from face-to face mode of instruction to where individuals can learn at their convenience outside the conventional system of education. However, the quality of the programme has become source of concern. There are diverse opinion that teachers trained through distance education are of low quality compared to their counterparts trained through the conventional mode. To erase the wrong perception, there is need for approach of assuring quality in teacher preparation through Open and Distance Learning Institute. To this effect, this paper examines the various quality assurance policies, systems and procedure put in place for ensuring quality in Distance Learning Institute, University of Lagos. The investigation further measures perceptions of one hundred and seventy-three participants of how quality have been sustained overtime under six main headings and challenges facing them. Results, however, gave rise to recommendations for decision regarding improved quality distance education with special focus on the teacher education programmes of the Distance Learning Institute University of Lagos, Nigeria.

Keywords: quality assurance, open and distance learning, quality control, teacher preparation.

Introduction

African continent and most especially in Nigeria where resource are scares and provision of higher education is inadequate, open and distance education (ODE) is an important mode for human capital development (Pitsoe & Maila, 2012). Investing in human capital development in education, is improving the quality of life of country's citizenry (Tagoe, 2014). In human capital development, Nigeria needs to develop innovative and holistic ways of ensuring that education is made available for all.

ODE has played an important role in teacher education and training since its adoption, offering solutions to a wide range of problems (e.g. cost effectiveness, flexible access, diversity and quality). Specifically, ODE has been promoted as a key strategy for achieving objectives of Education For All (EFA) which was launched in 1990 in Thailand and ratified in Dakar, Senegal in 2000 in the Millennium Development Goal (MDGs).

Sustainable Develeopment Goals (SDGs), which build on the strategy set by the MDGs aspire to end all forms of poverty and focus further on inequalities and climate change. Of these, SDG 4 is defined to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning oppourtunities for all (UNESCO, 2016). ODE is a powerful tool to drive this goal. It has great potential to reach un-reached,

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and marginalized group (Ngidi & Isibaya, 2003). It has helped in bringing education into reality by bridging the gap of location and time, since students can study at their own pace. It has successfully removed the barriers of using school facilities and huge cost investment (Ezenwu, 2000).

The education system of the 21st century has taken a different shape and pattern by the inclusion of ICT tools. This has made students and teachers to shift from the passive classroom nature to interactive student-centred method. Through ODE, 21st century teachers use new technologies and develop new instructional styles which are more effective and satisfying. A worrisome phenomenon is the growing population which cannot be accommodated the number of available schools and teachers. Thus, to address the phenomenon in number and in quality, ODE has been acknowledged as an educational system capable of increasing the number and quality of teachers in both developed and developing nations (Belawati & Wardi, 2007). Studies have been carried out in many countries which proved that ODE programmes have been used to produce new teachers and to improve the competencies of existing teachers (Jung, 2007).

The Distance Learning Institute, University of Lagos, has been on the frontiers of knowledge by providing education in Nigeria and has contributed to attainment of global developmental goals by making learning accessible and available for all in accordance with the University of Lagos Act 1967 as amended. This started in 1973 with a correspondence programme to assist those who are gainfully employed but without higher educational qualifications. Over the decades, the programme has expanded in length and breadth with more approved courses, migration to the electronic platforms of learning, growth of its academic staff, learners' support unit and strength of learners. It has contributed in no small measure to the development of the educational sector of Nigeria in setting out graduates who are well established in their areas of specialization.

However, according to Quan-Baffour & Arko-Achemfuor (2018) teaching quality depends on the quality of the teacher and the effectiveness of the training received by the teacher can be compromised by many challenging factors. In spite of the successes recorded by ODE on improving number and quality of teachers, the quality has become the subject of debate among teacher educators and stake holders.

Distance Learning Institute, University of Lagos runs five-year education undergraduate programmes in Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry and Physics. Others are Education Economics, English, Business and Early Childhood and Care Education. These programmes have contributed to teacher production significantly at all levels in education.

However, many believed and perceived that teacher training/education cannot be thorough at a distance with serious emphasis on the teaching practice exercise which is a compulsory and essential of teacher training exercise (Akinbode & Abati, 2019). According to Elliot (1993) the need for teaching practice originates from the concept called "Learning to Teach". He insisted that learning to teach is a matter for learning the technical skills which enable individuals to function effectively in the education system.

In Nigeria, teaching practice implies the preparation of student teachers for teaching by practical training (Uzoehina, 2015). Teaching Practice is an opportunity for aspiring teachers to understand the role and operation of how the business of teaching is done. According to Adagba & Idu (2005) teaching practice as an experience of guided teaching in which the trainee teacher assumes increased responsibility for directing the learning group for over a period of time. In the same vein, Imart (2003) observed that teaching practice has three major connotations and they are the practicing of teaching skills and acquisition of the role of a teacher, the whole range of experiences and practical aspect of the course as distinct from theoretical training. This field experience provides a challenging

yet rewarding experience of working with students and acquiring professional competence. It is believed that these experiences have the potential to enhance the teachers' acquisition of professional competence (Aglazor, 2017).

Teaching practice exercise is a requirement for completing teacher qualification and admission into the teaching profession (Allsop & Jessel, 2015). During the teaching practice exercise, learners are not only supervised and evaluated by assigned supervisor but by group of other lecturers who assessed him/her as a team as well as a staff of the school in which he is teaching (Adaba, 2005; Andabai, 2013). Teaching practice goes beyond knowing what to teach and knowing how to teach. The purpose of teaching practice is to develop several competencies in the trainee teacher. It includes impersonal, pedagogical, intercultural and psychological competencies. Supervision and assessment are important aspects of teaching practice and they are done through coordinated partnership between school personnel and University lecturers while the institute has its own developed assessment instruments. However, often times, problems are associated with supervision and assessment of students on teaching practice. This leads concerns for quality assurance in ODE.

Quality assurance has been defined as systematic management and assessment procedures adopted by higher education institutions and systems to monitor performance against objectives and to ensure achievement of quality outputs and quality improvement (Belawati & Zuhairi, 2007). According to Ijaiya (2001) quality is measured by the extent to which the training received from an institution enables the recipient to think clearly, independently and analytically to solve relevant societal problems in any given environment.

Ensuring and providing quality, capacity and appropriate teaching practice exercise at a distance and to realize the national objective of teacher education as stated in the national policy on education poses much threat to stake holders. Failure to ensure quality in teaching practice would result into incompetent teachers (Quan-Baffour & Arko-Achemfuor, 2018). Quality assurance initiatives can help to address challenges and threat by establishing acceptable best practices and developing standards of quality by which teaching practices can be objectively judged (Davies, Howell, & Petrie, 2010). In view of the strategic importance of teaching practice exercise, it is important to assure quality in its implementation. It is with this understanding that this study examined the quality assurance put in place at the Distance Learning Institute at the University of Lagos.

Statement of the Problem

There are various perceptions that teachers trained through distance education are of poor quality compared to their counterparts trained through the conventional mode. To erase the wrong perception, there is need for approach of assuring quality in teacher preparation through Open and Distance Learning Institute. To this effect, this paper examines the various quality assurance policies, systems and procedure put in place and its effectiveness for ensuring quality in teaching practice exercise for teacher trainees in Distance Learning Institute, University of Lagos.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the quality assurance tools put in place for the assessment and effective teaching practice exercise in Distance Learning Institute at the University of Lagos.

Research Questions

Arising from the problem, Six research questions were raised for the study:

1. Does the Institute have adequate orientation for trainee teachers for professional field work?
2. Do the development, production and instructional materials satisfy the need of trainee teachers?
3. Are the assessment Procedures used in teacher training at the Distance Learning Institute at the University of Lagos adequate?
4. Does students support services at the Distance Learning Institute at the University of Lagos meet students' challenges during the period of teaching practice?
5. Is proper monitoring, evaluation and feedback done periodically during teaching Practice?

Methodology

This research work followed a simple descriptive design. Data were collected using questionnaire from trainee teachers in their fourth and fifth years at the Institute. One hundred and seventy-three (173) trainee teachers participated in the research out of Two hundred and fifty-six (256) trainee teachers. The researcher used a stratified sampling technique to choose participants. This was done to ensure that all education students from different cohorts participated in the study. The questionnaire was designed by the researcher. Its reliability coefficient was 0.75. The questionnaire comprised of two sections A and B. Section A contains personal information about respondents while section B contains some quality assurance policies, systems and procedure put in place for teaching practice exercise in Distance Learning Institute, University of Lagos. The questionnaire comprises of 32-items using four-likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA=4), Agree (A=3), Disagree (D=2), and Strongly Disagree (SD=1). The instrument was pilot tested with fifty (50) trainee –teachers who were not involve in the study. The questionnaire was administered on trainee- teachers with the help of four research assistants. Mean statistics was used to analysed the data collected. The cut-off point for rating high or low an item was fixed at 2.50.

Results and Discussions

Reliability Analysis of Quality Assurance and Control in Distance Learning Teacher Preparation
Institute: Lessons from Distance Learning Institute, University of Lagos

Table 1: Reliability Results of Instrument

Instrument	Scale Statistics					Reliability Statistics	Validity Statistics (ANOVA)	
	No. of Items	No. of Valid Samples	Mean	SD	CV		F-value	P-value
Orientation exercise	3	173	2.95	0.527	0.18	0.738	59.729	0.001
Development, Production of Instructional Materials	10	173	2.77	0.237	0.09	0.750	54.364	0.001
Assessment Procedure	10	173	2.78	0.273	0.10	0.710	19.550	0.001
Students Support Services	4	173	2.72	0.476	0.18	0.702	18.142	0.001
Monitoring and feedback Systems	6	173	2.72	0.375	0.14	0.768	19.057	0.001
Pooled	33	173	2.79	0.176	0.06	0.746	310.413	0.000

Source: Field Survey, 2017. SD (Standard Deviation). CV (Coefficient of Variation).

The test of reliability result of the responses on the Quality Assurance and Control in Distance Learning Teacher Preparation Institute: Lessons from Distance Learning Institute, University of Lagos, using standardized Cronbach's Alpha indicates that the instruments are reliable, since the Cronbach's Alpha Statistics obtained in each composite variable and overall are 0.738 (Orientation Procedure), 0.750 (Development, Production of Instructional Materials and Structure), 0.710 (Assessment Procedure), 0.702 (Students Support Services), 0.768 (Monitoring and feedback Systems) and 0.746 (overall) > 0.70 threshold value. The validation of reliability results of instrument is carried out using the analysis of variance (ANOVA) test, in each segment of the instrument and overall, which suggests that there is no significance variation on how the respondents rated the items at F-value = 59.729, 54.364, 19.550, 18.142, 19.057 and 310.413, P-value < 0.05 significance level, respectively. These are supported by the coefficient of variation (CV) results; CV = 0.18, 0.09, 0.10, 0.18, 0.14 and 0.06 < 0.50 threshold value, respectively, which indicate strong homogeneity on how the respondents rated items in the instruments, Generally, there is an internal consistency of the answers provided by the respondents and therefore, the data do not violate the assumptions of reliability.

2. Analysis of Research Questions:

The research questions raised for this study were analysed as follows:

Does the Institute have adequate orientation for trainee teachers going for professional field work?

Table 2: Orientation for the Professional field work

Variable	Mean Response Rating				
	Mean	SD	Category	Relative Index	Remark
The orientation exercise is relevant to the field work	2.97	0.866	3	1.01	High
Trainee teachers are exposed to ideas/ theories in practical classrooms situations before the field work	2.95	0.900	3	1.00	High
Trainee teachers are exposed to problems and prospects in the teaching profession	2.95	0.897	3	1.00	High
Pooled	2.95	0.527	3	1.00	

Source: Field Survey 2017. Sample size = 173. SD (Standard Deviation). Category: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly agree

From Table 2, it is indicated that the teacher-trainees agreed with all the statements in question (i.e mean value was greater than 2.5). It is a clear indication that orientation exercise programme was adequate and not a waste of time (Mean= 2.97). It was also agreed that teacher-trainees were exposed to ideas and theories of practical teaching before embarking on the field work (mean=2.95). It was also indicated that during orientation teacher-trainees were exposed to problems and prospects of teaching practice (mean=2.95). This is in agreement with the findings of Okobia, Ogumogu and Osagie (2013) that found out that majority of the student-teachers that participated in the research found orientation exercise interesting and more rewarding. More so, the study is the same with the findings of Benton-kuper, (2001) previous knowledge gained prepared them for the actual professional field work.

Research Question 2: Do the development, production and instructional materials satisfied the need of trainee teachers?

Table 3: Development, Production of Instructional Materials and Structure and Management of Delivery System

Variable	Mean Response Rating				
	Mean	SD	Category	Relative Index	Remark
The course materials are available as at when due before embarking on the field work	3.27	0.639	3	1.18	High

The facilitators/e-tutors qualified to teach the assigned courses in education	3.14	0.760	3	1.13	High
The course material went through the normal developmental stages before giving it out to trainee teachers	3.14	0.696	3	1.13	High
e-tutoring is appropriate and provided with adequate facilities	3.10	0.721	3	1.12	High
The learning management system is robust and appropriate for teaching/ learning	2.92	0.828	3	1.05	High
I Preferred mode of delivery of our learning	2.83	0.763	3	1.02	High
There are no adequate training for staff members teaching education courses	2.70	0.877	3	0.97	Low
There are other learning materials available to support my learning	2.50	0.804	3	0.90	Low
Course materials are not readable	2.26	0.874	2	0.82	Low
The available course materials are interactive enough to satisfy trainee teachers' need	1.82	0.682	2	0.66	Low
Pooled	2.77	0.237	3	1.00	

Source: Field Survey 2017. Sample size = 173. SD (Standard Deviation). Category: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly agree

Table 3 indicates that teacher-trainees disagreed that available course materials are not interactive enough to meet their needs, they also disagreed that there are no adequate training for staff members taking education courses (mean=2.70). This implies that the staff are adequately trained. More so, there is inadequacy in the learning materials to support learning (mean=2.50). However, they agreed that course materials are available as and when due before embarking on the field work and the statement was rated high (mean=3.27). In the same vein, they agreed that the available course materials when through normal developmental stages ranging from content and language editing and instructional design before giving it out for learners' use (mean=3.14). Teacher-trainees also agreed that the learning management system is robust and met their needs with appropriate e-tutor to tackle the online learning (mean=2.92).

Research Question 3: Does Assessment Procedures Adequate?

Table 4: Assessment Procedure

Variable	Mean Response Rating				
	Mean	SD	Category	Relative Index	Remark
Lecurers/ supervisors supervisees /assess just a part of the lesson delivery	3.06	0.713	3	1.10	High
Supervisors are often appeared friendly	2.81	0.795	3	1.01	High
Workshops on TP should be run by training institutions for supervisors to standardize the process	2.81	0.838	3	1.01	High
Scoring by supervisors should be done after some oral discussion with trainee teachers	2.80	0.849	3	1.01	High
TP supervision training should be conducted for supervisors to standardize the process	2.79	0.816	3	1.00	High
Supervisors are chosen based on their knowledge in a particular subject area	2.79	0.899	3	1.00	High
Lesson note are not assessed by supervisors	2.72	0.878	3	0.98	Low
Supervisors are bias in awarding scores to trainee teachers	2.70	0.857	3	0.97	Low
Cooperating teachers demotivate trainee teachers during TP	2.69	0.899	3	0.97	Low
Supervisors compromised on the quality of TP	2.67	0.863	3	0.96	Low

Pooled	2.78	0.273	3	1.00	
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Source: Field Survey 2017. Sample size = 173. SD (Standard Deviation). Category: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly agree

Table 4 indicates that teacher-trainees agreed that lecturers/ supervisors assessed just a part of the lesson delivered (mean=3.06), and that supervisors always appeared friendly during their visit. They agreed that scoring by supervisors should be done after oral discussion with teacher-trainees (mean=2.81). In addition, they also agreed that teaching practice supervision training should be conducted for supervisors to standardized the process (mean=2.79). Teacher-trainees agreed that supervisors should score them after oral discussion with them (mean=2.80) but disagreed that supervisors are bias in awarding scores to teaher-trainees (mean=2.70). this in agreement with the findings of Hu & Wong (2006) trainee – teachers relate more with the cooperating teachers than supervisors from their schools. In the same vein, Ngara and Ngwarai & Ngara (2013) agreed that supervisors did not visit students trainees as at when due and that supervisors awarded scores before interacting with the student -teacher. Similar responses was noted in the study conducted by Holloway (2001) where he condemned the unprofessional behaviors of supervisors and stated that the the they are required to guide and lead student-teachers advising on shortcomings and encouraging them until the student-teachers is able to present lesson effectively.

Research Question 4: Does students support services met students challenges?

Table 5: Students Support Services

Variable	Mean Response Rating				
	Mean	SD	Category	Relative Index	Remark
The support services provided during teaching practice adequate	2.88	0.878	3	1.06	High
We are posted around our vicinity for easy access to TP schools	2.77	0.947	3	1.02	High
The counseling unit is tremendously helpful	2.77	0.916	3	1.02	High
I can access information from where I was posted for TP	2.44	0.858	2	0.90	Low
Pooled	2.72	0.476	3	1.00	

Source: Field Survey 2017. Sample size = 173. SD (Standard Deviation). Category: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly agree

Table 5 indicates that teacher-trainees rated support services provided during teaching practice very high(mean=2.88). They agreed that positing to ther various TP station is convenient for them due to their nature of mode of learning (mean =2.77) while the counselling unit tremendously assit them in getting the exercise done. Teacher trainees were not able to acess information from their various TP stations as at when due. They therefore rated the statement low (mean =2.44).

Research Question 5: Is proper monitoring and feedback done periodically?

Table 6: Feedback Systems

Variable	Mean Response Rating				
	Mean	SD	Category	Relative Index	Remark
Feed back are sent back promptly	3.18	0.724	3	1.17	High
Monitoring activities is adequate	2.80	0.952	3	1.03	High
Feedback mechanism is appropriate	2.71	0.896	3	1.00	High
Supervisors assessment report are illegible and therefore make feedback difficult	2.57	0.989	3	0.94	Low

Feedback are earnest and worked upon for correctness	2.54	0.905	3	0.93	Low
Counselling unit helps in getting feedback from supervisors	2.53	0.937	3	0.93	Low
Pooled	2.72	0.375	3	1.00	

Source: Field Survey 2017. Sample size = 173. SD (Standard Deviation). Category: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly agree

Table 6 shows that there is prompt feedback to teacher-trainees and the statement was rated high with (mean=3.18) and agreed that the monitoring mechanisms put in place is adequate (mean=2.80). teacher -trainees disagreed that the feedback given are adequate to read as a result of poor hand writing (mean=2.57). Oguntunde (2009) who conducted research students' teachers acquisition of knowledge in agriculture using agricultural students discovered that feed back process is an essential elements in teaching practice process and this enhances students teachers to acquire knowledge of agriculture content. Belawati & Zuhairi (2007) discovered that students involvement particularly through regular feed back, is confirmed as a key to implementing and maintaining quality assurance in academic.

Conclusion

From the view of point of teacher-trainees, it was revealed that majority of the teacher-trainees indicated that quality assurance and management requires management commitment and leadership for successful implementation.

Recognizing quality collaboration and team work within the supervisors, cooperating teachers, counsellors, institution and the teaching practice schools will facilitate communication and encourage collective and coordinated quality teaching practice exercise.

Regarding the level of competence, teacher-trainees perceived that getting appropriate feedback , communicating ideas, responding to their comments recognizing individual differences will enhance good performance on the professional field work.

Recommendations

From the findings above the following are therefore recommended:

- Teaching practice orientation should be made compulsory for trainee- teachers and carried out before the commencement of T.P exercise.
- School of their TP should not be far from their places of work as distance learners. Teacher-trainees often times double up as teachers in their schools and teacher trainees in the university, therefore a huge burden is place on them and at times rendered them ineffective during the exercise.
- Workshops and training should be organized for supervisor to empower them to work effectively in guiding and leading teacher-trainees.

Learner support unit should be structured to respond to teacher- trainees' queries and concerns swiftly. There is need for upgrading to meet up with 21st century skills of teaching and learning. Teaching practice contributed professional competence when student -teachers are employed in various schools.

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