

Learning Resources and Efficiency of Open Distance Learning Programmes in Kwara State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The Open Distance Learning (ODL) commenced in Nigeria in the year 2003 by the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) and many universities in the country have also adopted it. The study focused purposely on four ODL centers in Kwara state. Five research questions and three research hypotheses were formulated. The student samples were selected through convenience sampling method. Two research instruments designed by the researchers for data collection were subjected to both face and content validity. The questionnaire was pilot-tested using Cronbach Alpha test which yielded 0.67 coefficient of reliability. The hypotheses were tested using chi-square analysis and research questions were answered using percentages. Findings revealed a significant relationship between ODL programs efficiency and resources availability ($p < 0.00 < 0.05$), significant relationship between ODL program and academic learner support facilities ($p < 0.00 < 0.05$). The study concluded that teaching and learning resources availability and usage have significant influence on the efficiency of ODL programs. It is therefore recommended that learning resources within the reach of learners should be in use at the centers and support facilities should be improved upon by adopting more widely used media to communicate with students.

Keywords: learning resources, open distance learning, learners support facilities, resource efficiency, resource availability

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Introduction

Nigeria National Policy on Education (2004) has over the years recognized the place of education for all the citizens of the country and provided for lifelong learning through distance education. The policy was emphatic that at any stage of the educational process after junior secondary education an individual shall be able to choose between continuing full-time studies, combining work with study, or embarking on full time employment. The policy enumerated the goals of open and distance education in Nigeria as:

- Allow access for equal educational opportunities for all including those that have been denied.
- Meet special needs of employers by mounting special certificate courses for their employees at their workplace.
- Encourage internalization especially of tertiary education curricula, and
- Ameliorate the effects of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions utilizing experts as teachers regardless of their locations or places of work.

There is no doubt that the intention of the Federal Government of Nigeria was to widen the access to tertiary education through open and distance learning. However, these intentions are being abused by various institutions claiming to run distance learning and it has become a sort of all comer practice for tertiary institutions to run distance learning. The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) is currently the only known uni-mode university mandated for Open Distance Learning in delivery of university education while about eight other universities may be regarded as dual-mode universities with very limited capacity to deliver degree programs by the open and distance learning (National University Commission (NUC), 2009). These universities run a semblance of ODL in addition to the conventional face-to-face mode.

However, many non-accredited institutions were running distance learning programs in deviance of the government directives and policy. It is on the record that most of the centers were poorly run, ill-equipped and staffed for ODL programs and as such most of their students are either poorly prepared, poorly trained and for many of the centers, the students out rightly disappeared before the expiration of the program. Because of the apparent lack of discipline and compliance with the government policy statement, the National Universities Commission (2009) issued a guideline defining eligibility of institutions and centers to run ODL mode. The guideline expects:

- Universities operating on dual mode should seek for NUC accreditation / re-evaluation as ODL institutions.
- All universities interested in offering degree programs by ODL mode shall apply to the NUC in writing indicating the academic programs and the specific academic disciplines they intend to offer by the ODL mode,
- Interested universities shall complete the necessary application formats indicating the human and material resources including learner support facilities available to guarantee sustainable teaching and learning, and
- Such universities shall be evaluated by a panel of ODL experts from within and outside the Nigerian university system for the purposes of accreditation to offer ODL program

It is pertinent to say that only universities accredited to offer degree programs shall be granted approval to run degree programs in the specific academic disciplines in which they have verifiable competence (NUC, 2009)

The need for re-validation/accreditation of various ODL institutions in the country arises because of the apparent deficiencies attributed to very many of them. The ODL program has become a cash cow for many institutions taking advantages of the large pool of prospective students from the ever-increasing Nigerian population. Apparently, most of the ODL institutions did not do enough to have a good program; there is a mismatch in ODL program designed the institutions and what they are actually giving out to the students. Many of them lack the necessary learner support facilities that will ease and motivate learners to put their time and efforts into the program. Similar to this is the seeming fear of acceptability of ODL certificates like those ones issued by conventional institutions due to accreditation issues. The NUC felt let down by the way most of the institutions run their ODL programs and it was in response to this that it issued the 2009 guidelines which became effective in 2015. That all programs must be accredited by NUC, accreditation implies that, all institutional requirements- in terms of facilities, personnel and program are as good as we can find them in conventional institutions. This implies that, there will be no basis for the stigmatization of certificates from ODL programs. This stigmatization often affects the credibility and acceptance of ODL certificates which results in their low patronage.

The stigmatization of ODL programs has done a lot harm to the institutions running them including the NOUN the flagship of ODL program in the country. Many of their candidates' especially young applicants will continue to try admission into the regular universities as many times as possible until they are admitted even if it comes at the very last session of their program at an ODL institution. Many cited non

deployment of ODL graduates for the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) program which is a year compulsory national service by all graduates of Universities and Polytechnics in the country. Serving in the NYSC scheme has been a thing of pride to students and their parents because of the importance attached to it as a precondition for taking up jobs, political appointments and even embarking on further studies at the post graduate levels. The non acceptance of NOUN Law, Medicine and Nursing graduate to their professional bodies aggravate the situation as many of the students engaged in those programs opted out because admittance into those prestigious professional bodies is what defines your degree certificate in those areas. There is no doubt that these courses attract large number of prospective students in conventional institutions and the non acceptability of graduates of ODL program dampens the morale of students studying these courses thus, many students enrolled for them are opting out even when they are yet to secure admission into conventional schools.

The learning facilities for ODL could be of two types: The synchronous tools allow participants to be engaged the same time as the traditional classroom setting but participants are located in different places. The method deploys tele-visuals, digital and online tools for interacting with instructors and peers in real time but not physically. The method relies heavily on web – based technology that gives students and teachers the opportunity to interact simultaneously in real time. A system that deploys these tools has to ensure constant supply of electricity as well as adequate internet broad bands that are easily accessible and connected to by both instructors and students at the same time. In today's Nigeria, the two most important ingredients of synchronous learning are generously not available, mostly unreliable, and inherently costly.

On the other hand, the asynchronous learning uses online tools to facilitate information sharing outside the constraints of time and place where participants are located. The asynchronous learning model employs self study tools such as e-mail. Blogs, online discussion boards like WhatsApp and Wikis. The system allows for both online and offline interaction and students can always work at their own time and pace. The beauty of asynchronous tools is that they are learner-centered as students are able to follow the curriculum at their own pace. It does not require real time interactive activities and most participants are relieved of problem of pitiable electricity supply that is typical of the Nigerian social infrastructural space and the need to be time specific online at the period of instruction. These myriads of problems: credibility, accreditation and other operational

challenges facing ODL programs calls for its assessment to ascertain their enrolment levels, their withdrawals, dropout rates and wastages.

Literature Review

Distance learning has been described as learning organized, dispensed, and acquired from a distance. Towards the end of the 20th century, the prefix “open” became attached to distance learning to indicate learning managed from a distance which is equally open learning (Biao, 2012). For clarity, it is any learning process that allows individual learners to exercise control in the choice of one or more aspects of learning (NOUN, 2009). In distance learning, education and instructions is delivered to students individually mostly by correspondences while students engage with learning materials sent to them in the comfort of their home or workplace. (Atolagbe, Umaru & Oparinde, 2017). Distance education involves the use of a range of media such as print, written correspondence, audio, video, computer-based media, and networks as well as multimedia facilities for presentation and transmission of information and communication between the university and her students. In line with the above, Jamal, Rizvi and Kayani (2021) carried out research on the teaching-learning approaches to distance education and measuring students’ learning perceptions.

In Nigeria today, distance learning has become increasingly popular among the working class and younger generation of students who has struggled so much to gain admission into the conventional universities because of the rigorous admission requirements and criteria (Adamu, 2018). Annually, in the last six years, the application for admission into conventional Nigerian universities through the Unified Tertiary Institutions Matriculation Examinations has seen prospective admission seekers number increasing to over 1.8 million candidates. The universities had space to accommodate just about 500,000 applicants. The increasing number of prospective admission seekers to higher education especially university education who could not get admission has made the demand for distance learning to become very popular among Nigerians (Atueji, 2015).

A study on the perception of learners and lecturers on E-learning mode of Education and the availability as well as utilization of facilities for teaching and learning at the Distance Learning Institute (DLI), University of Lagos was conducted by Oladele and Modebelu (2021). Open learning programs enable people to learn at the time and place which satisfy their circumstances. For open learning, the methods of communication are through technology driven innovations like – self-

instructional electronic communication, telephone, printed materials, audio broadcasting, video and online communication in the form of Open Education Resources (OER) that allow students to study in the comfort of their homes. Today, most of the distance learning units in the Universities are transforming to full online learning platforms and are being subjected to re-validation and accreditation of their programs (NUC, 2015). Most of them are making their admission conditions more flexible and open so that they could attain the goal of providing greater access to quality university education for the teeming population of workers, adults and out of school youths who are hitherto denied access to university education in Nigeria.

ODL has greatly opened up the learning space (especially the university education) in Nigeria with NOUN running over 70 learning centers across the country and enrolment standing at over 500,000. In 2007, some of the NOUN programs do not have accreditation and the university sat down to separate those programs that have full accreditation and fish out others with interim accreditation and those that are denied accreditation. The result of the exercise was that forty-nine programs were flushed out across board and admission to them were suspended. Accreditation problems and viability of some of the programs created misgivings and mistrust about NOUN. People do not look at it as credible (Adamu, 2018). Perhaps, the misgivings about NOUN and the prohibitive cost of running some nonviable centers led to a fall in the total number of active registered students to 253,000 in 2018. However, in 2019, no fewer than 515,000 students are currently enrolled to pursue different courses at NOUN, however 150,000 students are active across the 78 study centers of the institution nationwide (The Nation Newspaper, 2018). In spite of the fact that only few numbers of enrolled students are active (29.1%) the Governing council of university is hoping to increase enrolment to one million candidates in five years.

Recently the university graduated 14,769 students across the disciplines. This is the largest number of students graduated by the university since its inception in 2003. The NOUN vice chancellor announced that 20,799 students will be graduating in 2019 academic session, 103 of them graduating with first class degrees while the number of postgraduates stood at 5,157 (Tyohemba, 2019).

Despite the success story of NOUN ODL programs across the country, opinions of major stakeholders is that, the program has not been as efficient as it should especially among conventional universities running a dual- mode program. This seeming inefficiency prompted the National University Commission (NUC) to step in with a view to sanitizing the

system. Ofoha (2012) examined the contribution of ODL programs to human capital development in primary schools in the South-eastern Nigeria and found a relative level of effectiveness of the programs. Ofoha, reported that primary school teachers who enrolled for the ODL program gained immensely. She however recommended a regular assessment of the ODL program to ensure continuous effectiveness and efficiency. Atolagbe, Umaru and Oparinde (2017) examined the challenges facing ODL program in Nigeria with specific reference to Business Education courses in Ilorin Study centers. The study identified a high level of completion rates in marketing (95%) office technology (86%) and accounting (68%). The study found a moderate positive relationship (.056) between adequacy of teaching materials and completion rates in the program. However, teaching/learning methodology employed by the centers had a positive low (.297) relationship with program completion rate. The researchers suggested the adoption of a friendly and student-centered mode of course delivery.

In a report by World University News (2016), three conclusions were drawn about 10 ODL institutions involved in the study, it reported a mixed enrolment patterns for them and observed a limited performance data with high level of tension between the typical ODL student experience and the capabilities, situations and preferences of many students. Although about half of the sample institutions have continued to grow strongly, the balance has suffered enrolment decline and market share loss along with financial difficulties. The world university News (2016) report concluded that despite decades of experience, many mature ODL institutions sustain a mixed reputation for academic quality and none in the sample squarely reports on student performance. The report says reasons including graduation rate are why ODL institutions do not report simple student performance data. It is noteworthy to say that NOUN was among the ODL institutions covered in the report.

Research Objectives

The study was undertaken to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the teaching and learning resources available at the various ODL centers in the Kwara State.
2. To examine the various technologies deployed for teaching and learning in ODL centers in the Kwara State
3. To examine the efficiency of the ODL program in the Kwara State
4. To investigate the major problems facing ODL students in Ilorin Centers.
5. To find out the program which attract the highest enrolment in Ilorin centers.

Research Questions

The research study was guided by the following questions:

1. What are the learning resources mostly used for ODL in Kwara State?
2. What is the level of learning and teaching resources availability at the ODL centers?
3. What is the student returning level of the ODL centers in Kwara State?
4. What are the major problems facing ODL students in Kwara State?
5. Which of the program attracted the highest enrolment level?

Research Hypotheses

The study involved three hypotheses for the study.

H₀₁ There is no significant relationship between availability of learning and teaching resources and efficiency of ODL centers in Kwara State

H₀₂ There is no significant relationship between availability of academic learners support facilities and efficiency of ODL centers in Kwara State

H₀₃ There is no significant relationship between the nature of evaluation and efficiency of ODL centers in Kwara State

Methodology

The study is a descriptive survey designed to investigate the operations of the ODL centers in Kwara State. The researcher is interested in all the institutions offering ODL programs in the state, namely: The University of Ilorin, The NOUN study center Kulende, NOUN center, Nigerian Prison Service and NOUN center Nigerian Army Barrack, Sobi.

The study adopted a purposive sampling technique to select all the ODL centers in Kwara State while convenience sampling technique was used to pick the student respondents. However, two out of the four centers presently do not have active student population. One reason for this was the re-validation and accreditation requirement of NUC and the Center for Open and Distance Learning (CODIL) University of Ilorin is currently undergoing changes in preparation for upcoming NUC accreditation while non-viability of the Nigeria Prison Service centre due to low enrolment was the reason for its suspension. However, all the Center Directors (4) were part of the sample for the study. The student sample was 342 selected from the combined population of 2045 students in the two active centers the total sample for the study is 346. The

students were selected using the convenience sample because ODL students were non-residential and only come to centers when the need arises.

The data for the study were collected using two instruments designed by the researcher. The first is a questionnaire named “Open and Distance Learning Resources and Efficiency Questionnaire” (ODLREQ) administered to center directors and students. The second instrument was tagged “Open and Distance Learning Resources and Efficiency Proforma” administered only to the center directors. The ODLREQ has two sections. Section A as questions on the nature of ODL program run by the centers, whether is pure open or pure distance learning or a hybrid of the two. It also asked about the various technologies deployed to run their programs, the number of academic programs in the center, staff mix as well as the accreditation status of their programs. Section B ask about learning and teaching resources available in the centers, academic learner support facilities available and the modalities for student evaluation.

The proforma asks for information on student enrolment, retention, and graduation for the programs in each center over a period of four years (2014 -2018). The ODLREQ was subjected to content and face validity by experts in Test and Measurement from the Faculty of Education, University of Ilorin, while it was pilot tested at the NOUN center in Osogbo, Osun State for reliability. The result of the pilot test was analyzed using Cronbach Alpha test of reliability which yielded 0.67 coefficient of reliability.

Results and Discussion

Research Questions (RQs)

The following questions were raised to help the researcher find answers to the objectives of the study.

RQ1. What are the learning resources mostly used for ODL in Kwara State?

Table 1

Learning and teaching resources availability and usability in Kwara state open distance learning centers

Teaching/Learning Usability Resources	Fully Available	Partially Available	Not Available
1. Interactive texts/modules 300(86.7%)	180 (52.0%)	120 (34.3%)	64 (18.5%)
2. CD Rom 200(56.7%)	150 (43.4%)	50 (14.5%)	156 (45.1%)

3. DVD 200(56.7%)	120 (34.7%)	80 (23.1%)	156 (45.1%)
4. USB Sticks 150(43.4%)	70 (20.2%)	76 (22.0%)	200 (57.8%)
5. ICT Availability 100(28.9%)	30 (8.7%)	66 (19.1%)	250 (72.3%)
6. ICT Accessibility 120(34.7%)	80 (23.1%)	40 (11.6%)	226 (65.3%)
7. Social media Networks 140(40.5%)	100 (28.9%)	40 (11.6%)	206 (59.5%)
Total 1,210(50%)	730 (30%)	472(20%)	1258 (52%)

Source: Fieldwork (2020)

Table 1 shows that interactive book material and modules are the most used learning resource among the students. The use of CD Rom and DVD was also averagely used while ICT and internet learning resources are available at very low level. Table 1 revealed the level of resources availability for teaching and learning in the ODL centers. It could be observed that Interactive texts and modules prepared by the centers for students are the most available (52.2%), followed by CD Rom (43.4%). ICT availability for teaching and learning was the least available (8.7%) as well as the least partially available. It is of note that 72.3% of the respondents affirmed the absence of ICT availability for learning while 56.7% said basic teaching and learning modules supplied by the centers were not available.

RQ 2. What is the level of learning and teaching resources availability in the ODL centers?

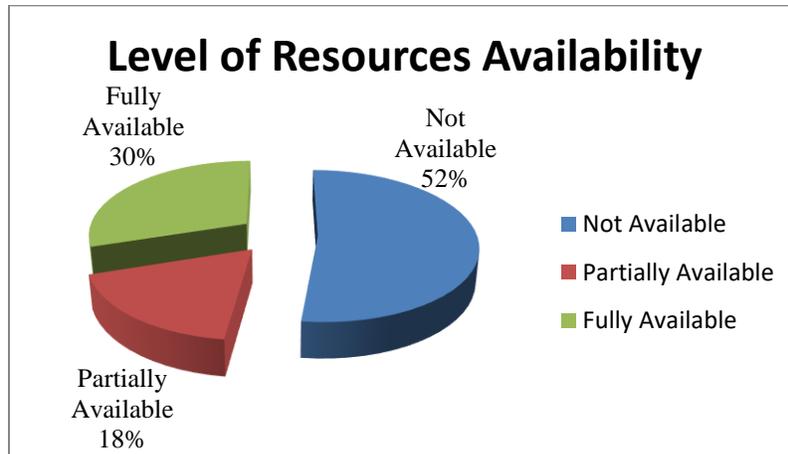


Fig 1. Resources availability for teaching and learning

On the whole as shown in Figure 1, 30% of the respondents agreed that the resources for teaching and learning in the ODL centers were fully available while 18% said they were partially available and 52% said the resources were not available.

RQ3. What is the student returning level of the ODL centers in Kwara State?

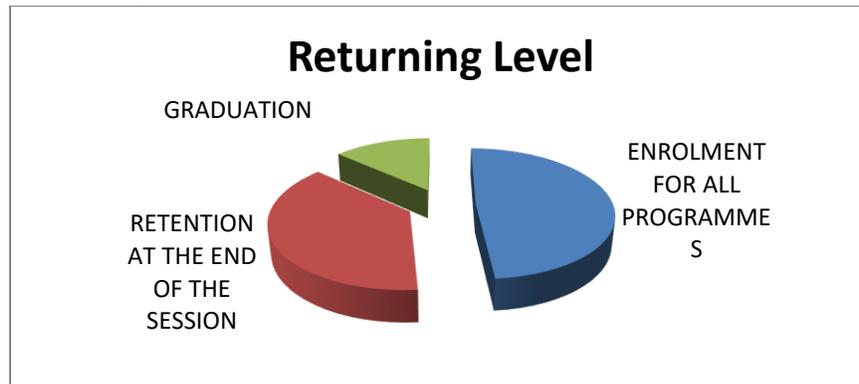


Fig 2. Enrolment, retention, and graduation levels of ODL students.

Table 2
Retention, drop-out and graduation rates

Years	Retention rates	Drop-out rates	Graduation rates **
2014	$890/1250 \times 100 = 71.2$	28.8	$200/890 \times 100 = 22.47$
2015	$1250/1500 \times 100 = 83.33$	16.67	$350/1250 \times 100 = 28.0$
2016	$1620/1850 \times 100 = 87.57$	12.43	$450/1620 \times 100 = 27.78$
2017	$1750/2105 \times 100 = 83.14$	16.86	$750/1750 \times 100 = 42.86$
2018	$2000/2950 \times 100 = 67.80$	32.20	$920/2000 \times 100 = 46.0$
Average	67.76	21.39	33.42

** Graduation rates were based on retention at the end of each session.
Source: Fieldwork (2020)

The retention rates for the program during the period was 67.76% while the drop –out rate was 21.39% and the graduation rate averaged 33.42% over the five years period. For a program that was designed to promote access to education among working people, the average retention and graduation rates is considered unhealthy for the realization of that objective.

For a clearer picture of student flow through the program a flow chart is shown below

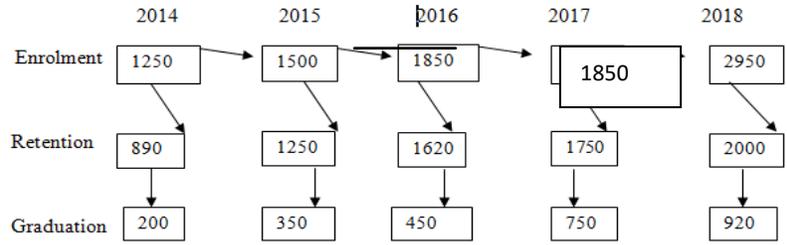


Fig 3. Students flow chart between 2014 and 2018

RQ4. What are the major problems facing ODL students in Ilorin Centers

Table 3

Major problems facing ODL students in Ilorin centers

SN	Problems confronting learners	Number	%
1.	Financial constraints	245	70
2.	Poor learning facilities	217	62
3.	Poor learner's skills	180	52
4.	Poor learning attitudes	158	45
5.	Unfriendly program mode	263	75
6.	Poor evaluation system	200	57
7.	Inadequate learners support facilities	210	60

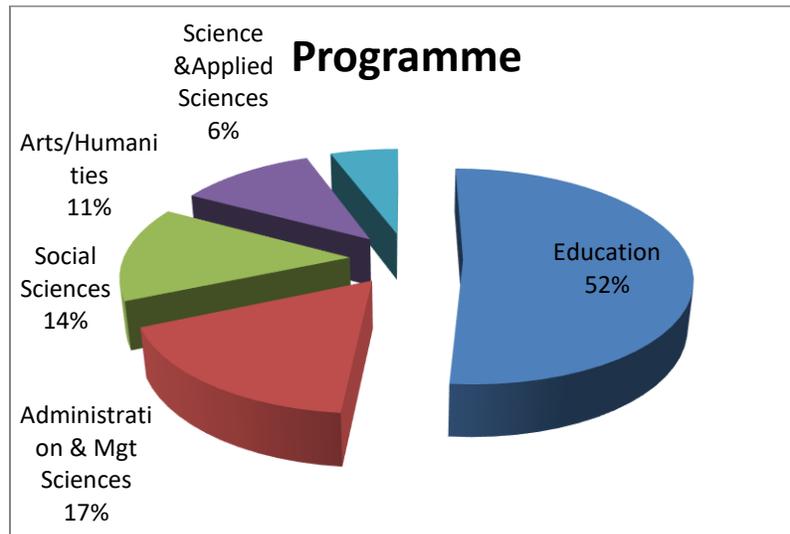


Figure 4. Enrolment by programs.

It was revealed that the program that attracted the highest enrolment in Ilorin centers was Education with score of 180 (52.0%) which is more than other program in Ilorin centers. Education programs (52%) was the most sought after followed by Administration and Management Sciences (17%) Social Sciences (14%) followed Arts and Humanities (11%) while Sciences and Applied Sciences was (6%).

Research Hypotheses

The study raised and tested three hypotheses

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between learning resources and efficiency of ODL centers in Kwara State.

Table 4

Relationship between learning resources and efficiency of ODL centers in Kwara State

Sources	N	Std. Dev	Mean	Df	r-value	r-value	p-value	Decision
Efficiency of ODL	346	2.79	32.87					
Learning resources	346	3.47	32.10	344	0.48*	0.08	0.00	Rejected

*Sig. $p < 0.05$

The findings from the table 4 above shows that calculated r- value of 0.484 and the critical r-value of 0.082 with the P-value of 0.000 which is less than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated r-value was greater than the critical r-value, the null hypothesis was not accepted. This implies that there is a statistically significant relationship between availability of learning and teaching resources and efficiency of ODL centers in Kwara State. Where facilities are inadequate especially on the part of core lecturers as observed by Oladele and Modebelu (2021), the program cannot be run efficiently. If learning resources were made available to students it may enhance student learning in a more comfortable and satisfactory way (Shahzard & Aurangzeb, 2021). It may help in integrating learning time with their work schedules. Learning resources that requires regular appearances at the ODL centers in a face-to –face format will not be convenient for working adults because it will adversely affect their working schedules. If ICT technologies were optimally deployed as was the objectives of the ODL program, students

will be able to work both online and offline on their studies with minimal discomfort. Poor internet connection, ineffective teaching methodologies and poorly scheduled assessment criteria could be a major challenge to the efficiency of the online program (Adnan, & Uddin, 2021).

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between academic learners' support facilities and efficiency of ODL centers in Kwara State.

Table 5
Relationship between academic learners' support facilities and efficiency of ODL centers in Kwara State

Sources		Std. Dev.	Mean	Df	Calc. r-value	Critical r-value	p-value	Decision
Efficiency of ODL	346	2.79	32.87					
Academic support	346	3.34	33.64	344	0.26	0.08	0.00	Rejected

*Sig. $p < 0.05$

The findings from the table 5 shows that calculated r- value of 0.269 and the critical r-value of 0.082 with the p-value of 0.000 which is less than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated r-value is greater than the critical r-value, the null hypothesis two was not accepted. This implies that there is a statistically significant relationship between availability of academic learners' support facilities and efficiency of ODL centers in Kwara State. Since it was discovered that the centers had enough tutor for the student population as shown by tutor-student ratio (60% said student -tutor ratio was between 1 tutor to 20 students), the possibility of adequate academic learners' support facilities making a difference in the efficiency of the ODL programme is very high this mostly contributed to the effectiveness of ODL program in South-Eastern Nigeria (Ofoha, 2012). There was adequate use of communication media among the centers administration and the students. Social media and telephone conversation was found to be the most prominently employed to interact with the students. The adequacy of teaching materials had a significant influence on the efficiency of ODL program as observed by Atolagbe, Umaru & Oparinde (2017).

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between the nature of evaluation and efficiency of ODL centers in Kwara State.

Table 6
Relationship between the nature of evaluation and efficiency of ODL centers in Kwara State

Sources		Std. Dev.	Mean	df	Calc. r-value	Critical r-value	P-value	Decision
Efficiency of ODL	346	2.79	32.8					
Nature of evaluation	346	2.95	32.9	344	0.47	0.08	0.00	Rejected

*Sig. $p < 0.05$

Table 6 shows that calculated r- value of 0.474 and the critical r-value of 0.082 with the P-value of 0.000 which is less than 0.05 level of significance thus, the correlation is statistically significant. Since the calculated r-value is greater than the critical r-value, the null hypothesis three was not accepted. This implies that there is a significant relationship between the nature of evaluation and efficiency of ODL centers in Kwara State. The nature of assessment in the ODL centers must have significantly influenced the operation of the programs. Regular external moderation visit by the National Universities Commission (NUC) must have significantly helped in raising the efficiency level of the centers (Ofoha, 2012). However, the mixture of online and face-to-face method of continuous assessment and examination may have dampened the efficiency level knowing very well the problems attributable to the use of internet facilities in Nigeria. Shahzard and Aurangzeb (2021) submitted that most participants decried the non – flexibility of LMS classes preferring a mixture of face-to-face and online learning, this is at variance with what ODL students in Nigeria clamor for.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concluded that resources for teaching and learning in the ODL centers were not adequate. The technologies for conducting ODL are very much inadequate and cannot sustain full operation of Open Distance Learning. The returning level of ODL students for the centers was high. Financial constraints, unfriendly program mode and inadequate learning facilities were the major problems of ODL centers in Kwara

State. The efficiency of the ODL programs were strongly influenced by the number of resources for teaching and learning in the centers. There was a significant relationship between the availability of academic learners' support facilities and the efficiency of the ODL centers. Also, the nature of student evaluation has a significant effect on the efficiency of the ODL centers.

Based on these results, the following recommendations were made that more resources especially Information and Communication Technology, and internet accessibility at affordable cost should be made available to both the instructors and the students, efficient technologies that are of today's standard should be deployed for teaching and assessment of the students, academic learner support facilities should be put in place especially the use of e-mail texts, social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Face book to improve communication between the students and the centers administrators. Face-to-face mode of delivery assignments and writing assessment tests should be adopted pending the time that online platform facilities would have substantially improved and accessible by all students.

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