



CORRELATION BETWEEN PERFORMANCE AND QUALITY OF ACADEMIC STAFF IN NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA (NOUN)

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Summary

The paper aims at examining the inability of NOUN to graduate degree students despite 7 years of operation. It examined this by viewing the quality, quantity, experience and continuous development of the academic staff. A 25% sample of the academic staff was taken across the schools and using the Spearman-Rho correlation, it is established that the acute shortage of academic staff hampers performance. It is also established that only 40% of the staff have doctoral degrees and 74% are in the lower academic ranks with few older academicians to mentor them. Finally, many of the staff has little or no experience in tertiary teaching hence they are bound to make blunders. The paper ends by suggesting the following:

- 1. Employment of academic staff should be based on a minimum of two years experience in at least a conventional university.*
- 2. New entrants into Open and Distance Learning (ODL) should be tutored for a minimum of six months.*
- 3. Constant training with focus on full time staff should be encouraged.*
- 4. Academic staff should be made to operate strictly within their specialization.*

Academic staff should be encouraged to have a Ph. D.

Introduction

An open university is a university that takes care of all its prospective candidates irrespective of their academic background (Anderson, Benjamin and Fuss, 1998). The door of the university is open to all. All applicants are admitted at will and are allowed to study according to their speed. This implies that a student may choose to study longer than the minimum number of years required to graduate for a particular course. Open universities has various programmes designed to take care of various interest groups of people despite their deficiencies. It is a university that do not shut the admission door on any applicant. Candidates who have deficiencies are usually admitted on compassionate grounds such as age and experience.

Presently, all over the world, Open and Distance Education (ODE) is gaining momentum and is responding to the challenge of the exponential rise in the population of those who have been deprived of the right to education. This mode of study has been legitimately accepted as a mode of education for over 150 years (Guri-Rosenblit, 1999; Holmberg, 2001). As a worldwide phenomenon, ODE has also become an acceptable mode of education in Africa

and particularly in Nigeria (Adekanmbi, 2004). However, the greatest challenge confronting ODE in Africa generally and Nigeria in particular is the availability of quality academic staff versed in the operations of the ODE.

National Open University of Nigeria: A Brief Overview

As far back as 1977, the idea of an open university has already reflected in the National Policy on Education as it states that: “maximum efforts will be made to enable those who can benefit from higher education to be given access to it. Such access may be through universities or correspondence courses, or *open universities*, or part-time and work study programme” (National Policy on Education, 1977). It was this policy statement that paved the way for the National Open University (NOU), the forerunner of the NOUN.

After a prolonged debate in the National Assembly, an act establishing the Open University of Nigeria was passed. The NOU was formally established on 22nd July, 1983 but before it could take off, the act was suspended via a budgetary pronouncement made by General Buhari on April 25, 1984, after the military junta took over (Blueprint, 2002). However, in 2002 another democratically elected government which had assumed power in 1999 removed the suspension and the university started with the name NOUN.

NOUN started with four schools and later added another one making five to date. The schools are: School of Arts and Social Sciences (SASS), School of Business and Human Resources Management (SBHRM), School of Education (SEDU), School of Law (SOL) and School of Science and Technology (SST). Each school is headed by a Dean who is a professor (except for SBHRM that has an Associate Professor as Dean) and various programmes are headed by Programme Leaders who are either Associate Professors or Senior Lecturers and are responsible to the Dean of their various schools. There are also Course Coordinators and Assistant Course Coordinators in the schools who are responsible for the coordination of the courses in the various programmes and they are responsible to the Programme Leaders.

Research Problem

NOUN is about 7 years old, all things being equal it should have had at least three sets of graduate for a 4-year programme. But this is not the case. With three sets of admissions in certificate courses, diplomas, degrees and post graduate courses since inception, it is only in January 2009 that NOUN is able to graduate only 69 students in certificate, diploma and post graduate diploma courses. This situation is worrisome to all NOUN stakeholders. If the number and period of graduation are the means through which the success of academic programmes are measured then NOUN cannot be said to be very successful. This study is to examine the likely variables responsible for this delay in the academic programmes, and thereby proffer solution to the problem.

Research Questions

Based on the stated problem, the following research questions are raised:

1. Is there a relationship between the quality of academic staff of NOUN and its implementation of educational programmes?
2. Does the qualification of academic staff have effect on implementation of educational programmes?
3. Is there a relationship between academic staff experience and the successful implementation of educational programmes?

4. Is there a significant difference between academic staff who had further training and those who do not in programme implementation?

Research Hypotheses

To provide answers to the stated research questions, the following hypotheses are formulated:

- Ho₁ There is no significance relationship between the quality of academic staff in NOUN and implementation of educational programmes.
- Ho₂ There is no significance relationship between academic staff qualification and implementation of educational programmes.
- Ho₃ There is no significance relationship between academic staff experience and successful implementation of educational programmes.
- Ho₄ There is no significance difference between academic staff who had further training and those who do not in the implementation of educational programmes.

Purpose of the Study

This study is designed to help elicit the actual variables responsible for the delay in the implementation of educational programmes in NOUN, and thereby proffer solution. The lack of adequate implementation of programmes is a threat to the existence of such programmes.

Significance of the Study

The findings in this study would help:

1. The NOUN management to re-strategies the implementation plan;
2. Other Open and Distance Institution to know how to avoid this kind of occurrence in their educational programmes;
3. Policy makers in taking appropriate decisions on Open and Distance Learning

Research Design

This study is based on the correlation method which is to help establish a relationship the independent variables and the dependent variable.

Population of the Study

The entire NOUN academic staff numbering 56 from the five existing schools constitutes the population for the research:

Table 1: Academic Staff at NOUN Showing Quantity and Ranks

S/N	SCHOOL	ACC-CCI	PL II	PL 1 & PROF	TOTAL
1.	SASS	8	4	2	14
2.	SBHRM	10	2	-	12
3.	SEDU	6	4	2	12
4.	SOL	2	1	1	4
5.	SST	11	2	1	14
	TOTAL	37	13	6	56

Sample of the Study

Stratified sampling technique was used, and from each stratum 25% of the existing population was selected, hence 4 was chosen from SASS, 3 from SEDU, 3 from SBHRM, 4 from SST and 1 from SOL. This gave a total 15.

Research Instrument

Questionnaire was designed for the sampled academic staff to elicit information on quality, quantity, experience and training. The Likert four rating scale was used; the positive response received higher score while the negative received lower score. To test these independent variables against the dependent variable, the National University Commissions (NUC) benchmark for implementation of educational programmes in the university was used. This was given a four rate score of 4, 3, 2, and 1. 4 stands at the highest and 1 the lowest.

Statistical Analysis

The Spearman Rho was the statistics used for the analysis. This was used because the study deals with ordinal data. The scores for each independent variable were correlated with the score for the dependent variable.

The correlation of academic staff quality and implementation of educational programmes shows a correlation coefficient of 0.8; that of academic staff quantity and implementation shows 0.8; academic staff experience and implementation of academic programmes is 0.7 and training with implementation of educational programmes shows 0.6. With this correlation coefficient the stated hypotheses could be interpreted.

Ho₁ There is no significant relationship between the quality of academic staff in NOUN and implementation of educational programmes.

The coefficient showed a positive relationship of .8 which shows a high level of relationship between the independent variable – quality of academic staff and the dependent variable – implementation of educational programmes. This is to say that Ho₁ is not tenable, therefore it could be said that there is a significant relationship between the quality of academic staff in NOUN and implementation of educational programmes.

Ho₂ There is no significant relationship between academic staff qualification and implementation of educational programmes.

This also showed a high co-efficient of .8 and implies that the qualification of an academic staff plays a vital role in his or her performance. Qualification is one major yardstick in measuring the quality of an academic staff. In this instance, Ho₂ is not acceptable because the result shows that there is a significant relationship between the qualification of academic staff and the implementation of educational programmes.

Ho₃ There is no significant relationship between academic staff experience and successful implementation of educational programmes.

The co-efficient for these variables shows .7 which again shows that there is a high relationship between the experience of academic staff and successful implementation of educational programmes. Thus the null hypothesis Ho₃ is rejected.

Ho₄ There is no significant difference between academic staff who had further training and those who do not in the implementation of educational programmes.

0.6 was the coefficient for this hypothesis testing. This implies that a difference exist between academic staff who had further training, that is, post qualification training and those who do not. Again the null hypothesis Ho₄ is rejected.

Discussion

From what has been obtained from the field, it could be said that the quantity of academic staff is significant in implementation of educational programmes. This implies that the problem faced by NOUN presently may have been as a result of non compliance of programme leaders/programme management ratio or course coordinator/course coordination ratio. From NOUN blueprint, a programme leader is to coordinate about 2 programmes while a course coordinator is to coordinate a maximum of 8 courses. But as of today, this is not the practice. Though NOUN has 56 academic staff members some of them are on contract or on sabbatical. The table below shows the current state of academic staff in NOUN:

Table 2: Academic Staff Position at NOUN Showing Status of Appointment

S/N	SCHOOL	FULL TIME	CONTRACT	SABATICAL	TOTAL
1.	SASS	11	1	2	14
2.	SBHRM	11	1	-	12
3.	SEDU	7	4	1	12
4.	SOL	4	-	-	4
5.	SST	13	1	-	14
	TOTAL	46	7	3	56

Looking at the staff strength vis-à-vis the number of programmes in each school would reveal the acute shortage of staff in NOUN. For example, the SASS runs 18 programmes. Thus, where she needs a minimum of nine Programme Leaders, she has only 5 (see Table 1) and the number of course coordinators in the whole school is barely enough for just for just four programmes. For the records, SEDU runs 16 programmes; SBHRM runs 22; SOL runs 2 and SST runs 12. This shortage in the number of staff required might be one of the reasons for the unavailability of course materials; which to an extent is a reflection of the performance of the academic staff. When you do not have enough academic staff, the few available are bound to be overworked, and thereby leads to low performance.

There was also a revelation that quality of academic staff has positive relationship with programme implementation. From data supplied by the respondents, some of the programmes lack specialists to control and monitor them. Some of such programmes are been coordinated by non-specialists. This should not be if implementation has to be adequately done. A programme Leader or Course coordinator cannot be efficacious outside his/her area of specialty. In this kind of situation, there are bound to be lapses in the academic staff performance. Another determinant of quality of academic staff is the possession of Ph. D in requisite field. The research reveals that only 40% of NOUN academic staff are Ph. D holders.

Experience cannot be ruled out in implementation of programmes. Staff who had conventional and open and distance teaching experience tend to be more apt with their jobs than those who do not. This reflected the Ho₃, which is to say that those who had experience had better performance. The members of the academic staff of NOUN are drawn from the conventional universities and most of them have no formal training in either distance or open and distance programmes only 2 representing 13.3% has experience in ODE while the

remaining 86.7% has no ODL experience. Apart from this, over 50% of the staff members are from the lower rank and have little or no teaching experience. Table 1 below shows the academic staff position at NOUN according to ranks reveals academic staffing at NOUN is bottom heavy. The following is the percentage at each rank:

Assistant Course Coordinator – Course Coordinator I	74%
Programme Leader II	24%
Programme Leader I – Professor	12%

This implies that there is a dearth of leadership from seasoned academic to mentor and serve as role models for the younger ones. The younger ones are thus left to pander on their own and chart their own course for the development of the programmes and themselves.

Lastly, constant training is the life wire of a good performance. This was found in the testing for Ho₄, those who had consistent training found it easier to perform their role in the institution than those who never had further training. Working with past experience alone is not enough because things are changing world over; this therefore calls for new innovations. Again the research reveals that only 13.3% of academic staff have received any formal training in ODL since arrival at NOUN.

Suggestions and Conclusion

Based on the findings, the following are suggested:

5. Employment of academic staff should be based on a minimum of two years experience in at least a conventional university, and new entrants into the academic profession in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) should be tutored for a minimum of six months before given any major assignment without close supervision. Six months is suggested because, the person is within the system and have constant access to the happenings of ODL.
6. Constant training should be encouraged for an update. Focus should be more on full time staff and not those on contract or sabbatical.
7. Academic staff should be made to operate strictly in their area of specialization, with this there will be better performance.
8. Academic staff who do not have a Ph. D. should be encouraged to commence on such immediately with full institutional support while those currently on their Ph. D. should also be encouraged to finish on time.

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