



## A TALE OF TWO CITIES: HINDRANCES TO DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMMES IN AWKA AND NNEWI CITIES IN ANAMBRA STATE OF NIGERIA

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### Abstract:

The purpose of the study was to identify the hindrances to distance learning program in two cities in Anambra State. Three research questions guided the study. The study adopted survey research design. A sample of 180 students and 30 facilitators (total 210) were randomly selected to participate in the study. A 15-item questionnaire was developed and used to collect data from the respondents. The data collected was analyzed using weighted mean. Findings indicated that poor Information and Communications Technology (ICT) knowledge and skills, lack of enough time for the students' study, work pressure, academic stress, poor remuneration to the facilitators and other administrative and mode of delivery issues hinder Distance Learning and prevent some people for not availing themselves of the opportunity for distance learning program. It was thus recommended among other things that Government and management of the various centers should regularly train their staff and students of Distance Learning on computer and technological applications to optimize the potentials of Distance Learning. Also, students enrolling for Distance Learning should properly obtain knowledge of Information and Communications Technology; organize their time and resources to limit academic stress. Finally some limitations of the findings were noted and suggestions for further research, made.

**Keywords:** distance learning, hindrances, barriers, information and communications technology, technology competencies

## Introduction

One of the major objectives stated in the Nigerian National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004) is the provision of equal educational opportunities to all citizens at different levels of education. This objective aligns well with the need to position Nigerian citizens with the qualifications and capabilities to be abreast of the enormous changes being witnessed around the world. As Ossiannilsson, Williams, Camilleri and Brown (2015) pointed out; the global education landscape is in a period of dramatic change. Some have labeled the changes as disruptive, others evolutionary, and some revolutionary. Other trends of change are associated with globalization of commerce and trade enabled by technological developments, affecting both goods and services; result in an increasingly global market for those with graduate level qualifications. By offering such qualifications, it is widely accepted that higher education plays a key role in the economic, scientific, social and human development of any country. The economically strongest nations are those with the best performing higher education sector. Higher education, as producers of knowledge and knowledge workers, has lately assumed an even more important role: that of assisting countries to develop into knowledge economies and to be globally competitive. A significant driver of the changing landscape has been the dramatic rise in the use of technology and, through various modes of delivery, the extension of the traditional campus to more learners through Distance Learning (DL).

Distance learning is any type of instruction in which the student and instructor are not in the same room but are separated by physical distance. O'Lawrence (2007) defined it as a medium of teaching and learning using modern technology so that teachers or students do not have to be together in the classroom. Akande (2011) defined it as the type of education that takes place outside the conventional school system; it is imparted without necessarily having personal interaction with students or learners. Jimoh (2013) stated that it as the acquisition of knowledge and skills through mediated information and instruction. UNESCO (2015) has submitted that distance education is any educational process in which all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner, with the effect that all or most of the communication between the teacher and the learner is through an artificial medium, either electronic or print materials. Distance learning is also conceptualized as e-learning and distance education (African Virtual University, 2014; Ahalt&Fecho, 2015; Erickson & Larwin; 2015; Marques, 2013; Niari, Evaggelia&Lionarakis, 2016). E-learning includes those programs that are delivered on-campus as supplements to traditional class teaching; while distance education is described as an off-campus program.

From these definitions, one can see that Distance Learning is learning disassociated from time and/or distance such that the learner does not share the same situation with what is being learned. It is a mode of study that allows the learner to study most or all of a course without attending a campus-based institution. Most definitions of distance learning include the use of technology. Some, however, refer to the degree of interactivity and the distance between learners. Other definitions do not require the use of technology. In fact, distance learning, in the older paradigm, can be as simple as postal correspondence and telephone communications. Hence, Distance Learning is a formalized teaching and learning system specifically designed to be carried out remotely by using electronic or non-electronic communication. A significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and time from the learner in an educational process. The link between that someone and the learner is necessarily provided by different means of communication and instruction. It is the kind of learning that is expected to be taken by those who need to catch up on their formal education and to effectively aid themselves towards self-fulfillment. It is a type of education that may be received outside the campus environment and is organized and delivered by tertiary institutions.

Distance learning is qualitatively different from much traditional teaching system. The traditional system involves face-to-face lecturers from a physically present tutor at a particular location. On the other hand, Distance learning programs resemble correspondence courses that require a high level of learner independence and management of the learning process by the students themselves. It serves relatively dispersed students populations and involves a minimal reliance on physical face-to-face teaching. The mode of delivery is that curriculum and contents of the learning material are delivered without a physically present tutor through modular structure or credit system. It makes a very good use of a wide range of media and other resources selected from those available in the context of the system. The media may include specially prepared correspondence textbooks, newspaper, supplements, posters, radio and television broadcast audio and videocassettes etc. (Belanger & Jordan, 2004; Bonk, 2016; Catalano, 2015; Holden & Westfall, 2010; Neslihan & Mustafa, 2016; Özmen & Atıcı, 2015). By implication, in distance learning the normal or principal means of communication is through prints and technology. There are numerous advantages of distance learning. For example, the availability of online learning tools has provided flexibility and the opportunity to complete course requirements from nearly any location without a physical teacher. Other advantages include: the increased ease of communication between participants, students' self-propelled actions to acquire knowledge; empowering people with education to enrich their lives; greater equality of

peer participation in the discussion, anonymity of participants, reduction in bias, ability to recruit diverse population, and the ability to address more controversial topics” are some of the advantages to distance education (Coursera, 2014; Jung & Belawati 2013; Nekongo-Nielson, 2015; O’Kelly, Garrison, Merry &Torreano, 2015; Schepens, van der Slik, & van Hout, 2016).

Studies have also highlighted some barriers to DL. Electrical power and access to Internet remain barriers to delivery in the developing world (Offorma, 2006; Ojo & Olakulehin, 2006). Using factor analytic studies, Muilenburg and Berge (2001) grouped identified DL barriers into eight clusters or factors as follows:

1. technical expertise;
2. administrative structure;
3. evaluation/effectiveness;
4. organizational change;
5. social interaction;
6. student support services;
7. threatened by technology; and
8. quality.

Berge and Muilenburg (2005) further found eight factors covering:

- a) administrative issues;
- b) social interaction;
- c) academic skills;
- d) technical skills;
- e) learner motivation;
- f) time and support for studies;
- g) cost and access to the Internet; and
- h) technical problems.

Isaac (2015) also found that whether in a traditional or distance education format, adults may confront barriers to their learning. Now that technology plays such an important role in DL delivery, new and returning adults may find additional barriers. In a related study, Lloyd, Byrne and McCoy (2012) found that some barriers to distance learning were faculty-related. A synthesizes of the barriers identified in literature indicates that the barriers to DL could be student, administrative and mode of delivery related. In Nigeria, there are many institutions involved in the establishment of Distance Learning program such as National Open University of Nigeria, National Teachers Institute Kaduna etc. In Anambra State for instance, Anambra Broadcasting Service established a correspondence course program known as the University of Air. Anambra State Broadcasting Service (ABS) collaborated with the National Open

University of Nigeria in Abagana to join hands for the same purpose. The ABS Anampoly UNIAIR offers courses to people from preliminary studies to courses on basic subjects; English, Economics, Mathematics, Accounting, and Foundation of Education. The successful ones must pass four (4) courses at credit level.

The ABS Anampoly had their main courses which provided the National Diploma in Accountancy and Secretarial Studies, then National Certificate of Education (NCE) in Business Education. The National Teachers Institute (NTI) organizes a program whereby the serving teachers in Anambra and other States of the federation engage in order to catch up with their educational enhancement. This body is responsible for organizing Teachers Certificate Grade Two (TCII) and NCE program for serving teachers throughout the federation. They have centers in almost all the six educational zones in Anambra State and termed it NCE by Distance Learning System (D.L.S). There is the 'COSIT' Correspondence and Open Studies Institute organized by the University of Lagos. This program offers courses on Administrations and Science education etc. in the entire center where they operate. With all these programs, Distance Learning has emerged as a mediated form of instruction that can improve the educational levels and competence of the citizenry.

### **Statement of the Problem**

One had expected that the introduction of Distance Learning programs and the setting up of different Distance Learning centers in Anambra State would have led to substantial improvements in enrolment, quality and completion of Distance Learning for the citizens. One also believed that the government and non-governmental bodies who operate these centers have provided the centers with the financial requirements and support to put in place in the centers, the much needed infrastructural facilities, instructional materials, adequate, qualified and motivated staff, furniture etc, which would have brought about effective and efficient management of the program. However, the poor enrolment, quality and completion rates in several Distance Learning centers, with its attendant grave consequences on the quality of management of Distance Learning education is a source of concern. Consequently, the aims of Distance Learning could not be achieved because the rate of enrolment and withdrawal has continued to soar. It is likely that some factors related to students, administration and mode of delivery hinder Distance Learning program and unless these hindrances are identified for improvement, the progress of the program might continue to be poor. Unfortunately, while many studies have examined the effect of distance learning and online learning technologies on student learning performance, few have looked into the

hindrances to distance learning in Anambra State of Nigeria. This presents a research gap that propelled the present study. Hence, it becomes necessary to empirically identify the hindrances to Distance Learning programs in Anambra State.

### **Purpose of Study**

The major purpose of this study was to determine the hindrances to Distance Learning programs in Anambra State. Specifically, other purposes of the study were to:

- a) identify the student-related hindrances to Distance Learning program in Anambra State;
- b) determine administration-related hindrances to Distance Learning program; and
- c) find out hindrances posed by the modes of delivering lectures to the students of the Distance Learning program.

### **Research Questions**

This study was guided by three research questions:

1. What are the student-related hindrances to the Distance Learning program?
2. What are the administration-related hindrances to the Distance Learning programs?
3. What mode of delivery problems presents hindrances to Distance Learning programs?

### **Materials and Methods**

This study adopted a survey research design. A survey is a method of obtaining information from various groups or persons mainly through questionnaire or personal interviews. This design is considered appropriate for the study because the opinions or responses of some students and facilitators of Distance Learning program in Anambra State regarding the hindrances to Distance Learning program especially in Anambra State were sought.

This study was carried out in two institutions in Anambra State that are involved in Distance Learning program, namely: National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) in Abagana in Njikoka Local Government Area and National Teachers Institute (NTI) in Igwebuike Grammar School Awka South Local Government Area, all in Anambra State.

The target population of the study was nine hundred and ninety seven (997) comprising students of all (5) levels and facilitators of NOUN in Abagana and NTI in

Igwebuike Grammar School Awka. The sample size was one hundred (100) respondents comprising 80 students and 20 facilitators selected through simple random sampling technique. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 14, 16, 20, 15 and 25 students totaling 80 students respectively from all the 5 levels of students in the selected centers. The same technique was also used to select 10 facilitators from each of two centers making it 20 facilitators.

The instrument that was used for the study was a structured questionnaire titled “Hindrances to Distance Learning Program.” It has two sections, A and B. section A sought information on personal data of the respondents. Section B, sought information on the perceptions of the respondents regarding the hindrances to Distance Learning. The questionnaire contained a total of fifteen (15) items. The responses made of the questionnaire were on the four-point scale of Agreed (A), Strongly Agreed (SA), Disagreed (D), and Strongly Disagreed (DA).

The reliability of the instrument was determined through equivalent or parallel form method. The instrument was administered on five levels of the students and facilitators randomly. The scores from these forms were compared for each respondent. The scores of the forms were correlated and analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Co-relation Co-efficient and the co-relation co-efficient value stood at 0.78, which was confirmed to be reliable.

The researcher personally administered the questionnaire to the respondents. Within two hours, completed copies of the questionnaire were collected back immediately by the researcher to reduce the chances of loss. Hence, a hundred percent return rate was recorded.

The researcher used mean in answering the research questions. The cut off point for accepting or not accepting responses to items as accepted or rejected as a hindrance was put at 2.5. The decision rule was that any item within the response mean of 2.5 and above was to be accepted as a hindrance while any item, with response below 2.5 was rejected as a hindrance.

**Research Question One:** What are the student-related hindrances to the Distance Learning program?

**Table 1:** Mean Ratings of the Respondents' Opinion on Student-Related Hindrances to the Distance Learning Program

S/N	Item	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total	$\bar{X}$	Decision
1	Lack of enough study and lesson time for students.	50 (200)	22 (66)	8 (16)	20 (20)	100 (302)	3.02	Accepted
2	Work pressure leading to academic stress affects the students seriously.	40 (160)	25 (75)	26 (52)	9 (9)	100 (296)	2.96	Accepted
3	Inability of some of the students to manage their studies by themselves.	50 (200)	30 (90)	10 (20)	10 (10)	100 (320)	3.2	Accepted
4	The problem of Distance Learning students is also due to isolation from lecturers and lack of motivation.	30 (120)	20 (60)	20 (40)	30 (30)	100 (250)	2.5	Accepted
5	High level of technology use among students is a hindrance to Distance Learning program.	27 (108)	19 (57)	24 (48)	30 (30)	100 (243)	2.43	Rejected

In Table 1, items 1 to 4 have mean scores that exceed the acceptance level of 2.50. This shows that the respondents accept that the issues raised pose hindrances to Distance Learning program. Item 5 scores less than 2.50 and is rejected as a hindrance to Distance Learning. Hence, the hindrances to DL include lack of adequate time, work pressure and academic stress as well as isolation and lack of motivation.



**Research Question Two:** What are the administration-related hindrances to the Distance Learning program?

**Table 2:** Mean Ratings of the Respondents' Opinion on Administration-Related Hindrances to Distance Learning Program

S/N	Item	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total	$\bar{X}$	Decision
6	Poor funding in managing the centers is a barrier to the program.	38 (152)	257 (75)	20 (40)	17 (17)	100 (284)	2.84	Accepted
7	Poor planning of lectures make students withdraw from the program.	48 (192)	32 (96)	10 (20)	10 (10)	100 (318)	3.18	Accepted
8	Poor remuneration prevents the facilitators from doing their job diligently.	23 (92)	28 (84)	19 (38)	30 (30)	100 (244)	2.44	Accepted
9	Location of the centers and security risks make a lot of students to give up idea of availing themselves this golden opportunity.	37 (146)	25 (75)	20 (40)	18 (18)	100 (279)	2.78	Accepted
10	High supervision makes students to withdraw from Distance Learning.	70 (280)	15 (45)	8 (16)	7 (7)	100 (248)	2.48	Rejected

From Table 2, items 6, 7, 8 and 9 have mean scores of 2.84, 3.18, 2.44, and 2.78 respectively. Only item 10 score less than 2.50 to be rejected as a hindrance. This indicates that the respondents accept that poor funding, poor planning of lectures, poor remuneration to facilitators, and location centers for tutorial classes and high security risks involved in the arrangement of program, prevent some people from availing themselves of golden opportunity of Distance Learning program.

**Research Question Three:** What mode of delivery problems presents hindrances to Distance Learning programs?

**Table 3:** Mean Ratings of the Respondents’ Opinion on Mode of Delivery Hindrances to Distance Learning Program

S/N	Question item	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total	$\bar{X}$	Decision
11	Some of the students lack computer knowledge and cannot access computer based course materials.	53 (212)	38 (114)	6 (12)	3 (3)	100 (341)	3.41	Accepted
12	Low level of Internet connectivity makes the Distance Learning difficult.	60 (240)	30 (90)	5 (10)	5 (5)	100 (345)	3.45	Accepted
13	Some students lack awareness on how to derive benefits from the use of radio and television lectures.	48 (192)	17 (51)	11 (22)	24 (24)	100 (289)	2.89	Accepted
14	Poor communication quality of broadcast lectures and unsuitability of the time fixed for the radio lessons.	51 (204)	22 (66)	12 (24)	15 (15)	100 (309)	3.09	Accepted
15	The instructors lack training in course development and technology so they could not even provide support to the students.	47 (188)	36 (108)	15 (30)	2 (2)	100 (328)	3.28	Accepted

From Table 3, all the items score above 2.50 to be accepted as hindrances. This indicates that the respondents many issues related to poor electricity supply, poor students knowledge of computer, inadequacy of the use of broadcasting and unsuitability of the time fixed for the radio lessons, lack of instructor support and lack of staff training in course development technology posed hindrances in the mode of delivery of Distance Learning program.

## Discussion of Findings

Following the investigations of the hindrances to Distance Learning program in Anambra State and the consequent analysis has been found out that Distance Learning program students encountered a lot of problems. The students' hindrances included among other things, lack of enough time for the students study, pressure of work in their offices leading to academic stress, isolation of the students from their tutors and the inability of some of the students to manage their studies by themselves.

There was hindrance of limited time meant for lessons. The time allotted for the lessons were not enough and was inadequate. This could mean that it is only the summary of the whole lecture that is presented and the time is not enough to give the detailed information needed for the lecture. Inability of some of the students to manage their studies by themselves and the isolation of the students of the program from their facilitators makes learning for some of the participants very difficult. The student finds it difficult to know how he is getting on and some were easily discouraged. These findings agree with those of Nakpodia (2010) that students' factors hinder access to Distance Learning in Nigeria.

It was also found that several administrative issues hinder Distance Learning. Among these are the poor funding and financial constraints that posed a lot of problems to the participants of the Distance Learning program in Anambra State. It is common knowledge that education is poorly funded in Nigeria. Lack of or low level of provision of the facilities for Distance Learning programs in the country is fallout of poor funding. This finding supports Jimoh (2013) who reported that finance is a problem in Distance Learning. Due to poor finance, investment in Distance learning is low because the soft and hard-wares required are costly. It is very expensive to get some of the soft wares because they are not developed locally, they are developed in Europe and other developed countries to suit their own system and make their own living.

Poor planning was found to be another hindrance. Added to this is the maintenance of the tutors of Distance Learning program (remuneration) since most of the facilitators are part time tutors and are not so easy to recruit to meet the quality demanded of the program. The above finding is in line with Mbonu and Ubbaonu (2010) which states that inadequate planning, remuneration and recruitment of staff are affecting the proper implementation of the programs.

The location of the centers for tutorial classes and insecurity also presented hindrances. Location could lead to inaccessibility of the tutorial lecture centers to some students due to its distance. For instance, most of the civil servants who were involved

in this Distance Learning were dispersed in different parts of the states; this made it very difficult for people in distance-rural areas to attend tutorial classes at their center. National Teachers Institute had only three centers in the State located in Awka, Onitsha and Nnewi; while National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) has only one center in the whole state located at Abagana for their tutorial classes. It then means that people who live very far away from these stipulated centers suffer untold hardship in transportation and insecurity anytime they visit the centers to collect materials or tutorials. Due to the security high risks involved in this arrangement many of the students give up the idea of continuing with this sort of learning program thereby preventing the individual from availing this golden opportunity of enhancing one's education.

Another issue is the problem of power instability in Nigeria which is perennial and has been a major setback for technological development. Internet connectivity is also poor. In line with this Nakpodia (2010) pointed out that lack of electricity and internet connectivity are major barriers to Distance Learning. Most Distance Learning students that reside in cities and towns are faced with the problem of epileptic supply of power to access their course materials and study.

In addition, the study found that there are problems with the mode of delivery. Most of the Distance Learning students have no computer education background; hence they might be afraid of using one. As Jimoh (2013) observed, some of them go to the extent of hiring experts at a cost to fill their admission, registration and other documents meant for them to fill online. However, the very few who have access to the computers do not know how to use it and take full advantage of its usage for learning. Another finding of the study is inadequacy of the use of broadcasting (television and radio) as a means of delivering lectures to students and the unsuitability of the time fixed for the radio lessons. This finding is in line with an earlier one made in India by Chaudhary (1992) who found that delivering lectures on television had many defects and posed a lot of problems. Radio and television are essentially a-one way media of instruction and encourage passive reception of lessons on the part of the students. The programs are gone as soon as they are transmitted and there is no means of recapitulating or going back over an argument and any radio lesson missed have been missed. Also, the time meant for these radio lessons were not suitable for most students due to the nature of their duty and other engagements. This tends to discourage the individual from benefiting from the Distance Learning program.

Added to this is the issue of lack of instructor support and instructors' lack of skills in designing course-ware. Just as Nakpodia (2010) observed, perhaps the biggest problem for distance programs is the lack of support and the course development skills

of instructors. The findings indicate that instructional delivery in Distance Learning is greatly affected by some facilitators' lack of knowledge and skills in designing and delivering courses in electronic format. This scenario is a fall out of the non- ICT-compliant status of the facilitators.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of the study have shown that a lot of issues related to students, administration and mode of deliver hinder Distance Learning. Although Distance Learning program has the potential for ensuring improvements in the standard of education if it is managed effectively, its effectiveness is limited by certain hindrances such as insufficient funding, student factors, administrative constraints, and a great number of problems in the mode of delivery that have implications for impeding educational development in the State. In other words, the students of Distance Learning program in Anambra State experienced a lot of problems both financial, academic stress, inadequate time for the students studies, unsuitability of the media used in the program production, and other problems involved. This does not mean that the program should be wiped out entirely from the school system since it has been found out that the use of Distance Learning program as a means of enhancing educational progress in Anambra State has remarkably improved educational qualifications of the workers of Anambra State and its environs. Therefore, instead of scrapping the Distance Learning program in Anambra State, it is necessary to suggest and recommend ways of improvement for proper continuity and advancement.

## **Recommendations**

In the light of the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made for improvement:

1. Government and institutional management should regularly train their staff and students of Distance Learning on computer and technological applications to optimize the potentials of Distance Learning.
2. Students enrolling for Distance Learning should properly obtain knowledge of Information and Communications Technology; organize their time and resources to limit academic stress.
3. The financial involvement of the Distance Learning program should be reduced as much as possible to enable the low income workers who have the ambition of advancing their educational qualification to do so through Distance Learning.

4. The Nigerian government should subsidize Distance Learning programs just like the conventional school system and improve electricity supplies to the nation.
5. More centers should be established especially in the densely populated areas for tutorial classes to ameliorate the suffering of the students and encourage more participants.
6. There should be provision of adequate Learning Management System to enable the students receive their lectures, tutorials and other vital documents on time and adequate/careful record-keeping of result and other statutory records and trustworthy management by the authority.
7. There should also be alternative arrangement provision for the student to make up for the lectures they missed when there is breakdown in transmission to enable the students cover up their crowded program.
8. Government and non-governmental telecommunication companies should strive to improve funding and the technological level Distance Education centers in the state and the country at large.
9. There should be increase in remuneration of the facilitators to increase their zeal of carrying out their job diligently.
10. The centers should be equipped with electronic devices. Television sets available at study centres can be equipped with decoder facility. So that personnel at study centres—coordinators, counsellors, evaluators and students, can recall relevant information transmitted for them. Students can come and make use of the facility, as and when needed.
11. Television and radio have a potential medium of imparting training if they are properly planned and implemented. Training, refresher and orientation courses for various functionaries of a distance learning course writers, counsellors, faculty, etc., can be conducted through multi-media packages including television and Radio as an important component.

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