



## **Administrative Constraints in the Management of Open and Distance Learning Programmes in Public Universities in Rivers State**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examined administrative constraints in the management of open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State. The study was guided by three objectives, research questions and hypotheses. The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The population of the study was 379 administrators and facilitators of open and distance education programmes in public universities in Rivers State. These are University of Port Harcourt and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. The sample size for the study was 359 facilitators and administrators comprising 59 Administrators and 300 facilitators of open and distance learning programmes in the study area. The simple random sampling technique was adopted in selecting the sample for facilitators while the 59 Administrators were all taken as census without sampling. The instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire which was validated by three experts, two in Educational Management and one in Measurement and Evaluation. The study adopted the Cronbach alpha method for the reliability of the instrument. The reliability coefficients of the instrument were 0.79, 0.81 and 0.89 for the three clusters of the instrument respectively. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses were tested using z-test. The findings of the study revealed among others that inadequate funding and lack of consistent policies and programmes serve as administrative constraints to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State to a high extent. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among others that university management should commit more funds to ODL programmes in their schools to ensure effectiveness in the administration of these programmes.

**Keywords:** Administrative, Constraint, Open and Distance Learning

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Education plays an indispensable role in nation building. It determines to a large extent the quality of manpower produced in a country and by extension the level of development these human capital can achieve. This explains why nations all over the world especially developed ones ensure their citizens have equal access to formal education at basic levels. Education can take the form of formal, informal or non-formal. Formal education according to Ihejirika (2015) refers to systematically organized learning where students are enrolled to follow prescribed courses on full time basis. This type of education usually takes place in established institutions and follows the norms and regulations set by the school. It is also referred to as "schooling". It has rigid rules and procedures that learners must follow strictly.

Informal education on the other hand also refers to accidental or unintentional acquisition of knowledge through various life experiences. This type of learning takes place anywhere and at any time as an individual engages in his/her daily activities (Nzeneri, 2010). Non formal education is any form of organized educational activity for youths and adults who cannot be integrated into the formal school as a result of some socially, economically and politically imposed conditions (United Nations in Ihejirika, 2015) All three types of education are equally important to have a fully functioning society.

However, governments focus over the years in Nigeria has been on formal schools and most efforts made towards supporting education are channeled towards schools at various levels. It is worthy of note, however, that the rigidity of formal education in terms of entry requirements, time, designated places where schools are located and other factors stand as barriers to a lot of people who seek education. There are tons of citizens who which to have university education but are already full time workers and do not have the time to attend schools. There are yet some others who are not able to pass the compulsory Joint Admission and Matriculation Board examinations (JAMB), Post Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examinations (PUTME) or who cannot access universities because of distance. These sets of people are denied access to tertiary education due to these barriers. It is in trying to remove these barriers and make education accessible to all that the Open and Distance Learning Programmes were introduced (Onwe, 2015).

Open and Distance Learning is the mode of education delivery where learners and teachers need not be in physical contact. This type of learning possesses high range of flexible learning environment, enhances access to education; has the capacity to deliver variety of skills and uses a variety of media and technologies to provide quality education for large number of learners. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2008) noted that the goals of Open and Distance Learning in Nigeria shall be to: provide more access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities; meet special needs of employers and employees by mounting special courses for employees at the workplace, encourages internationalization especially of tertiary education curricula,

ameliorate the effect of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing Nigerian experts as teachers regardless their locations or places of work; and encourage In pursuance of these goals, the National Policy on Education recognizes that the Federal Government shall: ensure that programmes for Open Distance Learning are equivalent in status to those offered by conventional face to face mode of delivery in the appropriate tertiary educational institution and also encourage and regulate open/distance learning practice in Nigeria. Furthermore, the government shall strengthen the existing coordinating agencies on open/distance learning which shall:

- a) Advise the government on the development and practice of Open/Distance learning;
- b) Promote Open/Distance learning nationwide in collaboration with Federal, States/FCT and local Government Education Authorities;
- c) Ensure The maintenance of standards for Open/Distance Learning programmes in various institutions;
- d) Liaise with media houses, information technology providers and other relevant bodies in enhancing Open/Distance Learning;
- e) Encourage private efforts and other nongovernmental organization in the provision of quality education sing Open/Distance Learning; and
- f) Encourage tertiary institution participation in Open/Distance Learning

From the foregoing, it is evident that the open and distance learning is a ready alternative for schooling but with more flexible and convenient characteristics. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programme has been considered as one of the most important educational innovations in Nigeria. Open and Distance Learning has provided opportunities for those who could not afford to leave their job to attend to full time conventional education. UNESCO (2002) stated 'in efforts to meet the new and changing demands for education and training, open and distance learning may be seen as an approach that is at least complementary and under certain circumstances, an appropriate substitute for the face-to-face methods that still dominates most educational systems'. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has offered access to many people who would have previously been denied access to educational opportunities based on where they live and work, poor-economic circumstances, social status etc.

This explains why most universities around the world including those in Rivers State have introduced the ODL programmes as a way to extend university education to all who desire to have it. It is on record that open and distance learning mode was first employed at the tertiary level in Nigeria at Ahmadu Bello University when it began the University of the Air in 1972. The university subsequently used it for the Teachers In-Service Education programme (TISEP) in 1975. The University of Lagos also began distance learning in 1974 with the Correspondence and Open Studies Unit (COSU) in response to the growing demand of working adults in line with the global trends. The Unit subsequently became the Correspondence and Open Studies Institute (COSIT) which was later restructured into the present Distance Learning Institute (DLI). The University of Lagos was the first tertiary institution to operate the dual mode system. Several universities in Nigeria today have created ODL units including those in Rivers State. (Jegade, 2010).

However, the successful implementation of these programmes has been hindered by a number of factors. Some of these factors range from funding issues to management issues and then policy issues. This study therefore seeks to clearly identify the administrative constraints of open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State.

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## Statement of the Problem

Open and Distance learning (ODL) is a part of government's effort to increase access to education by all. ODL programmes remove barriers to learning such as distance, time and other rigid conditions that characterize formal schooling. These programmes, therefore, hold great prospect for education in Nigeria. However, in spite of the usefulness of this type of education and the purpose it serves, the level of enrolment of students in these programmes have been quite low. This could be attributed to a number of constraints that affect the effective running of these programmes. Both learners, administrators and instructors have alluded to the fact that more needs to be done if the programme will stay viable and effective. The question then is what exactly are the administrative constraints that affect the smooth running of ODL programmes in public universities in Rivers State? Providing answer to this question is the problem of this study.

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## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the administrative constraints of open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. Find out the extent to which inadequate funding is an administrative constraint to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State.
2. Determine the extent to which irregular payment of honorarium to facilitators is an administrative constraint to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State.
3. Ascertain the extent to which lack of consistency in programme/policy implementation is an administrative constraint to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State.

## Research Questions

1. To what extent is inadequate funding an administrative constraint to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State?
2. To what extent is irregular payment of honorarium to facilitators an administrative constraint to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State?
3. To what extent is lack of consistency in programme/policy implementation an administrative constraint to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State?

## Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrators and facilitators of open and distance learning programmes on the extent to which inadequate funding is an administrative constraint to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrators and facilitators of open and distance learning programmes on the extent to which irregular payment of honorarium to facilitators is an administrative constraint to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State.
3. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrators and facilitators of open and distance learning programmes on the extent to which lack of consistency in programme/policy implementation is an administrative constraint to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State.

## METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The population of the study was 3079 consisting 3020 facilitators and 59 administrators of open and distance education programmes in public universities in Rivers State. (University of Port Harcourt and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education). Source: office of the registrars, July, 2022. The sample size for the study was 359 facilitators and administrators comprising 59 administrators and 300 facilitators of open and distance learning programmes in Rivers State University. The simple random sampling technique was adopted in selecting 150 facilitators from each of the two Universities to arrive at the 300 while the 59 administrators were all taken as census without sampling. The instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire titled "Administrative Constraints in the Management of Open and Distance Learning Programmes Questionnaire" (ACMODLPQ). The instrument had two sections (A and B). Section A elicited responses on the demographic characteristics of the respondents while section B had items drawn from the research questions of the study. Responses to the questionnaire were structured on a four-point Likert rating scale of Very High Extent (VHE=4), High Extent (HE=3), Low Extent (LE=2) and Very Low Extent (VLE=1). The instrument was validated by three experts, two in Educational Management and one in Measurement and Evaluation. The study adopted the Cronbach Alpha method for the reliability of the instrument.

The reliability coefficients of the instrument were 0.79, 0.81 and 0.89 for the three clusters of the instrument respectively. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses were tested using z-test. A criterion mean of 2.50 was used to ascertain "High Extent" or "Low Extent". The decision therefore is that any scores less than 2.50 were tagged "Low Extent" while scores of 2.50 and above represent "High Extent". The null hypotheses were rejected and the alternate hypotheses accepted when the computed value was greater than the critical value of  $\pm 1.96$  at the significance level of 0.05. On the contrary, the null hypotheses were accepted and the alternate hypotheses rejected if the computed value is less than the critical table value of  $\pm 1.96$ .

## RESULTS

**Research Question 1:** To what extent is inadequate funding an administrative constraint to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State?

**Table 1: Mean Response on Extent Inadequate Funding Affects Administration of ODL**

S/N	Item Statement	Facilitators (N <sub>1</sub> = 59)			Administrators (N <sub>2</sub> = 300)		
		$\bar{X}$	SD	RMK	$\bar{X}$	SD	RMK
1	Administrators of ODL programmes are unable to regularly pay facilitators for their services due to insufficient funds.	3.84	0.83	High Extent	3.40	0.63	High Extent

2	Inadequate funds affect the provision of adequate instructional materials for teaching in ODL programmes in your institution.	3.06	0.60	High Extent	3.33	0.88	High Extent
3	There is shortage of facilitators since administrators do not have enough fund to hire more instructors.	3.66	0.74	High Extent	3.45	1.01	High Extent
4	Inadequate funding affects administrators' ability to provide enough internet data for constant communication of facilitators with learners.	3.41	1.01	High Extent	4.10	0.70	High Extent
5	Inadequate funding affects administrators ability to carry out adverts on radio, television and other media to enhance enrolment of students in ODL programmes.	3.21	0.84	High Extent	3.68	0.94	High Extent
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>3.44</b>		<b>High Extent</b>	<b>3.59</b>		<b>High Extent</b>

The analyses in Table 1 revealed that items 1-5 had mean scores that fall within the range of High Extent. This implies that majority of the respondents agreed that inadequate funding results in inability of administrators to pay honorarium to facilitators, inability to provide enough instructional materials, hire more facilitators, provide internet data and carryout adverts that would enhance enrolment of students in ODL programmes. With grand mean scores of 3.44 and 3.59 respectively, the answer to research question one is that inadequate funding serves as an administrative constraint to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State to a high extent.

**Research Question 2:** To what extent is irregular payment of honorarium to facilitators an administrative constraint to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State?

**Table 2: Mean Response on the Extent Irregular Payment of Honorarium Affects Administration of ODL**

S/N	Item Statement	Facilitators (N <sub>1</sub> =59)			Administrator (N <sub>2</sub> = 300)		
		$\bar{X}$	SD	RMK	$\bar{X}$	SD	RMK
6	Irregular payment of honorarium makes facilitators resign from teaching ODL programmes.	3.21	1.01	High Extent	3.25	0.71	High Extent
7	Irregular payment of honorarium reduces facilitators' motivation to teach.	3.28	0.66	High Extent	3.06	0.95	High Extent
8	Irregular payment of honorarium makes it difficult for facilitators to get instructional materials needed for teaching.	3.15	0.70	High Extent	3.05	0.70	High Extent
9	Irregular payment of honorarium to facilitators makes ODL programmes less attractive for potential facilitators to apply for employment and this leads to shortage of personnel	3.10	0.84	High Extent	3.14	1.11	High Extent
10	Irregular payment of honorarium leads to friction and misunderstanding between administrators of ODL programmes which negatively affects the programme.	2.88	0.99	High Extent	2.78	0.79	High Extent
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>3.12</b>		<b>High Extent</b>	<b>3.06</b>		<b>High Extent</b>

The analyses in Table 2 revealed that all the items in the table have mean scores that fall within the range of high extent. This implies that majority of the respondents were of the opinion that irregular payment of honorarium makes instructors resign from teaching in ODL programmes, reduces facilitators' morale, makes it difficult for facilitators to get instructional materials and causes consistent misunderstanding between administrators and facilitators. With grand mean scores of 3.12 and 3.06 for facilitators and administrators respectively, the answer to research question two is that irregular payment of

honorarium to facilitators serve as an administrative constraint to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State to a high extent.

**Research Question 3:** To what extent is lack of consistency in programme/policy implementation an administrative constraint to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State?

**Table 3: Mean Response on the Extent Lack of Consistency in Programme/Policy Implementation Affects Administration of ODL**

S/N	Item Statement	Facilitators (N <sub>1</sub> = 59)			Administrator (N <sub>2</sub> = 300)		
		$\bar{X}$	SD	RMK	$\bar{X}$	SD	RMK
10	When programmes do not meet learners' expectation, they often drop out of the ODL programmes.	3.20	0.60	High Extent	3.08	0.60	High Extent
11	Introduction of new policies not consistent with the expectations affect learners interest in ODL programmes.	3.14	0.77	High Extent	2.50	0.59	High Extent
12	Some programmes needed by potential learners are often unavailable in ODL programmes and this affects learners' interest in the programme.	3.30	0.58	High Extent	3.21	0.70	High Extent
13	Introduction of new stringent rules in ODL programmes discourages facilitators from teaching in these programmes	3.08	0.71	High Extent	3.16	0.84	High Extent
14	Not tailoring ODL programmes towards meeting learners' needs affect effectiveness of these programmes	3.10	0.84	High Extent	3.13	1.05	High Extent
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>3.16</b>		<b>High Extent</b>	<b>3.01</b>	<b>0.76</b>	<b>High Extent</b>

The data analysed in in Table 3 revealed that all the items has mean scores that fall within the range of "High Extent". This implies that majority of respondents agreed that introduction of policies and programmes that do not meet students expectations stand as a constraint to ODL programmes. They also agreed that introduction of stringent rules and unavailable of programmes required by potential students affect the effective administration of ODL programmes. With grand mean scores of 3.16 and 3.01 for facilitators and administrators respectively, the answer to research question five is that lack of consistency in programme/policy implementation stands as an administrative constraint to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State to a high extent.

### Hypotheses

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrators and facilitators of open and distance learning programmes on the extent to which inadequate funding is an administrative constraint to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State.

**Table 4: z-Test Analysis on Mean Ratings of Administrators and Facilitators of Open and Distance Learning Programmes on the Extent to which Inadequate Funding is an Administrative Constraint to Open and Distance Learning Programmes in Public Universities in Rivers State.**

Category	$\bar{X}$	SD	N	Df	A	zcal	zcrit	Remark
Facilitators	3.44	0.80	59	357	0.05	1.02	1.96	Failed to Reject
Administrators	3.59	0.83	300					

Accept Ho if  $z_{cal} \leq z_{crit}$ , Otherwise Reject Ho.

Since the calculated value of z ( $z_{cal} = 1.20$ ) is less than the critical value of z ( $z_{crit} = 1.96$ ) at 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrators and facilitators of open and distance learning programmes on the extent to which inadequate funding is an administrative constraint to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrators and facilitators of open and distance learning programmes on the extent to which irregular payment of honorarium to facilitators is an administrative constraint to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State.

**Table 5: z-Test Analysis on Mean Ratings of Administrators and Facilitators of Open and Distance Learning Programmes on the Extent to which Irregular Payment of Honorarium to Facilitators is an Administrative Constraint to Open and Distance Learning Programmes in Public Universities in Rivers State.**

Category	$\bar{X}$	SD	N	Df	A	zcal	zcrit	Remark
Facilitators	3.12	0.81	59	357	0.05	0.13	1.96	Failed to reject
Administrators	3.06	0.87	300					

Accept  $H_0$  if  $z_{cal} \leq z_{crit}$ , Otherwise Reject  $H_0$ .

The analysed data in Table 5 showed that the calculated value of z ( $z_{cal} = 0.13$ ) is less than the critical value of z ( $z_{crit} = 1.96$ ) at 0.05 level of significance and 357 degree of freedom. Since the z-cal is less than the zcrit, the null hypothesis was accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrators and facilitators of open and distance learning programmes on the extent to which irregular payment of honorarium to facilitators is an administrative constraint to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State.

**$H_{03}$ :** There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrators and facilitators of open and distance learning programmes on the extent to which lack of consistency in programme/policy implementation is an administrative constraint to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State.

**Table 6: z-Test Analysis on Mean Ratings of Administrators and Facilitators of Open and Distance Learning Programmes on the Extent to which Lack of Consistency in Programme/Policy Implementation is an Administrative Constraint to Open and Distance Learning Programmes in Public Universities in Rivers State.**

Category	$\bar{X}$	SD	N	Df	A	zcal	zcrit	Remark
Facilitators	3.16	0.70	59	357	0.05	1.80	1.96	Failed to reject
Administrators	3.01	0.76	300					

Accept  $H_0$  if  $z_{cal} \leq z_{crit}$ , Otherwise Reject  $H_0$ .

The analysed data in Table 6 showed that the calculated value of z ( $z_{cal} = 1.80$ ) is less than the critical value of z ( $z_{crit} = 1.96$ ) at 0.05 level of significance and 357 degree of freedom. Since the z-cal is less than the zcrit, the null hypothesis was accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrators and facilitators of open and distance learning programmes on the extent to which lack of consistency in programme/policy implementation is an administrative constraint to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State.

## Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study for research question 1 revealed that inadequate funding serves as an administrative constraint to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State to a high extent. Majority of the respondents agreed that inadequate funding results in inability of administrators to pay honorarium to facilitators, inability to provide enough instructional materials, hire more facilitators, provide internet data and carryout adverts that would enhance enrolment of students in ODL programmes. The corresponding hypothesis 1 revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of administrators and facilitators of open and distance learning programmes on the extent to which inadequate funding is an administrative constraint to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State. This finding is in line with the findings of Ogbeide, (2019) which revealed that poor funding is one major setback to the implementation of open and distance learning in Nigeria. This is just a reflection of the issue that plays out in the mainstream formal education system in the country.

The findings of the study for research question 2 revealed that irregular payment of honorarium to facilitators serve as an administrative constraint to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State to a high extent. Majority of the respondents were of the opinion that irregular payment of honorarium makes facilitators resign from teaching in ODL programmes, reduces facilitators' morale, makes it difficult for facilitators to get instructional materials and causes consistent misunderstanding between administrators and facilitators. The findings of the study is in line with the findings of Dyer and Song (2016) which revealed that poor remuneration of facilitators of open and distance education programmes discourages professional teachers participation in these programmes. Consequently, administrators settle for mediocre facilitators to do the jobs.

The findings of the study for research question 3 revealed that lack of consistency in programme/policy implementation stands as an administrative constraint to open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State to a high extent. Majority of respondents agreed that introduction of policies and programmes that do not meet students expectations stand as a constraint to ODL programmes. They also agreed that introduction of stringent rules and unavailable of programmes required by potential students affect the effective administration of ODL programmes. This finding is in line with the findings of Hansra, and Jain, (2012) which revealed that consistent policy summersault from government and management of Open and Distance Learning centres negatively affect programmes in these centres.

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## Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study it was concluded that administrative constraints of open and distance learning programmes in public universities in Rivers State are inadequate funding, irregular payment of honorarium and lack of consistent programmes/policies. These constraints affect the effectiveness of ODL programmes in universities and they negatively impact on the enrolment rate of both learners and facilitators in these programmes.

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## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations were made:

1. University management should commit more funds to ODL programmes in their schools to ensure effectiveness in the administration of these programmes.
2. Administrators of ODL programmes should ensure they pay facilitators their honorarium regularly as this determines the success of this programme to a large extent.
3. University management should appoint qualified administrators who will come up with good policies and programmes that are consistent with the learning needs of people to encourage increased enrolment in ODL programmes.

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