

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

**CHALLENGES OF COUPLING DISTANCE EDUCATION DEGREE
PROGRAMMES TO ON-CAMPUS EDUCATION DEGREE PROGRAMMES IN
DUAL MODE PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN GHANA**



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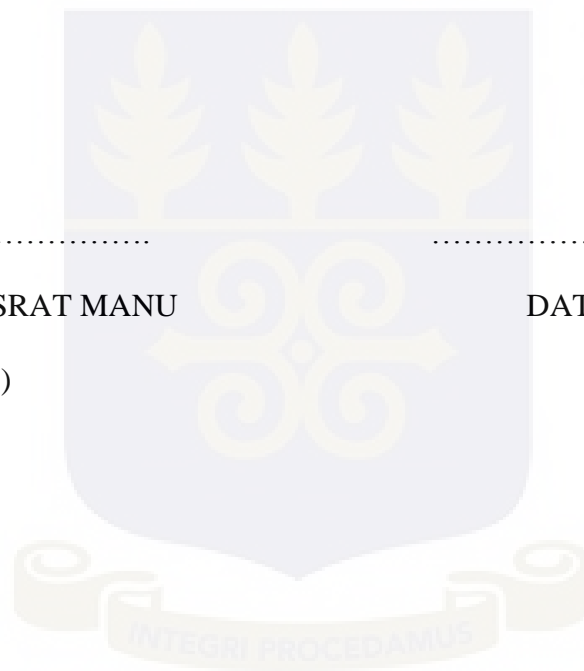
DECLARATION

I do hereby declare that this work is the result of my own research and has not been presented by anyone for any academic award in this or any other university. All references used in the work have been acknowledged. I do bear sole responsibility for any shortcomings.

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CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this Long essay was supervised in accordance with procedures laid down by the University of Ghana.

DR. DANIEL APPIAH
(Supervisor)

DATE



DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my lovely family for their support, love and inspiration.



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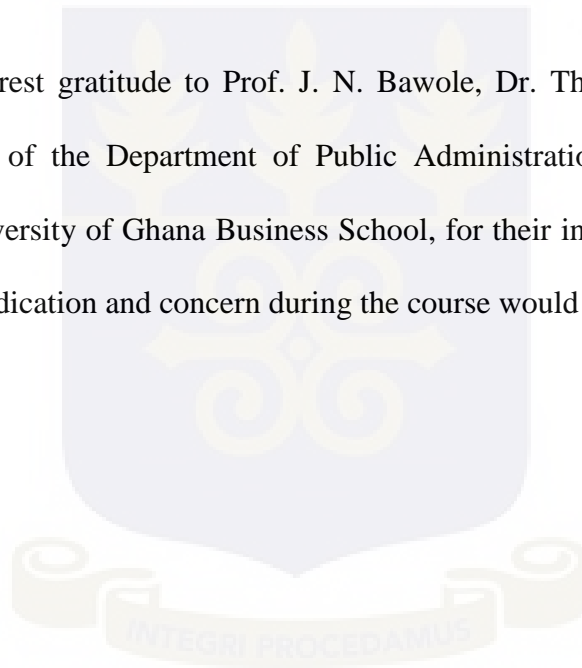
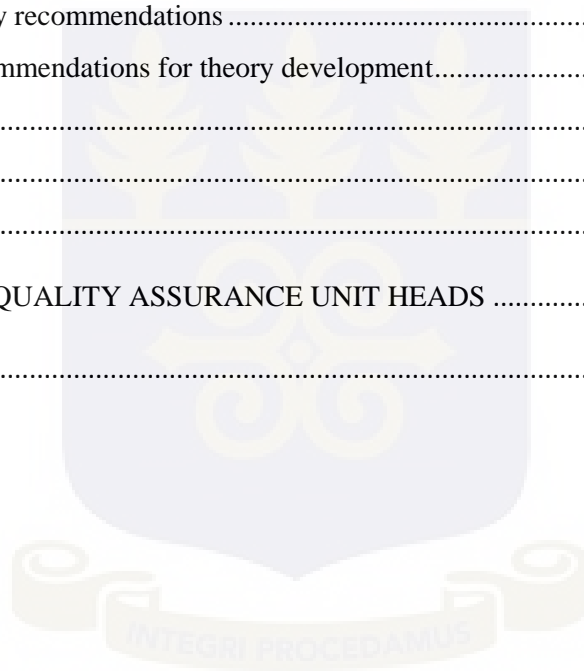


TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	ii
CERTIFICATION	iii
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	x
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xi
ABSTRACT.....	xii
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.0 Background to the Study.....	1
1.1 Statement of the Problem.....	3
1.2 Research Objective.....	4
1.3 Research Questions	5
1.4 Significance of the Study	5
1.5 Organisation of the Study.....	6
CHAPTER TWO	7
LITERATURE REVIEW	7
2.0 Introduction.....	7
2.1 Definition of Key Concepts	7
2.1.1 Organization.....	8
2.1.2 Distance Education.....	9
2.1.3 Dual-Mode Universities	10
2.2 Theoretical Framework: The Theory of Loosely Coupled Organizations	11
2.3 Coupling Dual-Mode Degree Programmes on Dimensions of Quality Education	14
2.4 History and evolution of distance education.....	25
2.5 Challenges of distance education in dual-mode universities in Africa	27

CHAPTER THREE.....	29
METHODOLOGY.....	29
3.0 Introduction.....	29
3.1 Research design: Qualitative comparative research design	29
3.1.1 Case Study Design: Studying Two Dual Mode Public Universities	32
3.2 Sources of data	33
3.3 Data collection procedure	33
3.4 Primary data collection	34
3.5 Secondary data collection	38
3.6 Method of data analysis	39
3.7 Research trustworthiness: Validity and Reliability.....	40
3.8 Ethical considerations	41
CHAPTER FOUR.....	42
ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION.....	42
4.0 Introduction.....	42
4.1 Probing the understanding of University administrators and teaching faculty about the nature of the dual-mode policy	42
4.2 Nature of coupling on-campus and distance education degree programmes	45
4.2.1 Coupling of admission requirements and degree certification.....	46
4.2.2 Coupling of administrative authority for managing distance education	49
4.2.3 Coupling of Teaching Faculty and Students for Distance Education and On-campus Education Degree Programmes.....	53
4.2.4 Coupling of curriculum for distance education and on-campus education degree programmes: Structure, content, and credit hours.....	59
4.2.5 Coupling of Learning Resources for Distance Education and On-campus Education Degree Programmes.....	62
4.3 Coupling distance education and on-campus education through information technological innovations	66
CHAPTER FIVE.....	70

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS	70
5.0 Introduction	70
5.1 Summary of findings.....	70
5.1.1 Nature of the dual-mode degree programme.....	71
5.1.2 Nature of understanding of University Administrators and teaching faculty about the dual-mode degree programme.....	72
5.1.3 Impact of the loosely coupled university organization on the dual-mode degree programme	72
5.1.4 Challenges of administering dual-mode programmes in public universities	74
5.2 Recommendations: Policy and theoretical development.....	75
5.2.1 Policy recommendations	75
5.2.2 Recommendations for theory development.....	76
REFERENCES.....	77
APPENDICES	86
APPENDIX 1	86
QUESTIONS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE UNIT HEADS	86
APPENDIX 2	90



LIST OF TABLES

TABLES	PAGES
Table 1: Description of research participants interviewed	38



LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURES

PAGES

Figure 1: Octet of Quality in Higher Education

16



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVU	African Virtual University
CoDE	College of Distance Education, UCC
COL	Commonwealth of Learning
GES	Ghana Education Service
KNUST	Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology
MOE	Ministry of Education
NAB	National Accreditation Board
NCTE	National Council for Tertiary Education
Sakai LMS	Sakai Learning Management System
SCDE	School of Continuing and Distance Education
UCC	University of Cape Coast
UG	University of Ghana
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WASSCE	West Africa Senior Secondary Certificate Examination

ABSTRACT

Technological advancement and the changing demands of formal occupations has culminated in the birth of distance education degree programmes in universities that also offer the traditional on-campus degree programmes referred to as dual-mode universities. But it is well established in the literature on educational administration that the organizational structure of universities are loosely coupled in that there are many independent departments, colleges and schools that occasionally respond to administrative and professional demands. Using the theory of loosely coupled organizations, and a qualitative comparative research methodology, this study investigated the nature of the dual-mode degree programmes offered by the University of Ghana and University of Cape Coast (two dual-mode public universities), and, how their loosely coupled organizational structure has impacted on the delivery of the dual-mode degree programmes. The study found that apart from the certification of the dual-mode degree programmes, all other components of the degree programmes differ across the distance education and on-campus education due to the absence of a formal national policy to provide guidelines on which components of distance education and on-campus education degree programmes should be coupled or loosened. Again, the study found that the relative independence of the department for distance education at the University of Ghana enabled it to innovate an online teaching and learning system which has been adopted by lecturers for teaching on-campus courses. This finding suggests that loosely coupled systems do not seal off and prevent the spread of problems and solutions. The study recommends that a formal national policy should be designed for the dual-mode programme in Ghana that scholars should develop a clear typology of the concept of loose coupling to help advance empirical research on loosely coupled organizations.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background to the Study

Higher education in universities is regarded as the facilitator and the catalyst for the production of human capital required to support appropriate socio-economic, cultural, political and industrial development of a country (Peretomode, 2007; Sen, 2008). Higher education covers all post-secondary education leading to the award of certificates, diplomas, and degrees (Wilkinson & Yussuf, 2005); but, the term higher education is used in this study to refer to post-secondary education in universities leading to the award of degrees. Technological advancement and the changing demands of most formal occupations has culminated in the birth of distance education degree programmes in universities with students and faculty having less physical interaction with the internal systems of a higher education organization.

Distance education is any form of organised formal education in which teaching and learning takes place with the learner physically absent from the location of the teacher, most of the time if not all the time (Chandler, 1990; Dodds, 1991). Students enrolled on distance education programmes largely rely on self-instructional materials. Distance education stands in contrast to the regular on-campus education programmes where both the students and teachers physically interact in classrooms and offices to achieve learning objectives. It is generally argued that the basic aim of distance education is to increase access to education (Holmberg, 2000). Distance education promotes inclusiveness in

access to higher education for the poor who are constrained by financial resources to pursue higher education through the regular on-campus mode.

In order to support both learners and teachers working in the distance education mode, most universities have usually established specialized distance education units which acts as a repository of current knowledge of the theory and practice of distance education (Bottomley & Calvert, 2003). The unit would normally include specialists in educational design and technology as well as housing a dedicated student enquiry service. The educational design specialists would be responsible for liaison with faculty who are tasked with the development and delivery of courses to all students to ensure that the needs of off-campus students are adequately catered for. Thus, the unit would largely be administratively responsible for the effective delivery of distance education.

Despite the strategic role of distance education in providing greater access to higher education, it is being faced with several challenges such as the challenges in providing tutors, academic advisors, and technical assistance (Rena, 2007); difficulty in overseeing instruction delivery nationwide (Rashid & Rashid, 2012); and establishing infrastructure and delivery of academic and logistical student support services (Hoosen & Butcher, 2012). As a result of these continuing pressures on the institutions, distance education has been regarded as of poor quality and sub-standard (Daniel, 2012; Davies, Howell, & Petrie, 2010), leaving the impression in some circles that distance education delivers a second-rate education (Stella & Gnanam, 2004). Distance education in the public universities has been welcomed with mixed reaction by various groups and individuals in Ghana. According to Badu-Nyarko (2013), distance education is perceived as not producing the same quality as on-campus education. Nevertheless, the introduction of

distance education in public universities has received massive patronage from the public (Daily Graphic, December, 2010; Badu-Nyarko, 2013). There is increasing demand for higher education through distance education. There is a high potential for distance education to widen access to higher education in Ghana.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In Ghana, the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) and the National Accreditation Board (NAB) are the state regulatory actors responsible for managing the introduction and accreditation of new programmes in tertiary education institutions. Under a policy referred to as the “dual mode” policy (Croft, 1992), the NCTE and NAB have accredited four public universities to offer both on-campus education degree programmes and distance education degree programmes (Dontwi and Mensah, 2013; Tagoe, 2014). Universities administering the dual mode policy of delivering both distance education and on-campus education degree programmes are referred to as dual mode universities (Croft, 1992). The universities that have been accredited by the NCTE and NAB to run dual mode degree programmes in Ghana are University of Ghana, University of Cape Coast, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), and University of Education, to offer distance education programmes (Mensah and Owusu-Mensah, 2002; Dontwi and Mensah, 2013; Osei et al, 2013).

The NAB and NCTE have not formulated national policy guidelines to shape how the distance education degree programme should be structured in relation to the on-campus degree programmes. Consequently, Osei et al (2013:84) have noted that, “As a dual-mode institution, the KNUST uses the same curriculum, course structure and course content for

the on campus and the DE [Distance Education] programmes” (brackets mine). Some scholars have raised questions about whether the curriculum, course structure and course content designed for the on-campus education degree programmes are appropriate for the delivery of distance education degree programmes (Osei, et al., 2013).

The absence of clear formal policy guidelines to govern the nature of coupling between distance education and on-campus education degree programmes in Ghana raises many questions for empirical investigation. Using the lenses of loose coupling theory (Weick, 1976; Orton & Weick, 1990), a key research question to investigate is which components of distance education degree programmes have been tightly coupled or loosely coupled to the on-campus degree programmes? Further, how has the nature of coupling components of the distance education degree programmes to the mode of the on-campus education degree programmes affected the former? Moreover, what have been the challenges faced by the public universities in administering the dual mode policy in the absence of clear policy guidelines stipulating which components of distance education degree programmes should be tightly coupled or loosely coupled to the administration of the on-campus degree programmes? These questions are pursued in this study.

1.2 Research Objective

This study seeks to investigate the nature of the dual-mode degree programme offered by public universities in Ghana, and, how the loosely coupled nature of public universities has impacted on the coupling of distance education and on-campus education degree programmes. The study seeks to achieve this objective through a study of two public

universities – University of Ghana and University of Cape Coast – accredited to run degree programmes through both distance education and on-campus education.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What is the understanding of Administrators and teaching faculty members about the dual-mode policy of delivering degree programmes through distance education and on-campus education?
2. How is distance education degree programmes coupled to the on-campus education degree programmes in the loosely coupled public universities?
3. How has the loosely coupled nature of public universities impacted on the coupling of distance education and on-campus education degree programmes?
4. How has the loosely coupled dual-mode system in the public universities produced innovations to improve distance education?
5. What are the challenges faced by the public universities in coupling distance education and on-campus education degree programmes?

1.4 Significance of the Study

Many research works done about distance education in Ghana have focused on the benefits and challenges of distance education, and the nature of the policy framework for distance education in the public universities (Osei, et al., 2013; Tagoe, 2014). There is the need to research about how the loosely coupled organizational structure of public universities impact on the dual mode policy of coupling distance education and on-campus education degree programmes. The study tries to fill this research gap. The study is likely

to help policymakers and university administrators know how the loosely coupled organizational structure of public universities impact on the dual-mode policy of coupling distance education and on-campus education degree programmes. This is likely to help avoid “design mismatch” that risks the education system (Pritchett, 2014: 9). It is important for policy makers to ensure that the dual-mode policy does not create a design mismatch that undermines the quality of degree programmes offered through distance education. The study will provide feedback, information, and serve as guidance and resource for stakeholders and policy makers in the tertiary education sector (such as the Ministry of Education (MOE), Ghana Education Service (GES), NCTE, and NAB).

1.5 Organisation of the Study

The study is organised in five (5) chapters. Chapter one presents introduction and the background to the study. The problem statement, research objectives and questions as well as the significance of the study have been discussed. Chapter two presents the conceptual and theoretical framework of the study. Empirical literature relevant to the study is also reviewed. Chapter three presents the methodology of the study. The fourth chapter presents an analysis and discussion of the data collected. Finally, chapter five summarises the findings of the research and makes recommendations for policy-makers and further research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the conceptual and theoretical framework of the study, as well as the empirical literature on the evolution, nature and challenges of distance education particularly in dual-mode higher education organizations. The chapter is divided into five main sections. Section 2.1 defines the key concepts of organization, distance education, and dual-mode universities used to organize the research. Section 2.2 presents the theory of loosely coupled organizations. It also presents a theoretical discussion of the organizational components of a degree programme that are loosely coupled in universities offering both distance education and on-campus education degree programmes. Section 2.3 discusses the dimensions of quality education in higher education organizations that can be analyzed to assess the success of dual-mode universities. Section 2.4 looks at the evolution of distance education with a focus on dual-mode systems. Section 2.5 presents the challenges of distance education in dual-mode tertiary organizations in Africa.

2.1 Definition of Key Concepts

The key concepts of organization, distance education, and dual-mode universities underpins the empirical analysis of the research. These concepts have been defined below for the purpose of ensuring clarity in the empirical analysis of the study.

2.1.1 Organization

The research is based on a theory of organization referred to as loose coupling theory (Weick, 1976). This organization theory has been applied to the study of higher education by many scholars (Scott, 2013). In the view of Scott and Davis (2015: 11) “Most analysts have conceived of organizations as social structures created by individuals to support the collaborative pursuit of specified goals.” It is this definition that underpins this study. It suggest the fact that an organization is made up interdependent part that requires conscious effort on the part of human agency – usually a center of administrative authority – to ensure collaboration in pursuit of common goals. The definition also suggests that the members or constitutive units of an organization may, and usually do, require resources to work towards the attainment of common goals.

Organizational analysts have also highlighted the fact that organizations are embedded with value conflicts because the different individuals working on organizations have different values and aspirations. One therefore requires an effective administrative authority to help minimize conflicts among members or resolve the conflict when it arises. The tendency for constituent units of an organization to autonomously pursue specialized goals while maintaining a tight or loose connection with other organizational components is at the heart of the theory of loose coupling that underpins the study.

Defining the relationships of authority and responsibility between members of an organization, ensuring effective coordination in organizations, resolving conflicts, and assessing the performance of organizational members require rules and standard operating procedures technically referred to as institutions (Scott, 2013). Institutions, according to

a widely accepted definition offered by Douglas North (1991), are the humanly devised “rules of the game” that shape human action and make organizations work.

2.1.2 Distance Education

Distance education encompasses many different perspectives, so there have been many different definitions and meanings put forward in the literature (King, 2012). According to Holmberg (2000), distance education could be regarded as a special kind of adult education where the learner is provided self-instructional materials by an educational organization. Chandler (1990) and Dodds (1991) both see distance education as any form of organised educational experience in which teaching and learning takes place with the teacher at a distance from the learner most of the time. Perraton (1991), however, viewed distance education as an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and time from the learner.

For the purpose of this research, following Greenberg (1998), distance education is defined as the planned teaching and learning experience that uses a wide spectrum of technologies to reach learners at a distance which is designed to encourage learner interaction and certification of learning. Verdun and Clark (1991) pointed to three major elements of distance education: (1) the separation of teacher and learner during the learning process; (2) the use of learning technologies to connect the teacher and learner; and (3) the provision of two way interaction between the teacher and learner. An important fourth component of distance education added in this study is certification of learning.

Distance education typically requires well-resourced organisations and clear policy guidelines governing student recruitment, administrative support, curriculum, teaching, and certification (Bradley, 2011). These components are elaborated later in this chapter. In developing countries where there is inadequate infrastructure to deal with increasing demand for face-to-face teaching (Mallet, 2006; Maritim, 2009; Olakulehin, 2008), distance education therefore becomes the best fit solution to the problem.

2.1.3 Dual-Mode Universities

Traditionally, universities have offered higher education through on-campus teaching and learning. Distance education has however emerged as a viable approach for universities to offer higher education degree programmes to students. According to King (2012: 10), “Dual-mode universities are conventional institutions that at some point commit to delivering programmes to students who cannot, or chose not to, attend on campus.” In dual-mode universities, King (2012: 10) emphasizes the important point that, “Typically, procedures and systems are implemented that acknowledge the different logistics of dealing with the needs of these students.” Dual-mode universities therefore require policy guidelines that specify elements that should be different from on-campus degree programmes and elements that should reflect the nature of on-campus programmes.

In the context of this study, dual-mode universities are universities that offer certification of learning to students through both the traditional on-campus education degree programmes as well as the distance education degree programmes. In dual-mode universities, usually, the core difference between on-campus and distance education degree programmes is the mode of learning (Croft, 1992; Hope, 2006; Fyle et al., 2012).

2.2 Theoretical Framework: The Theory of Loosely Coupled Organizations

The concepts of ‘loose coupling’ and ‘tight coupling’ were first used by Glassman (1973) to describe the degree of interdependence of the components of living organisms. Laying the foundation for the theory of loosely coupled organizations in educational systems, Weick (1976: 3) defined a loosely coupled organization as “a situation in which elements are responsive, but retain evidence of separateness and identity.” Specifying the nature of a loosely coupled organization, Orton and Weick (1990: 204) wrote, “The fact that these elements are linked and preserve some degree of determinacy is captured by the word *coupled* in the phrase loosely coupled. The fact that these elements are also subject to spontaneous changes and preserve some degree of independence and indeterminacy is captured by the modifying word *loosely*. The resulting image is a system that is simultaneously open and closed, indeterminate and rational, spontaneous and deliberate.” The theory of loose coupling offers a dialectical interpretation of an organization where “there is both distinctiveness and responsiveness” (Orton and Weick, 1990: 205).

Distinguishing loosely coupled system from other systems, Orton and Weick (1990: 205), emphasized that “If there is neither responsiveness nor distinctiveness, the system is not really a system, and it can be defined as a *noncoupled system*. If there is responsiveness without distinctiveness, the system is tightly coupled. If there is distinctiveness without responsiveness, the system is decoupled. If there is both distinctiveness and responsiveness, the system is loosely coupled” (italics from source). Within a loosely coupled system of organization, “coupling produces stability”, and “looseness produces flexibility” (Orton and Weick, 1990: 205). Theorists recognize that a loosely coupled organization contain elements of tightness and looseness (Weick and Quinn, 1999).

The idea of universities as loosely coupled organizations comprising units (lecturers, departments, schools, and colleges) that are both autonomous and responsive is well-established in the literature on educational administration (Weick, 1976; 1982; Orton and Weick, 1990; Fusarelli, 2002). Clark (1983: 16, in Orton and Weick, 1990: 206) argued that university organizations are loosely coupled because “An academic system works with materials that are increasingly specialized and numerous, knowledge-intensive and knowledge-extensive, with a momentum of autonomy.” The theory of loosely coupled system draws the attention of analysts to examine incentives and measures that could be created in the system to influence the responsiveness of members of autonomous academic departments to implement policies and programmes that require collaboration. The theory also enables analysts to examine how the loosely coupled university organization impacts on the introduction of new policies and programmes that require the responsiveness of the autonomous academic departments.

The challenge for university administrators is how to design mechanisms that make the distinctive academic departments of the system respond timely to new policies and programmes that require strong cooperation and collaboration among faculty members of the distinctive academic departments. The university system must decide whether to create a new autonomous unit to coordinate the responsiveness of members of the other autonomous academic departments; or whether to give authority to heads of the existing departments to coordinate the responsiveness of their own members. The choice of organizational design therefore matters for ensuring the responsiveness of the members of autonomous academic departments, schools and colleges.

Many scholars have recognized that some components of an organization can be ‘tightly coupled’ while other components of the same organization can be ‘loosely coupled’ (Rubin, 1979; Spillane, 2004; Pans, 2016). For instance, in a university organization the teaching faculty are tightly coupled to the same standard criteria of promotion from one rank to the next rank. Again, members of an academic department are more likely to be strongly coupled to the administrative authority of their head of department than to the administrative authority of the head of another academic department. Thus, the two departments can be described as weakly coupled to each other. However, members of the two academic departments are more likely to be more responsive to the authority of the University Council; and, for that matter, members of the two departments are described as strongly coupled to the authority of the University Council. In spite of the acknowledgement by loose coupling theorists that there is “the lack of a tight definition of loose coupling” (Pans, 2016: 28), and, that, the same organization can contain ‘tightly coupled’ elements and ‘loosely coupled’ elements, there is lack of progress in producing a typology of loosely coupled organizations after four decades of research.

The glue that hold university organizations together include socialization in common professional values and powerful structures of administrative authority (such as the office of vice-chancellor) (Weick, 1976; 1982; Orton and Weick, 1990). Weick (1982: 675) points out that “one reason loosely coupled systems remain systems is that their occupants have had similar socialization; e.g., they all think like educators. This means that, even though people do not communicate much with each other, they can still coordinate their actions because each person can anticipate accurately what the other is thinking and doing.” In organizations where participants have not been appropriately socialized, leaders will find it more difficult to coordinate action across different units.

In higher education organizations, different academic departments, colleges, schools, and lecturers have different teaching philosophies and use different innovative approaches to deliver their courses or subjects. Goldspink (2007: 41) points out, “If education systems are loosely coupled it is to be expected that differing practices would emerge in response to differing local needs and differing ideas about education. In other words, the autonomy enjoyed by actors at local levels can be expected to lead to very different approaches at different sites.” Depending on the nature of a course, the mode of lecturer-student interactions, and the intellectual abilities of students, lecturers vary their teaching approaches to ensure effective teaching and learning. Loose coupling theorists (Weick, 1976; 1982; Orton and Weick, 1990; Fusarelli, 2002; Spillane and Burch, 2004) have argued that higher education policy makers should carefully study the differing requirements, capacities and resources of academic departments, faculties, lecturers, and students before introducing policies that require the tight coupling of some components of the loosely coupled educational system. Failure to do so is likely to lead to policy “design mismatch” and “risks to education systems” (Pritchett, 2014). The theory of loose coupling offers important conceptual tools of ‘coupling’ and ‘looseness’ to analyze the extent to which ‘dual mode’ universities concurrently deliver the same degree programme through on-campus education and distance education.

2.3 Coupling Dual-Mode Degree Programmes on Dimensions of Quality Education

In dual mode universities, there is the need for clear policy guidelines that specify which components of the distance education degree programme require coupling with the on-campus education degree programme for stability, and which components of the distance education degree programme requires looseness from the on-campus degree programme

for flexibility. In the absence of such a policy guideline for administering a dual mode university, distance education degree programmes could either become suffocated by the established rules governing on-campus programmes may become decoupled from the on-campus degree programme.

The theory of loosely coupled system only points us to the fact that educational organizations are special organizations where “there is both distinctiveness and responsiveness” of elements in the system (Orton and Weick, 1990: 205). Concerning higher education organizations like universities, the theory does not tell us which elements in the system should be coupled and which elements should be loosened to ensure that on-campus and distance education degree programmes attain parity of quality. It is argued here that dual-mode degree programmes should be loosely coupled on the dimensions of the variables that can help achieve parity of quality. Dual-mode educational policies should be linked to an outcome of parity of quality education for the policy to be theoretically and practically meaningful. Parity of quality between on-campus and distance education degree programmes within dual-mode universities has been a major issue of concern for scholars and university administrators (Fyle et al., 2012). Through the theory of loose coupling, research can focus on discovering which elements of dual-mode degree programmes should be strongly coupled and which elements should be loosely coupled to ensure that each mode of education draws on its differential strengths to achieve parity of quality education within the same educational organization.

The dimensions of quality education suggested by Zaki and Rashidi (2013) in their model referred to ‘octet of quality in higher education’ offers important specific variables in higher education that can be used to investigate and assess the success of dual-mode

systems within the broader theoretical framework of loosely coupled systems. Quality education in this study refers to education that is fit for the intended purpose or outcomes defined by stakeholders (Boyle and Bowden, 1997; Harvey, 2006). Quality education can be achieved only if the stakeholders are able to define the intended purposes or outcomes for which the educational system has been created. Quality assurance standards and systems would have to be created for measuring quality education.

Zaki and Rashidi's (2013) argued that the capacity of a higher education organization to achieve quality education is dependent on the interaction of eight variables within the system including (i) policies and practices, (ii) curriculum, (iii) faculty knowledge, skills and abilities, (iv) institutional design and strategy, (v) institutional leadership, (vi) learners' profile, (vii) resources, and (viii) open-system thinking and change. This 'octet of quality in higher education' model is depicted below in Figure 1.

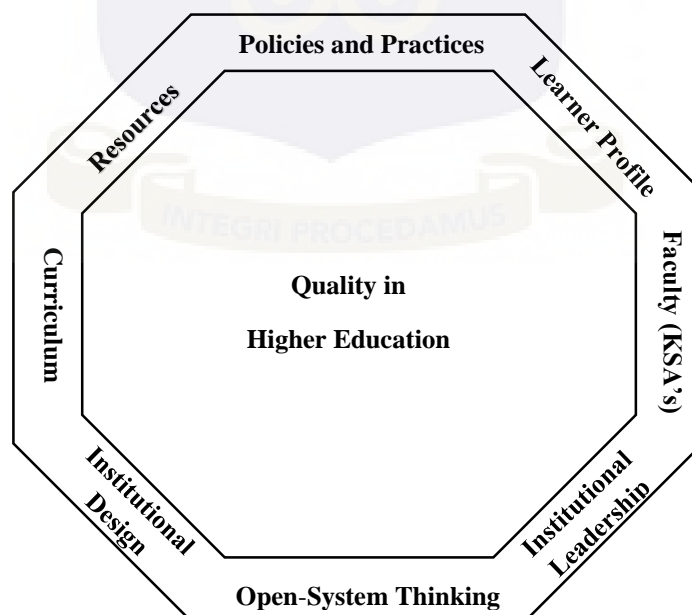


Figure 1: Octet of Quality in Higher Education

Source: Zaki and Rashidi (2013:1099)

In a dual-mode university, on-campus education and distance education degree programmes can be comparatively compared along the dimensions of the above octet of quality education to determine the extent of parity of quality education achieved. How these variables of quality education matter in single and dual-mode systems of higher education is discussed in turn.

i. Institutional design

An educational institution may have several dimensions and designs of structure providing the support for the implementation of policies and strategies designed to achieve quality education. Nevertheless, two broad dimensions namely: structural dimension and contextual dimension are considered significant (Daft, 2001). The structural dimensions provide labels to describe internal characteristics and create the basis of measuring and comparing the institutions; whilst the contextual one characterizes the whole organization, including its size, technology, environment, and goals, these dimensions describe the settings that influence and shape the structural dimension. Structural dimensions include formalization, specialization, hierarchy of authority, centralization, and professionalism, whereas contextual dimensions include size, organizational technology, environment, goals and strategy and culture (Greenberg & Baron, 2003).

Analysts of dual-mode systems should examine whether the institutional design of distance and on-campus education are appropriate or there is a design mismatch that risks the quality of education. Researchers should also examine the forms of institutions and policies – whether formal or informal – that act as a glue to hold together the loosely coupled elements of dual-mode systems (North, 1990).

ii. Higher education policies and practices

Zaki and Rashidi (2013:1100) argue that the attainment of quality in higher education is only possible if the policies specifying quality standards “is not left at the discretion of the individuals but it has to be targeted religiously as a matter of principle by the concerned authority.” They further indicated that it is the responsibility of the state to focus on quality as the ultimate objective and to ensure policies and practices that are governed by quality standards. It should be the responsibility of public regulatory bodies such as NAB to define the requirements of quality higher education to guide the (re)accredited universities to run degree programmes.

Zaki and Rashidi (2013) argue that higher education policies and practices to ensure quality education should be directed in three areas including physical infrastructure, human capital (policies focusing on faculty, administration and staff development), and, intellectual development (policies for improving research, teaching, curriculum).

According to Croft (1992), “Distance education in the dual mode institution has some base requirements for success: the administrative unit must have some level of authority, even if it is not academic; the unit must have some level of autonomy to set its own procedures and policies; other units in the institution must be willing to cooperate; adequate numbers of well-trained staff and faculty must be available; and a sound funding base must be provided on a consistent basis, under the control of the unit. These conditions will allow a distance education program to exist, but not necessarily to become congruent with the resident organizational culture.” Thus, there is the need for an administrative authority with clear policy guidelines for ensuring the coupling of both on-campus

education and distance education to the same degree programme; but, at the same time, the administrative authority having some looseness of autonomy to design and implement distinctive policies that respond to the special needs of distance education.

iii. Leadership commitment

House et al. (1999) defined leadership as the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organization. Leadership includes the ability to “envision strategic contingencies”, to implement dynamic decision making, to counter uncertainty, and to organize inter dependencies and networks (Daft, 2001). The leadership of a higher education system will have to provide guidance and direction to implement the set policies to achieve the specified goals. The prevailing influence of the leader helps to optimize the organizational resources, and motivate the faculty to produce the best within them.

Writing about the administration of education in loosely coupled systems, Weick (1982: 675) remarked that “In a loosely coupled system, leadership is diffused rather than concentrated. Since there are numerous local initiatives to solve problems, the total amount of leadership in a loosely coupled system is often greater than the amount of leadership that is present in a centralized, tightly coupled system, but that leadership is unfocused. Given this lack of focus, the administrator needs to stimulate these initiatives to move in a common direction. This is most likely to happen when the administrator articulates a direction with eloquence, persistence, and detail.” Thus, the ability of leadership to coordinate action in a loosely coupled system will be more challenging than in a tightly coupled system.

Similarly, dual-mode systems are more likely to have diffused rather than concentrated leadership to administer the different modes of education across diverse academic departments. It becomes more challenging for leadership at the central administration to ensure effective coupling of elements between on-campus and distance education degree programmes. Dual-mode systems would therefore require greater leadership energy and commitment to work towards ensuring parity of quality education across the on-campus and distance modes of education.

A strategic leader may perceive the upcoming challenges and opportunities; hence prepare its institution to confront these challenges and opportunities effectively and efficiently. The challenges and opportunities can be, either changing workplace requirements, upgrading of curriculum, faculty hiring, training, and retaining, or setting the performance benchmarks in every aspect and measuring them effectively. A strategic leader also works to prepare its successor for the survival of the institution and promote others to work in environment conducive to teaching and learning with open thinking. Putting all together, effective strategic leadership in dual-mode educational organizations is required to ensure the commitment of faculty, administrative staff, and other stakeholders of education to achieve parity of quality across distance and on-campus degree programmes.

iv. Learners' profile

The number of students participating in university education has significantly increased globally culminating in multiplicity of students that join higher education (HERO, 2007). Learners' profile points to various entry level qualifications, experiences, cultures, expectations, and motivations for higher education (Hay, Kinchin & Lygo-Baker, 2008).

Accordingly, the learners' profile then interacts with all the components and factors of the education process, and influences the quality of education.

Munro (2006) describes the present generation of learners as digitally literate and connected; experiential; entrepreneurial and independent; rejecting micromanagement; and valuing empowerment, collaboration, and immediacy. Higher educational systems should take these factors into account when developing methods, modalities and means for the acquisition of adequate knowledge and competencies by students. Besides, the academic programmes which learners take up at higher education level should introduce admission profiles and an adequate system of consultation and orientation based on true and fair treatment of learners' abilities and dispositions. The needs of the employment world should also be incorporated in assigning academic programmes to help develop the abilities and potentials of distance education students who are also full time workers. Course credits can be coupled to the practical work experiences of such students.

v. Curriculum

Curriculum is the road map which identifies the direction in which the academic journey has to be made and also ensures the manner in which it has to be completed. Quality education heavily rests with the quality of the curriculum in terms of the objectives and outcomes, contents and credits, materials and methods and assessment and audio-visual aids. The development of a curriculum may be influenced by empirical issues in the environment; and, when those environmental issues change it is expected that the curriculum should be updated to reflect the changes in the empirical realities. The content of a curriculum largely shapes the realities formed in the mind of learners.

Curriculum development is perceived as a collaborative, multilevel, and multi-sector process which begins with empirical study of the needs of students, society and the disciplines, thus, planners should conduct systematic needs assessment to identify the discrepancies between desired and actual student performance (Oliva, 1997; Taba, 1962). In a dual-mode education system, distance education and on-campus education students cannot have the same curriculum due to their different learning needs and constraints. Curriculum developers have the responsibility to seek ways of responding to the unique needs of both on-campus and distance education students.

vi. Faculty competence: Knowledge, skills and abilities

Faculty knowledge, skills and abilities are vital to bring quality in higher education. In fact, they are seen as the principal agents of inducing quality in education (Zaki, 2006). Policies, curriculum, socio-economic factors can improve academia only if there is qualified faculty equipped with the appropriate knowledge, skills and abilities. Quality education is directly proportional to the quality of lecturers and what students learn is directly related to what and how lecturers teach; and what and how lecturers teach depend on the knowledge, skills and commitments they bring to their teaching (Nemser, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Reeves 2000). Faculty translates and gives forms and meanings to the curriculum so that it becomes meaningful and beneficial to the learners and through them to all other stake holders. The teaching faculty for on-campus and distance education students need to be trained to respond appropriately to different modes of education.

With changes in the environment, it is expected that the academic faculty should constantly update themselves with the current knowledge and skills in their respective

disciplines. Therefore, academicians should be encouraged to engage in their growth and development activities alongside providing training and development opportunities as part of their work assignments. Besides, opportunities for further education and research engagements, both pre-service and in-service trainings could be arranged to improve faculty knowledge, skills and abilities. Training and development should be planned to suit on-campus and distance education domains of teaching in dual-mode systems.

vii. Learning resources

Resources can be physical resources (infrastructure, building, laboratories, furniture, equipment, books, research journals); human resources (faculty, administrative and other support staff); and financial resources (funds available to carry on different projects and managing events or petty cash to run day to day affairs). Hence, adequate, continuous and timely availability and effective utilization of these resources assures the proper delivery of programmes that are essential to achieve quality education.

With the advancement of technology, various terminologies such as ‘virtual education’, ‘off-site education’, ‘on-line learning’ and ‘e-learning’ have emerged to describe the application of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance distance education. In developed countries, the application of ICT in distance education make learning activities more flexible and enable these learning activities to be distributed among many learning venues (Farrell, 2001). In view of this, world organizations such as UNESCO (2002) characterizes distance education in positive terms as opening access to education, freeing learners from the constraints of time and place, and offering flexible learning opportunities to individuals and groups of learners.

Resources required for the delivery of on-campus degree programmes are sometimes different from resources required to deliver degree programmes to students who are geographically separated from the teaching faculty. The delivery of distance education degree programmes has moved from the use of self-instructional textbooks to softcopy materials transmitted through information technology systems connected to internets.

This means that a dual-mode university need to undertake comprehensive planning to acquire new resources and make policies to protect and audit existing resources. Inadequate, erratic and untimely availability and ineffective utilization of resources pose a challenge to the quality of distance education. Availability of virtual resources today is a key factor in the proper functioning of academic units and the satisfaction of the administrative staff, faculty and students, particularly with distance education.

viii. Open-system thinking and change

An open-system is conceived as an arena where diverse actors with interest in higher education share ideas, negotiate, define and change standards of quality education. Such open-system arena of contestation and negotiation over ideas of higher education is required for creating organizations of higher learning (French & Bell, 1999). Higher education organizations must embrace open-system thinking that will enable them to cope with emergent challenges and changes in society, specific subject domains, teaching and learning models, and educational technologies (Tsinidou, et al., 2010; Brown, 2013).

Brown (2013:421) draws on Hood et al.'s (2004) model of public co-ordination to show that changes in standards of quality education in the United Kingdom (UK) "has remained

essentially a collaboration between self-regulation, the state and the market”; and that, “whilst both the state and the market are now playing a larger part than previously, self-regulation remains the dominant mode of control.” This suggest that whilst internal organizational factors in universities are important influencers of quality education, it is important to recognize that higher education organizations are engaged in constant battles with external forces like the state, the market, and students in the open-system arena to win control over the regulation of quality in higher education. Dual-mode universities need to develop different strategies of engagement in the open-system arena for the administrators of distance education and on-campus education.

In sum, dual-mode universities should aim to ensure parity of quality education across distance and on-campus degree programmes by coupling appropriate dimensions of (i) higher education policies and practices, (ii) curriculum, (iii) faculty knowledge, skills and abilities, (iv) institutional design and strategy, (v) institutional leadership, (vi) learners’ profile, (vii) learning resources, and (viii) open-system thinking and change. This research investigates the extent to which these dimensions of quality education are coupled across the distance and on-campus education degree programmes offered by two public universities in Ghana. The next section describes the evolution of distance education and its operation in dual-mode universities.

2.4 History and evolution of distance education

Historically, according to Holberg (1989), distance education first established its roots as a form of instruction delivered through correspondence study. This first generation of distance education – variously known as correspondence study, off-campus study, and

home study – was delivered using written and printed materials. In the 1920s, the invention of radio led to the emergence of the second generation of distance education which combined radio-led teaching with the hard copy written materials. The current third generation type of distance education makes use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) as its engine by offering a media-based electronic communication in which teaching and learning materials (including text, graphics, sound moving picture) were made available online, the purpose being to facilitate greater interactivity between the teacher and student, student and student, and between student and materials. This ICT based third generation of distance education has been propelled by the internet. Distance education in Ghana falls into the second generation type.

The landscape of distance education has been increasing in African countries. According to Saint (2001), more than 140 public and private institutions provide tertiary distance education services within sub-Saharan Africa, while some 49 of the 54 Africa countries have access to the internet in their capital cities. Universities in South Africa are at the forefront of the third generation type of distance education in sub-Saharan Africa (Saint, 2001). As further noted by Saint (2001), in the past half century some universities in other African countries like Kenya, Cote d' Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Mali, Togo, Central African Republic, Zambia, Malawi and Botswana have used distance education for tertiary training programmes. The majority of African countries fall within the second generation type of distance education (Saint, 2001). Today, several African countries make use of distance education on a large scale, but less than many of the Asian countries (Dhanarajan, 2000; Saint, 2001).

The African Virtual University (AVU) which was established in 1997 to serve countries in sub-Saharan Africa was yet another model of distance education that uses technological mode of instructional delivery to increase access to higher education (Magdalene and Geoffrey, 2001). The AVU has established partnerships with organizations of higher education by offering credit and non-credit undergraduate degree programmes throughout Sub-Saharan Africa via digital satellite transmission (Magdalene and Geoffrey, 2001). The trailblazing role of AVU in delivering technology-based distance education in many African countries inspired governments and public universities in countries like Ghana to explore distance education as an alternative to increase access to university education.

2.5 Challenges of distance education in dual-mode universities in Africa

Distance education programmes exist mainly within dual-mode universities in Africa as subject-oriented departments, unit, institute or college within a college or university (Magdalene and Geoffrey, 2001). In most cases the extent of operation determines whether or not it will operate either as a unit or section within an existing conventional department or as semi-autonomous departments. Various studies conducted in other dual-mode universities in Africa that operate the distance education programme shows that the programme faces a myriad of problems.

According to Siaciwena (1997), the Directorate of Distance Education at the University of Zambia, created in 1994, had operated as a Correspondence Unit in the university. Prior to 1994, the distance education programmes had suffered due to lack of clear and comprehensive policy, inadequate funding and long bureaucratic decision-making processes. Since 1994, the Director of the distance education unit was given authority

similar to that of a Dean of Faculty or School, and the decision-making process improved because the Director could now make decision with little bureaucratic hindrances. But, even with these changes, the Directorate lacks trained staff; and, training and sustaining part-time personnel has proven to be difficult. Kapaale (1993) remarked that the teaching faculty felt overburdened with on-campus and distance teaching assignments. However, academic staff became motivated to work with the Directorate after the Directorate gained administrative and financial autonomy.

Distance education programmes in Makerere University in Uganda, University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the University of Zimbabwe, just to name a few, have experienced similar constraints at one time (Kamau 1997). It is to avoid similar experiences that the former Directorate of Distance Education at the University of Zimbabwe sought autonomy to become a constituent college with the hope to becoming an Open University.

In conclusion, the limited comparison of distance education programmes in African countries suggest that distance education programmes are unable to function effectiveness in the absence of administrative and financial autonomy. Distance education programmes suffer if they operate under the rigid internal structures of on-campus programmes which are not flexible to the peculiar needs of distant learners. Distance education departments easily find themselves relegated to a peripheral position if their unique requirements are not made part of the mission of universities. It therefore seems that distance education programmes function best when they are given greater autonomy and are weakly coupled to university organizational structures.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter describes the qualitative research methodology used for the study. It discusses the research design, methods and sources of data, issues of research reliability, and the limitations of the study. Simply put, the chapter outlines the procedures that were employed in carrying out this research.

3.1 Research design: Qualitative comparative research design

Research design is a general plan of work which explains the systematic approach to be followed to integrate the different components of the study in a coherent and logical way to effectively address the research problem; it constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data (Bryman, 2003; Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) interprets research designs as the plan and procedures for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis. The research design refers to the overall strategy that you choose. The overall research design used for the study is hereby referred to as qualitative comparative design. The nature of this research design is discussed below.

There are three main research approaches for the collection and analysis of data, namely qualitative approach, quantitative approach, and mixed approach. Both qualitative and quantitative research approaches may be combined by a researcher to form a mixed research design. According to Bryman (2003), the qualitative approach is characterized

by the collection and analysis of textual data through interviews, conversational analysis, focus group discussions, and observations within the context of a study. The textual data captures the real life experiences, attitudes, behaviours and perspective of the research respondents. Such data is used in narratives to construct a social reality that helps to understand its origins, nature and outcomes. Strauss and Corbin (1998:10) described qualitative research as “Any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification. It (qualitative research) can refer to research about persons’ lives, lived experiences, behaviours, emotions, and feelings as well as about organizational functioning, social movements, and cultural phenomena”. Miles and Huberman (1994) articulated an elaborate position and stated that qualitative research is conducted to: (a) confirm previous research on a topic, (b) provide more in-depth detail about something that is already known, (c) gain a new perspective or a new way of viewing something, and (d) expand the scope of an existing study.

The quantitative research approach, on the other hand, relies on the use of standardized or structured survey instruments, with predetermined response categories, to collect data from a large sample of a population of people to enable the researcher undertake statistical aggregation of varying perspectives and experiences of people to understand a problem affecting the general population. The quantitative data is analyzed and presented in frequency tables, pie chart, bar chart and advanced statistical models to convey the findings of a study. Quantitative research usually involve the testing of a hypothesis.

The study must choose an appropriate design from among these three approaches to investigate how the loosely coupled organizational structures of public universities has shaped the administration of the dual mode policy of education. Weick (1976: 9) went

beyond laying the foundations for the theory of loosely coupled system to also outline the “tricky methodological problems [to overcome] before one can investigate loose coupling.” Offering his support to acceptable methodological designs, Weick (1976: 10) pointed out that “J.G. March has argued that loose coupling can be spotted and examined only if one uses methodology that highlights and preserves rich detail about context. The necessity for a contextual methodology seems to arise, interestingly enough, from inside organization theory. The implied model involves cognitive limits on rationality and man as a single channel information processor. The basic methodological point is that if one wishes to observe loose coupling, then he has to see both what is and is not being done.” The approach that preserves rich contextual detail about the organizational context of loose coupling is the qualitative research design approach.

This study used the qualitative comparative approach because it is more congruent with the nature of the research problem which focuses on the analysis of ‘coupling’ and ‘looseness’ of programmes in educational organizations. Investigating the extent of coupling between distance education degree programmes, on the one hand, and on-campus education degree programmes, on the other hand, requires the analysis of administrative processes of authority, and the examination of technical issues related to the nature of the degree programme itself. The analysis of administrative processes of authority, loose coupling, and cognitive limits on rationality in organizations do not easily lend themselves to statistical explanations, but are best understood through a contextually sensitive methodology of qualitative analysis (Weick, 1976; Silverman, 2009).

3.1.1 Choice of Two Dual Mode Public Universities

Taking into account the limited time and resources available to the researcher, the case study design was chosen to gain deeper understanding of the context of the dual-mode degree programmes in the public universities. As argued by Yin (2012), a case study is a representation of the comprehensive description and explanation of the many components of a given social situation which may be embedded in a single case or multiple cases. The case study involved the empirical investigation of the occurrence of the dual-mode policy in two public universities accredited to deliver degree programmes through distance education and on-campus education. Out of the four public universities that have been accredited to deliver degree programmes through the dual mode approach, the researcher purposely selected the University of Ghana where she is undertaking this postgraduate study, and University of Cape Coast where the researcher is formally employed. This suited the nature of the research problem and practical constraints.

Furthermore, the case study design allowed the combination of various data collection methods, such as interviews, documentary analysis and questionnaires (Saunders et al, 2007; Morris and Wood, 2011; Yin, 2003) to understand a phenomenon. According to Yin (2003), lessons learnt about cases can be assumed to be informative about the experiences of an average institution. Wolcott (2003) also indicated that the case study approach can be useful for understanding the process of policy development, policy changes over time and what the changes reveal.

However, a limitation of the case study design is that what one learns about the particular case might not necessarily be true of others. Accordingly, it may be difficult to draw general conclusions about other similar cases. Therefore, although the two cases selected

represent fifty percent of the population of dual mode public universities in Ghana accredited to deliver degree programmes, the findings of the study have limited generalization. Although all higher educational organizations fit into the analytical concept of loosely coupled systems as developed by Weick (1976; 1982), it is recognized that the impact of the loosely coupled system on the administration of the dual mode policy could be different in each public university. The generalization of the findings beyond the University of Ghana and University of Cape Coast is therefore limited.

3.2 Sources of data

The main sources of data for this case study were from both primary and secondary sources. With regard to the primary source, interviews were conducted with key informants; and, for the secondary source relevant official documents, books, journals and internet-based information, particularly rated articles in the academia, were consulted and reviewed for more detailed information. As indicated by Merriam (1998), data found in documents can be used in the same manner as data from interviews or observations. The multiple data sources allowed for triangulation of findings and conclusions about the practices of the dual mode universities, and how the loosely coupled organizations of the universities have influenced practices concerning the dual mode policy.

3.3 Data collection procedure

Data were collected from May to July, 2016. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews, preceded by the presentation of a letter of introduction given by the University of Ghana, intended to introduce the researcher to the respondents. Before conducting the interview, the researcher explained the rationale for the study to the Provost of the College

and Heads of Department to effect approval. This helped to pave way for the support and co-operation of the respondents in terms of agreement on the day and time to have the interviews. Respondents were made to endorse the Research Ethics Form (Appendix 3), an informed consent form to assure them of anonymity of information given and guaranteed that information provided would only be used for academic purpose.

On the basis of the qualitative design of the study, an interview guide was used for one-on-one interview sessions to probe questions relating to the dual-mode policy, and the nature and challenges of coupling degree programmes across distance education and on-campus education. The interview took the form of discussions on issues relating to the processes and challenges of coupling distance and on-campus degree programmes. The direction of the interview was determined by both the interviewer and the interviewee. This made it difficult to standardise the interview across the different interviewees. In spite of the use of an interview guide, each interview usually took its own format. Although, some sessions were quite time consuming, it was possible to generate rich information and ideas from the conversations because the level of questioning was varied to suit the context, and the interviewees were quizzed more deeply on specific issues. The one-on-one interview sessions held at the respondents work places lasted for between twenty-five to fifty minutes on the average.

3.4 Primary data collection

The study used interviews with key informants as the method for primary data collection to analyse the nature and impact of the dual-mode policy in each public university. The two public universities are large organizations with more than one thousand employees,

numerous academic departments, and many administrative offices. Therefore, the choice of research participants for interviews required careful reflection to ensure that the right data was collected for analysis. The researcher therefore used theoretical and purposive sampling to select departments administering distance education degree programmes as well as quality assurance departments within the public universities.

Sampling, according to Boateng (2014:149), “is a process of selecting samples from a group or population to become the foundation for studying a population in order to obtain data to address a research problem”. The notion of sampling in qualitative research could be misleading to researchers abreast with quantitative research because it carries notions of selection of a group of actors from a population with a known number of members. Perhaps, in qualitative research, the term ‘purposive interviews’ (Silverman, 2009) is more appropriate in place of purposive sampling. Boateng (2014:149) however emphasize that “Qualitative researchers use a non-probability sampling approach in which the probability of selecting any particular member is unknown”. According to Walliman (2005), purposive sampling is a useful sampling method which allows an investigator to get information from a sample of the population that one thinks knows most about the subject matter. The rationale for purposive sampling in qualitative research is to help the researcher select respondents who are abreast with the research problem and have relevant information or knowledge of the issue being studied. The aim is not to select a representative group to discover principles that have universal application.

Theoretical sampling, on the other hand, is where the researcher’s selection of respondents is influenced or driven by a theory (Teddlie and Yu, 2007; Opong, 2013) – in the case of this research it was driven by the theory of loosely coupled systems (Weick, 1976).

Oppong (2013:205) emphasized that “theoretical sampling essentially enables the researcher to select a segment of the population of study as the sample in line with decision rules as informed by the purpose of the study as well as insights gained from emerging data collection and theorising arising therein.” Theoretical sampling enables the researcher to purposively select organizations, units, cases or actors that exhibit the characteristics described by the theory guiding a study. In the context of this study, only academic departments that were administering dual mode degree programmes offered through on-campus education and distance education were those that could be studied to understand the extent to which the programmes were loosely coupled in practice.

The choice of research respondents was guided by the dual-mode policy and the theory of loosely coupled systems. Only the departments administering dual-mode degree programmes were of interest to the research. In the public universities, of particular interest to the research were administrative offices of authority managing distance education degree programmes, academic departments offering dual-mode degree programmes, and quality assurance units. Outside the public universities, the researcher interviewed two officials of the NAB for their views about the dual-mode programmes. A total of sixteen (16) officials interviewed for the study is shown below in Table 1.

Table 1: Description of research participants interviewed

Category	Case Units	Departments	Participants	No.
University of Cape Coast	College of Distance Education	Provost Secretariat	Pro-Vice Chancellor/ Immediate Past Provost	1
		Quality Assurance and Enhancement	Head of Dept.	1
	Central Administration	Directorate of Quality Assurance and Academic Planning	Director	1
		UCC Academic Department	Head of Dept.	1
University of Ghana	Central Administration	Academic Quality Assurance Unit	Director	1
		School of Continuing and Distance Education	Head of Dept.	1
	College of Humanities	UG Academic Department	Head of Dept.	1
		Lecturers	2	
		Course Tutors	2	
Higher Education Regulatory Agency	National Accreditation Board	Quality Assurance Department	Head of Dept.	1
		Deputy Head	1	
Total sample size				16

Seven (7) informants were interviewed at the University of Cape Coast including the Head of Department of Quality Assurance and Enhancement at the College of Distance Education (CoDE), Head of Directorate of Quality Assurance and Academic Planning for the enter university, Pro-Vice Chancellor, the Head of one of the academic departments offering dual-mode degree programmes (hereafter referred to as UCC Academic

Department), a lecturer in the UCC Academic Department, and two Tutors for the distance education degree programmes.

At University of Ghana, seven (7) informants were interviewed including the Head of School of Continuing and Distance Education (SCDE), Head of Department of Academic Quality Assurance Unit, the Head of one of the academic departments offering dual-mode degree programmes (hereafter referred to as UG Academic Department), two lecturers in the UG Academic Department, and two Tutors for the distance education programmes.

Outside the two public universities, the researcher interviewed two officials of the NAB; specifically, the Head of Quality Assurance Department and the Deputy. Whenever the researcher deems that a direct quotation being used in the analysis could be harmful to the position of the official who provided the information, the researcher carefully avoids making reference to the position of the interviewee.

3.5 Secondary data collection

Documentary analysis involves methodical procedures of appraising documents, both printed and electronic (computer-based and internet-transmitted) material (Bowen, 2009). These may include institutional reports, policy documents among others. The researcher drew upon various sources of evidence by reading and interpreting secondary sources so as to merge and validate them in provision of a confluence of evidence that bred credibility with the aim of reducing the impact of potential biases. Patterns were formed and coded to uncover themes pertinent to the phenomenon under study.

3.6 Method of data analysis

According to Anderson (1998) qualitative data are analysed in interpretative ways whereby the researcher makes judgments and interprets meaning within a particular context. In the view of Denzin and Lincoln (2000) there is no single way to accomplish qualitative research, since data analysis is a process of making meaning. It is a creative process, not a mechanical one (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) as is common with quantitative research. In this study, the researcher followed the data analysis and coding procedures proposed by Creswell (2009) and Esterberg (2002:158). Precisely, Esterberg (2002:158) suggested that open coding is a process where “you work intensively with your data, line by line, identifying themes and categories that seem of interest”.

Analyzing the nature and impact of loosely coupled academic programmes implies the use of the comparative method of analysis as suggested by Weick (1976: 10): “A contextually sensitive methodology would record both the fact that some people are in one place generating events and the fact that these same people are thereby absent from some other place. ... Thus, to see the effects of variations in these understandings one compares contexts that differ in conspicuous and meaningful ways.” The study comparatively analyzes the loosely coupled distance education degree programmes and on-campus education degree programmes. In analysing this loose coupling policy, the study examine whether what happens in the on-campus education degree programmes is present in, or absent from, the distance education degree programmes.

The technical components of the degree programmes offered the themes for the analysis of pattern-matching (Yin, 1994). The pattern-matching logic approach, as explained by

Yin (1994), was used to code, identify patterns, themes, categorize patterns, and classify the data. Care was taken to notice convergence and divergence in coding and classifying.

3.7 Research trustworthiness: Validity and Reliability

The concepts of reliability and validity have a different emphasis and implication when applied to quantitative and qualitative data (Sim and Wright, 2000). With respect to quantitative data, reliability refers to the consistency of collected data, while validity refers to the appropriate measurement to the objectives of the study. However, reliability in qualitative data refers to the dependability, while validity refers to the degree to which a finding is judged to have been interpreted in a correct way (Golafshani, 2003).

The researcher engaged in extensive discussions with supervisor, qualitative researchers and colleagues on the research questions, data analysis, findings and conclusions. In addition, effort was made during the data collection to verify with participants the representativeness of the transcribed data to what they actually said or meant.

The issue of dependability, which has to do with whether a study's findings could be replicated if it was done with the same participants in the same context, with regard to a study such as this, and many qualitative studies, can be challenging. The reason being that participants experience with regard to the phenomenon is likely to change with the passage of time. Therefore, the researcher has noted and described all the processes leading to the findings of the study.

The researcher ensured the data, findings and interpretations made in this study were the true reflection of the intents of the participants and not modified by the researcher. Thus, other researchers were made to review the transcribed data, generated themes and conclusions made to determine if they were in line or there were contradictions.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical issues cannot be ignored in the study of quality assurance practices because they relate directly to the integrity of the research and it is a way to do the research honestly and responsibly (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Academic ethical standards including respect for respondent's norms and values during the whole process was maintained as these are obligatory and essential. This was done in an ethical manner in line with both moral and practical issues in research (Oliver, 2003). The literature used in this study such as books, journals and other sources were appropriately cited and referenced to avoid plagiarism. In addition, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy, harm to participants and deception was avoided (Bryman and Bell, 2007) as much as possible.

Letters were written to the participating institutions seeking permission and consent to carry out the study. Permissions were duly granted for the research to proceed.. Respondents who were willing to participate in the study were informed about what is being investigated and what role they had to play in the investigation. Subsequently, various appointments were booked for the interviews at the convenience of participants. The use of recorders as well as note-taking during the interviews was at the discretion of the respondents. The respondents were assured of anonymity. The consent of the respondents were sought before the interview was carried out.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the analysis of the central question of how the loosely coupled organizational structure of the public universities has impacted on the coupling of distance education degree programmes to the on-campus education degree programmes. The chapter is divided into four sections. Section 4.1 examines the understanding of university administrators and teaching faculty about the dual-mode policy governing distance and on-campus education degree programmes. Section 4.2 analyzes the nature of coupling of distance education and on-campus education degree programmes at the two public universities. Section 4.3 analyzes how the loosely coupled dual-mode system in the public universities has produced innovations to improve distance education. The challenges of the loosely coupled university system for the effective administration of the dual-mode degree programme is highlighted throughout the analysis and discussion.

4.1 University administrators and teaching faculty's perception of the dual-mode policy

It is important to examine how the university administrators responsible for the distance education degree programmes understand the dual mode policy which demands the coupling of on-campus and distance education degree programmes. It has been established in the literature on policy implementation that how policy implementers understand a policy shapes how they actually implement the policy. How the administrators of the distance education programme understand the dual-mode policy is crucial in influencing

how the policy will be implemented. In analyzing the nature and effect of loose coupling, Weick (1976: 11) stated, “Thus, a major initial research question is simply, what does a map of the couplings and elements within an educational organization look like?” Particularly, in the absence of a formal policy guideline that specifies the map of the dual-mode system, it is important to establish the normative understanding shared by the university administrators concerning the nature of the dual-mode policy. University Administrators and Heads of Departments for distance education in the two public universities were interviewed to know their understanding of the dual-mode policy.

At the University of Cape Coast, a former Director of the distance education programme, shared his understanding of the dual-mode policy as follows:

Distance [education] does not have its own programs. It uses programs that have been certified by the Academic Board and accredited by National Accreditation Board. And so it is only the delivery mode that changes but we use accredited programs, existing departments and faculties.

The Head of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Directorate at the University of Cape Coast also understood the dual-mode policy as follows:

The National Accreditation Board maintain that whatever you do at the university if it is a regular [on-campus] programme, and you say you are going to offer that thing by distance, it must not deviate from the normal one. For example, if this is the course approved for this type of programme on the regular one, it must not vary. It is the mode of delivery that must vary. Everything must be the same. It must be parity of extreme and if you are running the dual mode, a student who comes into regular session and a student who studies at a distance, if they are doing the same programme, [and] in the end they are going to get the same

certificate, then they must go through the same programme and they are very insistent upon that one.

At the University of Ghana, the Head of the Department of the distance programme stated the following understanding of the dual-mode policy:

We pick the programs that have already been accredited by the National Accreditation Board through the departments. We rely on main campus department for our courses, we do not develop any new programs.

The above understandings of the dual-mode policy shared by Administrators of the distance education programmes in the two universities suggest a large degree of consensus about the nature and implication of the dual-mode policy. There is no doubt that the administrators have the common understanding that the dual-mode policy implies the tight coupling of the distance education degree programmes to the on-campus (regular or normal) degree programmes.

To a large extent, there exist some common understanding among University Administrators about the nature of the dual-mode policy. This finding supports the view of loose coupling theorists that educational organizations are loosely coupled systems usually connected by common understanding of policies and values (Weick, 1976). The common understanding about the dual-mode policy among the Administrators can ensure effective coordination of action towards achieving the policy objective. Policy ambiguity, according to March (1987), causes loose coupling of problems, solutions and actions in organizational decision-making. Therefore, at least, the common understanding among

the policy Administrators is likely to aid them to unambiguously communicate the nature of the ‘dual-mode’ coupling policy to the teaching faculty members.

4.2 Nature of coupling on-campus and distance education degree programmes

We now investigate the nature of coupling between the on-campus education degree programme and distance education degree programmes. According to Weick (1976: 4), the technical core of an organization and the authority of office are the two most important mechanisms for ensuring the coupling of elements in an organization: “The relevance of those two mechanisms for the issue of identifying elements is that in the case of technical couplings, each element is some kind of technology, task, subtask, role, territory and person, and the couplings are task-induced. In the case of authority as the coupling mechanism, the elements include positions, offices, responsibilities, opportunities, rewards, and sanctions and it is the couplings among these elements that presumably hold the organization together.” The extent to which the administrative structures and technical components of the degree programme have been structured to ensure the coupling of elements of the dual-mode system shall be analyzed here.

Focusing on the drivers of quality higher education in tertiary organizations (Zaki and Rashidi, 2013), the study analyzes the nature and impact of loose coupling of the dual-mode system by focusing on the following factors: (i) the nature of admission requirements and degree certification; (ii) the nature of administrative office of authority for administering degree programmes; (iii) the nature of teaching faculty (v) the nature of the curriculum; and, (iv) the nature of learning resources.

4.2.1 Coupling of admission requirements and degree certification

The study found that the degree certificates awarded by the two public universities to distance education and on-campus education graduates are not distinguished by the mode of learning. The duration of the Bachelor degree programmes and the graduation certificates for both the on-campus and distance education programmes are therefore tightly coupled. The loosely coupled organizational structure of the public universities does not affect the tight coupling of the duration and certification of the degree programmes offered through on-campus and distance education.

The study examined the extent of coupling of the entry requirements for the four-year bachelor degree social science programmes for both on-campus and distance education. According to the admission guidelines jointly issued by the National Council for Tertiary Education and National Accreditation Board (2013), applicants to first degree programmes in tertiary institutions in Ghana who hold the West Africa Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) should have the minimum requirement of “Credit passes (A1-C6) in six (6) subjects comprising three core subjects, including English Language and Mathematics, plus three (3) relevant elective subjects.” In practice, the public universities adheres to this admission policy during admission of applicants into the on-campus education bachelor degree programmes. However, interviews with some Administrators of the two public universities revealed that applicants admitted into the distance education degree programmes sometimes have lower academic performance backgrounds compared to the applicants admitted into the on-campus education degree programmes. The situations at the two public universities are highlighted in turn.

At the University of Cape Coast, one of the Administrators of the distance education programme stated that an applicant who obtains grade D7 in a relevant WASSCE subject can still gain admission into the distance education degree programme through an indirect route called “the special entry” where the applicant is required to pass an entrance examination. Such an applicant cannot gain admission into the on-campus degree programme which uses only direct admissions.

At the University of Ghana, WASSCE applicants who sought admission into the on-campus social science degree programmes were to have the following minimum entry requirements: “An applicant for admission to a degree programme in the University of Ghana must have at least credits (A1 - C6 in WASSCE) in English, Core Mathematics and Integrated Science (for Science applicants) or Social Studies (for non-Science applicants) and three elective subjects...in General Arts/Business..., with the total aggregate not exceeding 24.” For applicants to the distance education social science degree programmes in the same university, the requirements remained the same for the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration programme. However, the requirements were lowered for two other distance education degree programmes as follows: Distance education applicants for the Bachelor of Science in Information Technology programme were required to have “*Credit passes in any Three (3) Electives subjects with the total aggregate not exceeding 30*”; and, applicants to the Bachelor of Arts were required to have “*Credit passes in any Three (3) Electives subjects with the total aggregate not exceeding 30*.” The quality of students admitted into the on-campus and distance education social science degree programmes are not the same.

Concerning the above differential admission requirements for on-campus (or regular) education and distance education social science degree programmes at the University of Ghana, a lecturer observed the following differences during the admission process:

The admission requirements are not the same, it is very competitive with the regular [on-campus] students. For the regular there is a cut-off point that is aggregate 12 or 13, and if you go to distance students I think the cutoff point is at somewhere like 20 or 21. So you know there are differences.

Many lecturers at the University of Ghana who have assessed students on the two modes of education share the view that there is a difference between the quality of the students on the on-campus and distance education programmes. A Head of Department at the University of Ghana stated the origins and nature of the difference in quality as follows:

In terms of quality, there is a lot of difference. ... You realize that most of the best students come to the regular campuses, but I have also seen good students in the distance education. ... Generally, I will say that the level of quality of the [distance education] students is very low as compared to the regular students.

In the same department at the University of Ghana, a lecturer also shared the following view about the differences in quality of distance and on-campus education students:

I think that you can have some extreme cases where we have very brilliant individuals in the distance programme, but on the average those on campus [regular] look sharper, they look more serious and I think it is also a function of the admission requirement and so you see that reflecting in their results.

From the above reports, it is clear that the loosely coupled organizational structure of the public universities does not affect the tight coupling of the duration of the degree programmes for both on-campus and distance education students. Moreover, in both universities, there is no distinction between the mode of education on the degree certificates awarded to graduates who went through the distance and on-campus routes. However, it also emerges that there is some loose coupling of the admission requirements for applicants into the distance education and on-campus education social science degree programmes. It could be argued that the loose coupling of admission requirements undermines the dual-mode policy which requires tight coupling. It seems that the loosely coupled admission requirements for distance and on-campus social science degree programmes is due to the loosely coupled organizational structure of the university for distance education and on-campus education.

4.2.2 Coupling of administrative authority for managing distance education

Many scholars have pointed out that higher educational policies and reforms such as dual-mode programmes require authorities to implement (Weick, 1976; Rubin, 1979; Croft, 1992; Gillmore, et al., 1999; Goldspink, 2007). Croft noted that “distance education in the dual mode institution has some base requirements for success: the administrative unit must have some level of authority, even if it is not academic; the unit must have some level of autonomy to set its own procedures and policies; other units in the institution must be willing to cooperate; adequate numbers of well-trained staff and faculty must be available; and a sound funding base must be provided on a consistent basis, under the control of the unit.” Where there is no powerful administrative authority with some level of autonomy to promote the coupling of degree programmes under dual-mode policies, it will be

difficult to coordinate the actions of autonomous academic departments and teaching faculty members to accept the additional burdens brought by distance education programmes. The nature of the administrative authority created to promote the coupling of distance education and on-campus education degree programmes at the University of Ghana and University of Cape Coast are analyzed below.

In the University of Ghana, the SCDE manages the distance education programme. The SCDE has an advisory board chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor with Deans of the participating faculties, the Director of SCDE, a representative from the University of Education (at Winneba), a representative from the NCTE, and the Director of Academic Affairs (see also Badu-Nyarko, 2013). In the SCDE is a department of distance education with a head of department like any other academic department within the University. There is also a Management Committee which is mostly responsible for approving the annual operational plans and budget for the SCDE, determines the level of fees and remunerations, and liaises with the Advisory Board to provide guidance for the functioning of the Centre. The Management Committee further assists in mobilizing resources for infrastructural development and functioning of the Centre. They also periodically appraise the SCDE to ensure efficient and effective management of the programme as well as the quality of the distance education programme.

According to a senior official at the University of Ghana who works with the distance education programme, distance education does not usually get the needed support from the higher administrative authorities in the university. The official stated,

Distance education students are seen at the third tier kind of students and they are not the focal point of University authorities. So quality assurance unit here cares

very little about what is happening to Distance Education students. Until the university sees distance education as another way of delivering education to the majority of the people, [and] not necessarily that the people do not have the necessary qualification to come to campus, there are always going to be issues. So we need the maximum support just as those on main campus.

The above suggests that the distance education department is tightly coupled to the administrative structures of the University for the on-campus degree programmes. However, the programmes of the distance education department do not receive equal attention for resources from the administrative authorities compared to the on-campus programmes. The Head of the Department stated, *“distance education needs proper attention, it needs resources because it is expensive to deliver distance education and ensuring quality. ...The biggest challenge for me is resources both in terms of human, financial and material.”* A senior lecturer at the University of Ghana corroborated the position of the Head of Department as follows:

What we also would need is the fact that the university itself should not treat the distance education as if it is an abandoned step child, it should give it the resources that it needs, sometimes I get the impression that resources are a bit constrained even though the students have paid what they may have to pay. If they are decentralizing authority they must also decentralize resources so they can deliver. There have been instances that tutors and lecturers have complained that they have not been incentivized, so that is one area that must be looked at.

It emerged that the distance education department at the University of Ghana does not have autonomy to use the money that it derives from the distance education programme.

This weakens the capacity of the distance education programme to promptly address problems when they arise. In the 2015/2016 academic year, the University of Ghana recruited some Assistant Lecturers for the distance education department to help improve the quality of teaching. Until the distance education department becomes autonomous to recruit its own teaching faculty and use its own financial resources, it will be constrained to match the quality of on-campus programmes.

At the University of Cape Coast, the College of Distance Education (CoDE) which manages the distance education programme seems to have greater authority and autonomy in the management of its financial resources. The CoDE has even created its own quality assurance unit called the 'Quality Enhancement and Assurance Unit' to improve the quality of the distance education programme. According to a former Provost of the CoDE, the creation of the quality assurance unit is "to cater for the contextual issues" monitoring the quality of teaching of course facilitators and dealing with absenteeism among course facilitators. The Provost stated some of the achievements of the quality assurance unit as follows: "The Quality Assurance Unit has been able to reduce the level of absenteeism of facilitators because they report on them and management of the College could act on that. There have been instances where some facilitators were dismissed." It appears that loosening the coupling of administrative and financial management between on-campus degree programmes and distance education degree programs is more appropriate for improving the administrative effectiveness of distance education.

It can be seen that there is a greater degree of loose coupling in the financial management of on-campus and distance education programmes at the University of Cape Coast than it exist at the University of Ghana. It appears that the high degree of financial autonomy

enjoyed by the CoDE at the University of Cape Coast has contributed to improving the quality of the distance education programme.

4.2.3 Coupling of Teaching Faculty and Students for Distance Education and On-campus Education Degree Programmes

Faculty knowledge, skills and abilities are essential in making the teaching and learning process effective in that if they impart the right information with the appropriate skills using explicitly planned interactions it facilitates and promotes student learning. Faculty should be able to interact with students in such a way that will offer them an opportunity to learn, create circumstances that facilitate learning, and use communication skills that would create a high prospect of initiating learning.

Distance education departments at both the University of Ghana and the University of Cape Coast relies on lecturers in other academic departments who are teaching on the on-campus programmes. The lecturers are used by the distance education departments to prepare students for final examinations, set examination questions, and assess the students. At the University of Cape Coast, a Lecturer at the UCC Academic Department explained the situation as follows:

With the regular [on-campus] students, it is the lecturer who teaches, who sets the questions and marks the questions. In the distance, the lecturer or the departments, they set the questions but other people teach the subject and then the lecturer marks. So you can see the differences.

A similar situation that pertains at the University of Ghana was explained by a lecturer at the UG Academic Department as follows:

We the course writers we do not teach, we only do revision and that is once in every semester, it is a three hour period and we do that once in every semester.

It is clear that the teaching faculty used for the on-campus degree programmes have very little contact with the distance education students. There exist strong coupling between the teaching faculty and students on the on-campus degree programmes than it exist on the distance education programme. The impact of this weak coupling for the distance education programme need to be examined by stakeholders. From the conceptual perspective of the study, distance education is a planned teaching and learning experience that uses a wide spectrum of technologies to reach learners at a distance which is designed to encourage learner interaction and certification of learning. It is important to emphasize that the same qualified teaching faculty used on on-campus education degree programmes can be used to deliver learning experience to distance students through a wide spectrum of technologies. The question is who are the “other people” who teach distance education students or facilitate the learning of distance education students?

The study found that whiles the regular education degree programmes are handled by the academic faculty, many of them with terminal degrees, and approved by the NAB; the same lecturers are usually not involved in the teaching of the distance education students.

The distance education students are largely tutored by other people who are mainly masters degree holders. One of the distance education course tutors at the university of Cape Coast was of the view that the distance education programmes “*are not able to recruit the best*” because of financial challenges.

Due to the large number of distance education students, and the additional burden of marking distance education examination papers, the lecturers who assess the distance education students try to involve the distance education course tutors (or facilitators) in the marking of the final examination scripts. A lecturer at the University of Cape Coast explained the situation as follows:

They [the lecturers] are supposed to be responsible for the marking but the facilitators we use do the marking, but each chief examiner is supposed to supervise the marking, [and] do co-ordination. Four people sometimes have to do diamond marking for them to see in order to harmonize so that there is not so much disparity in terms of what is marked. Because it is never possible, because for one programme they have about 2000 to 3000 students. So certainly one examiner cannot mark all the script. It is not possible.

The implication of different lecturers setting examination questions and different course tutors teaching and marking examination papers of distance education students was explained by one tutor at the University of Cape Coast in the following manner:

A distance education student can get an A in a course but if that same student came to take that course in a regular [on-campus] class he will get C or D. Our regular students we give them more so we expect more but for distance students we don't give them more. For their [distance] end of semester exams is multiple choices, that's section A, and section B is two essays. So an average student in a distance education class can score an A while an average regular student will score C. So the distance education students who I taught [and] had first class would have gotten second class lower or upper in the regular.

The suggestion by the tutor that the dual-mode system produces distance education graduates who are generally below the quality of on-campus graduates is reproduced at the University of Ghana where a lecturer shared the following insight;

We do not tend to burden the distance students so much and so I will say that what is given to the distance students is somehow abridged compared to the regular students. Distance students, some of them are working and all that, we may not be able to have them go to the libraries and do all the readings that's why we try to compress the readings into lecture notes and into modules for them.

It appears that the consequences of lowering the admission requirements for distance education programmes translates into the lowering of teaching and examination standards for distance education students in the two dual-mode public universities. Unfortunately for the on-campus students, the degree certificates offered by the dual-mode universities do not state whether a student pursued a degree programme through distance education or through on-campus education. Employers will not be able to discriminate between graduates of distance education from on-campus graduates. A student who graduated with a lower class of degree through the on-campus education route may end up being rejected for job offers while a distance education graduate with a better class of degree, but poorly educated, is undeservedly rewarded with a job offer by the unsuspecting employer.

The study found that the general problem of distance education students having weak academic backgrounds is worsened by low quality of teaching by course tutors. At the University of Ghana, a Head of Department stated;

I think we had been having problems with the quality of teaching when the university started the programme. For instance, if you are running a programme

in [centres such as] Wa, Kumasi and others so you need to employ some people. So they recognized that some of them were not qualified so later on what they did was that they started consulting the Department in charge of such courses to assist them in recruiting the teaching assistants as tutors; and it has improved the quality of tutors. The quality has gone up and improving.

The low quality of tutors appears to be partly due to the weak coupling of the relationship between on-campus teaching faculty and distance education teaching faculty. This was made clear by a lecturer at the University of Ghana as follows;

I do not have a hand in determining who becomes the tutor for my course. When you go to the class for revision and you explain some of the issues then the class starts “aahhh, oh is that so”, and then they say we wish this lecture could have been more than three hours because you have provided more insights into the topics that were captured in the modules. So then you keep wondering, what did the tutors teach during their discussions with them? And so the fact that the quality of tutorials is often times not that high reflects in the exams that they write.

The general problem of low quality of teaching faculty on the distance education degree programmes is recognized by some of the tutors. A course tutor at the University of Ghana shared the following concerns of first year students;

During the matriculation for the level 100, some [students] were giving the concerns that some of the tutors do come and they are just jumping when it get to topics that are somehow confusing or complicated. They are wishing that we have to replace the tutors. The recommendation is that at least the lecturers who are

taking the course have to know those who are tutoring because some might not have knowledge in that particular area.

Many of the course tutors held the view that the universities are not able to remunerate the tutors fairly and therefore are not able to retain tutors with higher qualifications and competencies. One course tutor at the University of Cape Coast emphasised,

Number one issue is quality of tutors is a major challenge because the distance education unit is not prepared to pay tutors well for teaching, so it is not attractive. Many people are not ready to sacrifice at that engagement to come and teach. So mainly the people they get to teach are the people who are ready to take anything. Because if you are not prepared to pay for high calibre of staff, even if you get such staff, eventually they leave because they think they are not worth it.

As a solution to the problem of low quality tuition by some course tutors, the distance education department at the University of Ghana has moved to involve lecturers in the recruitment of the course tutors. The Head of the UG Academic Department affirmed,

They [Distance Education department] now involve us and we also recommend people that we have worked with before such as National Service personnel and Teaching Assistant of which we have trained them on these methodologies. We came to this decision largely based on the feedback we are getting from the students; that there were instances where the students would attend the tutorials and they are totally at sea with the delivery and the issues being discussed. I even participated in some of the recruitment processes and really improved the capacity of the Centre as far as my Department is concerned.

Strengthening the coupling of the relationship between the on-campus education lecturers approved by the NAB, on the one hand, and the distance education tutors on the other hand is a mechanism for improving teaching on distance education degree programmes, and, thereby bridging the gap of quality teaching in the dual-mode public universities. One wonders why some tutors would be recruited for distance education if they do not qualify? The foregoing reports and analysis also suggests that there exist weak coupling between the calibre of tutors recruited for the distance education programme and the standards approved by the NCTE and NAB for the recruitment of university teachers. This situation appears to have partly arisen because of the absence of clear policy guidelines developed by the NCTE and NAB for distance education programmes.

The analysis suggests that the weak coupling of qualified lecturers to the distance education programmes is not only undermining the quality of the distance education programme, but, it is also undermining the quality of the on-campus degree programme in the absence of differentiation. The relationship between qualified teaching faculty and the distance education programme should be strengthened.

4.2.4 Coupling of curriculum for distance education and on-campus education degree programmes: Structure, content, and credit hours

In the two dual-mode public universities, the bachelor degree programmes approved by the NCTE and accredited by the NAB, the sixteen weeks in a semester is structured into thirteen weeks of teaching, one week for revision, and two weeks for examinations. The courses in the approved programme are generally three-hour credit courses. This means that students are supposed to be given at least three hours of teaching every week; this is

normally divided into two hours of lectures delivered by faculty members approved by the NAB, and one hour of tutorials by teaching assistants hired by the department. By the end of the semester, the regular students who have attended all lectures and tutorials would have received thirty-nine hours of teaching to help them understand the content of the courses. Going by the logic of dual-mode of curriculum delivery through regular and distance education, the distance education students should be given the same number of hours. A lecturer at the UCC Academic Department explained the reality:

The course outline of the regular is used as a guide to prepare the outline [for distance education], but in terms of weekly activities ... The only difference is maybe the number of weeks of teaching, because for distance [education] face-to-face [meetings with tutors] is three times or four times. For those on the distance programme, if I meet them once we are able to cover three or four topics. Most of the work may have to be done by them. I give the same staff in terms of books and materials to regular students also to distance students.

Another lecturer in the same Department at the University of Cape Coast gave a similar account about the delivery of the curriculum for the distance education students:

We make available three hours lecture per meeting. They have six meetings because our modules are designed into 6 unit modules. So each topic is supposed to take about three hours in comparison to what happens at the regular because at the regular students are supposed to have 3 hours lecture per week according to how our courses are structured.

In reality, the distance education student receives about eighteen (18) hours of tutorials (or teaching) as compared to the thirty-nine (39) hours given to the regular education

students. In spite of this, a lecturer at the University of Cape Coast did not accept the view that distance education students are better educated because, in his view, *“In terms of delivery and materials they all get the same thing but the number of interaction is more when it comes to the regular than the distance students.”* Dual-mode public universities require clear standards for measuring the parity of quality education between on-campus education and distance education.

The social science courses approved by the NAB for bachelor degree programmes at the University of Ghana are generally three-hour credit courses. In the University of Ghana ‘Regulations for Junior Members,’ 2015, Section 7(12), it states that “One (1) course credit shall be defined as follows: One hour lecture, One hour tutorial, or One practical session (of two or three hours), or Six hours of field work per week for a semester.” Three-hour course credit is usually translated into two hours of lecture and one hour of tutorials per week for a semester. A lecturer at the University of Ghana emphasized,

The regular [on-campus] students have about period 13 weeks for lectures or about 26 to 39 hours lectures to attend. Twenty-six hours for regular lectures and another 13 hours for tutorials. But the distance people don’t have that because of the nature of the programme. It has been prepared in such a way that it is self-tutorial and students should be able to learn certain things on their own.

The nature of the curriculum and instructional time for on-campus degree programmes is weakly coupled to the distance education degree programme. It is clear that distance education students have a reduced physical contact sessions with their teachers. The dual-mode public universities should pay attention to the loose coupling of curriculum for students across distance education and on-campus education.

4.2.5 Coupling of Learning Resources for Distance Education and On-campus Education Degree Programmes

The above analysis so far indicates that distance education in the public universities in Ghana largely depends on the use of self-instructional materials. Therefore, the nature of the learning resources available to distance education students is very important in shaping the quality of distance education. Of equal importance is how the learning materials can be acquired by students. Do distance education students have equal and unhindered access to the learning materials that are given to on-campus education students? What have been the modes of transmitting learning resources to distance education students who are physically absent from their examiners? The study investigated these matters to establish the extent, and impact, of coupling of learning resources for distance education and on-campus education degree programmes.

The study found that the two dual-mode public universities provide their students a combination of printed modules and online materials including powerpoints, videos, and downloadable literature. Both the University of Ghana and the University of Cape Coast relied heavily on printed course modules written by the lecturers teaching counterpart courses on the on-campus degree programme. At the University of Ghana, the head of the distance education department described the module production process as follows:

We have an internal auditing system that audits whatever modules that have been produced. Sometimes, the module is sent back to lecturers, that is, the department that provides the modules for us to check whether the content that has been provided is of standard. So all these are internal mechanisms that have been put in place to ensure quality in course delivery and teaching.

Croft (1992) has argued that distance education course materials are usually better developed than on-campus education course materials in dual-mode universities because, “Experience has shown that university academics, especially if unchecked by editors and instructional designers, have a tendency to overload courses prepared for home study, primarily because they know that, unlike their classroom teaching, which is hardly ever observed by peers, their 'open' courses will be in the public domain and available for scrutiny by other academics. As a consequence, their first concern is that these courses be unquestionably respectable academically.” Advocates for quality education need to go beyond the quality of instructional materials prepared for the media platforms of distance education to examine the competence of course instructors, the duration of institutional time, and the calibre of learners who have been given self-instructional materials. But, it is a plus for quality education if indeed the writer of the distance education materials put in more effort to prepare materials that meet high standards of education.

A lecturer at the UG Academic Department praised the high quality nature of the modules produced for distance students as follows:

If you look at the modules we have given you assignments, exercises, among others, to be working on so if you are able to apply yourself diligently to the course, you should be better off. ...A lot more went into the crafting of the modules than just the normal teaching that we do. Because here we teach them and give them reading materials but with distance we have dissolved all the reading materials into the modules and have different perspectives all captured in the modules with more information. In fact I can tell you on authority that even when I am teaching the regular students I go for my model to help me because I have more information there.

The above confirms the view of Croft (1992) that distance education materials are prepared by writers with the objective of meeting high standards of teaching expected by peer reviewers. One can therefore say that the instructional materials given to the distance education students is at a parity of quality in relation to the materials given to on-campus education students. The core instructional modules given by lecturers to distance education students therefore appear to be tightly coupled to the on-campus materials.

At the University of Cape Coast, the nquality nature of the course modules given to distance education students was reported by interviewees. Distance education course tutors at the University of Cape Coast described the module as comprehensive and easy to understand. One of the course tutors stated the following:

The module is like the course outline, lecture, tutorial questions, assessment questions and reading materials put together; so once they are given the module that is all. ...80% of the regular students even tried to get the distance education students' materials. This is so because they think that the distance education materials are very simple, specific and easy to understand so they have a better chance of understanding the subject.

The irony is that the on-campus education students seek to add the knowledge of the distance education students to the knowledge they get in the weekly classroom interactions with lecturers and tutors. In contrast, the distance education students cannot benefit from what their counterparts on campus enjoy. An official of the distance education department at the University of Cape Coast stated that,

Distance students are spread all over the country. The regular students, they are accommodated. They meet in the lectures so they have their interaction with

lecturers, their library is available for them and so they can go to the library at any time. Distance students may be located in places where even public library will be difficult to access.

The bottom-line is that the on-campus education students have an advantage in gaining access to both the materials given to distance education students and the stock of books at the university library. Thus, the on-campus education students have a greater span of learning resources at their disposal than the distance education students. Dual-mode University Administrators in Ghana must therefore find innovative ways of bridging the gap of learning that exist between on-campus and distance education students.

A key challenge to be overcome by the administrators of distance education programmes in the two dual-mode public universities is how to motivate the distance education students to devote more time and resources into learning. A number of distance education tutors reported that the distance education students appear to have a low interest in the learning process in comparison to the on-campus education students. A course tutor at the University of Cape Coast reported the following observation:

...what I have observed is that most of them [students] do not even read the modules and that is the biggest challenge that we [tutors] have.

Another tutor reported a similar observation among distance education students:

The distance students are almost always not ready, if they come to class, but they come and have not read. And so what can you do? You have to start talking about everything all over again... Generally, they don't submit assignments on time you would have to be chasing them yourself for it.

Generally, at the University of Ghana, the attitude of distance education students towards the reading of their course materials was not better than at the University of Cape Coast. Lecturers and tutors attributed the problem to the marital responsibilities, work demands and domestic roles performed by most students who enrol for distance education programme. A lecturer at the UG Academic Department commented as follows:

... these [distance students] are people who are doing a lot of things; they are wives, they are husbands, they are church elders, they are workers or staffs, boyfriends and girlfriends and what have you... So sometimes, there are a lot things competing for their time over the weekend because of the fact that these are the only space that they have because throughout the week they are working.

Generally, if distance education students have heavy working responsibilities than on-campus students then it suggest that the curriculum of distance education courses should be structured differently, or loosely coupled to the on-campus curriculum. Some novel solutions developed by the two public universities and distance education departments to improve the learning process are discussed in the next section.

4.3 Coupling distance education and on-campus education through information technological innovations

Loose coupling theorists hypothesized that loose coupling systems have the tendency to generate innovations in loosely coupled units. As Goldspink (2007: 41) points out, “If education systems are loosely coupled it is to be expected that differing practices would emerge in response to differing local needs and differing ideas about education. In other

words, the autonomy enjoyed by actors at local levels can be expected to lead to very different approaches at different sites.” On an optimistic note, Weick (1976: 7) remarked that “in loosely coupled systems where the identity, uniqueness, and separateness of elements is preserved, the system potentially can retain a greater number of mutations and novel solutions than would be the case with a tightly coupled system.” Thus, in what ways has the loosely coupled dual-mode system in the two public universities produced innovations to improve distance education?

Many research participants were of the view that the paper and pen era is gradually fading away as the distance education departments use modern technology for teaching, learning and writing examinations. An official of the SCDE at the University of Ghana gladly shared the milestone achieved in this regard:

The distance education programme has put together a new program particularly with the Level 100's where they are given tablets loaded with the course outline, study guides, PowerPoint slides of various lectures, and sometimes with some video recordings of lectures. Students can complement the reading of the slides with the videos that they are attached to give them a sense of what it means to have that regular interactions.

The distance education programme at the University of Cape Coast also now give newly admitted students tablets loaded with learning materials. However, university administrators, lecturers and tutors in the two public universities indicated that this technological innovation in teaching and learning has been excellent for distance education but it is constrained by the limited access to internet connection.

Another information technological innovation developed by the SCDE at the University of Ghana is the development of an online teaching and learning platform called the Sakai Learning Management System (popularly called Sakai LMS). The SCDE piloted the Sakai LMS in the 2013/2014 academic year as a tool to connect the teaching faculty with the distance education students. The head of the distance education department stated,

We train course developers, we train tutors, we train students. We train students on the effective way of using the Sakai learning management system because that is the main medium that we now use to reach out to students on the distance programme.

In the view of the Head of the distance education programme at the SCDE, the greatest challenge to the delivery of quality distance education through the Sakai LMS is financial resources because,

It is really expensive from internet access to laptops, computers, time of lecturers-committing their time to ensure that they are on the Sakai platform; using time and money to ensure quality is very important. Developing videos and all that is hugely expensive.

Studies conducted by other researchers (Adah et al. 2012; Tagoe and Abakah, 2014) on the pilot mobile learning and Sakai projects suggests that the main challenges that will confront the distance learning students include lack of access to internet facilities in many district and rural areas, as well as the expensive cost of accessing internet where available.

The Sakai LMS which was developed for the delivery of degree curriculum to distance students is now being used by lecturers to deliver their courses to on-campus education

students. An official of the Academic Quality Assurance Unit at the University of Ghana summed up the achievement of the Sakai LMS project as follows:

In fact, I would say that it was through the distance learning Sakai program now coming that they got the Sakai learning management system for the whole University to use. That is a big milestone, through them we have also got the Sakai learning management system to use.

The argument of loose coupling systems theorists has been felt in the development, deployment and diffusion of the Sakai LMS at the University of Ghana. Through the Sakai LMS, the administrators of the dual-mode degree programme may now be able to strongly couple many components of the degree programmes across distance education and on-campus education. Crucial components of the degree programme that are being strongly coupled to ensure parity in quality education is the coupling of on-campus teaching faculty to distance education students. Moreover, the SCDE also uploads on the Sakai LMS video recordings of lectures given by the on-campus teaching faculty. This has enabled distance education students to watch weekly lectures on the Sakai LMS, similar to the weekly lectures organized for the on-campus education degree programmes.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This concluding chapter summarizes the key findings of the study, makes recommendations for theoretical and policy improvement. The study sought to investigate the nature of the dual-mode degree programmes offered by two public universities in Ghana, and, how the loosely coupled nature of two public universities has impacted on the dual-mode policy of coupling of distance education and on-campus education degree programmes in an accredited university. The University of Ghana and University of Cape Coast were the two public universities studied. The study analyzed the problem and questions by using the theory of loosely coupled organizations which see a university as educational organizations containing elements that are relatively independent, but are responsive to administrative structures of authority. The study was carried out using a qualitative comparative analytical approach to examine the nature of the dual-mode system and the impact of loose coupling on the dual-mode degree programmes offered through distance education and on-campus education.

5.1 Summary of findings

This section summarizes the key findings on the nature of the dual-mode degree programme offered by the two public universities in Ghana, and how the loosely coupled organizational structure of public universities has impacted on the dual-mode programme.

The challenges encountered by the two dual-mode universities in administering the degree programmes through distance education and on-campus education are also summarized.

5.1.1 Nature of the dual-mode degree programme

The study found that the dual-mode degree programme offered by the University of Ghana and the University of Cape Coast simply refers to the delivery of the same degree certificate through on-campus education and distance education. The degree programme does not distinguish between degree certificates on the basis of the mode of education – that is, whether through distance education or on-campus education. Using the medium of distance education, the two public universities have used the dual-mode programme to expand access to university education.

In the context of the theory of loosely coupled systems, the study found that the dual-mode degree programme is tightly coupled on the dimension of certification of the degree programme to the extent that both distance education graduates and on-campus education graduates receive the same certificate which does not discriminate between the modes of education pursued by graduates. Apart from the certification of the dual-mode degree programme, the study found that all other components of the degree programme such as teaching faculty, curriculum, learning resources, and administrative structures differ across the distance education mode and the on-campus education mode. However, the study also found that there is no formal policy guidelines that specify how the dual-mode programme is to be implemented by the public universities; and, that, the higher education regulatory agencies (including NCTE and NAB) are in the process of developing a formal national policy guidelines for the dual-mode programme.

5.1.2 Nature of understanding of University Administrators and teaching faculty about the dual-mode degree programme

The study also examined the understanding of university administrators and teaching faculty about the nature of the dual-mode degree programme. The study found that the University administrators and teaching faculty share some common understanding and values about the nature of the dual-mode degree programme. There exist some common understanding that in the context of the dual-mode programme, the public universities should offer the same programme across distance education and on-campus education. In other words, there exist the shared understanding that in the dual-mode system, whatever is done for the on-campus degree programme should be replicated for the distance degree programme. This shared understanding contributes to the consolidating the dual-mode programme in the absence of formal national policy guidelines.

5.1.3 Impact of the loosely coupled university organization on the dual-mode degree programme

In the context of the theory of loosely coupled organizations, the study found that the loosely coupled nature of distance education and on-campus education did not create a differentiation between the degree certificate awarded to distance education graduates and the degree certificate awarded to on-campus education graduates. Therefore, within the loosely coupled public university, the study found that the degree certificates awarded to distance education students and on-campus education students are tightly coupled. This

finding is in harmony with the proposition of the theory of loosely coupled organization that some elements in the organization are coupled, but not all elements.

The study found apart from the inanimate elements of degree certificates that are tightly coupled, all the human actions that occur in the lifecycle of the dual-mode degree programme across distance education and on-campus education are loosely coupled in the two public universities. The loosely coupled elements in the dual-mode programme include the creation of administrative offices of authority, the recruitment of teaching faculty, the delivery of curriculum by teaching faculty, and the use of learning resources by students. In practice, these elements are different across the distance education and on-campus education modes of delivery the same degree programme. It seems that in higher educational organizations, it is difficult if not impossible, to tightly couple human action across different actors and departments.

The study also found that, as predicted by the theory of loose coupling, the relatively independent department for distance education at the University of Ghana innovated an online learning system, called the Sakai Learning Management System (Sakai LMS), for use by distance education students. This confirms the prediction of loose coupling theory that if organizations create relatively autonomous units within a flexible system, the autonomous units are likely to be innovative. The study found that the Sakai LMS has been adopted by lecturers for teaching on-campus courses. This finding raises questions about the claim made by Weick (1976) that “loosely coupled systems seal off and prevent the spread of problems” (Orton and Weick, 1990: 213). If solutions for a particular problem can spread in the system to deal with similar problems in other autonomous units of the system, then it confirms the findings of other studies that “buffering in loosely

coupled systems is partial, rather than complete” (Orton and Weick, 1990: 236). This study therefore makes an original contribution to the knowledge that in human organizations, relatively autonomous units cannot seal off solutions that work.

5.1.4 Challenges of administering dual-mode programmes in public universities

The study sought to find out the challenges of administering the dual-mode programme in loosely coupled public universities. The study found that there are many challenges that affect the capacities of the two dual-mode public universities in Ghana to effectively couple the distance education degree programmes with the on-campus education degree programmes as required by the dual-mode policy.

In comparison to the on-campus education programme, the study found the following challenges that have undermined the quality of the distance education programme: lack of a formal national policy guideline to govern the coupling of distance education and on-campus education degree programmes; lack of qualified and competent teaching staff for the distance education programme; lack of financial autonomy for administrative departments managing the distance education programme to invest in qualified personnel and appropriate technology; and, weak academic background of distance education students as a result of lower admission requirements.

The study found that the above administrative and technical challenges undermine the capacity of distance education programmes in the dual-mode universities to achieve parity of quality higher education with the on-campus education programme.

5.2 Recommendations

In the light of the research undertaken and the analysis presented, the researcher makes the following recommendations for policy and theoretical development.

5.2.1 Policy recommendations

First, it is recommended that the dual-mode public universities should collaborate with the stakeholders to design a national policy for the dual-mode programme. The policy should clearly specify the components of the distance and online education programmes that are to be tightly coupled and the components that should be loosely coupled. It is suggested that the components for coupling or loosening should be framed by taking into consideration the factors that promote quality higher education.

Second, it is recommended that the distance education programme should invest in technological innovations like the Sakai LMS that could at least help bridge the gap of learning with the on-campus programmes. Investments in information technology would make it easier to connect or couple distance education students to on-campus learning resources and teaching faculty. It also makes it easier for on-campus teaching faculty to extend their knowledge and skills to distance education students given physical limits.

Finally, it is recommended that the administrative departments managing the distance education programme should be given financial autonomy required to make appropriate investments in qualified personnel and advanced information communication technologies to enhance the quality of distance education.

5.2.2 Recommendations for theory development

The study has demonstrated that the theory of loosely coupled systems is useful for understanding the nature, processes and outcomes of loosely coupled programmes within loosely coupled educational organizations. In fact, the study has contributed to understanding the nature of universities as loosely coupled organizations. It does not only help to understand that university organizations contain both autonomous but administratively responsive departments, but, it also helps to understand how loosely coupled university organizations impact on policy reforms within the university.

In spite of the potential of the theory of loosely coupled organizations to contribute to understanding the nature and impact of educational organizations, the theory remains underdeveloped notwithstanding earlier attempts made by Orton and Weick (1990) and other scholars (Pancs, 2016) to develop the theory. The theory needs a clear typology of the concept of loose coupling. Pancs (2016: 28) noted that “The lack of a tight definition of loose coupling and the traditionally informal nature of the discourse in organizational theory have freed the researchers to entertain rich interpretations but have hindered the synthesis of formal models of coupling.” For instance, although each of the two public universities was conceptualized as a loosely coupled organization, the study found that some components of the dual-mode degree programmes in the two public universities such as the certification of degree programme are tightly coupled, while other elements such as learning resources and curriculum were loosely coupled. There is the need to develop concepts that appropriately describes the ‘tightly coupled’ components of the organization without doing damage to the overall analytical concept of loose coupling.

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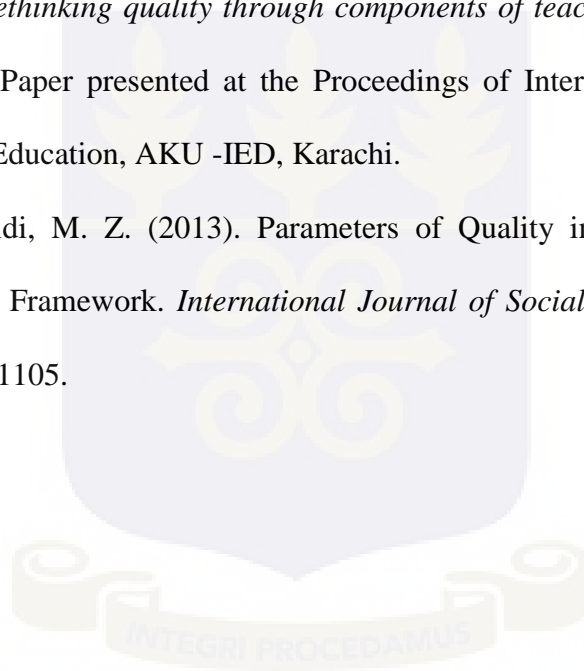
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE UNIT HEADS

Date of Interview..... Name of University/Unit Time Started/ Ended

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a graduate student from the University of Ghana Business School, Department of Public Administration and Health Services. I am conducting a research on the topic **“Quality Assurance in Distance Education in Public Tertiary Educational Institutions: A Comparative Study of University of Cape Coast and University of Ghana”**. The study is primarily for academic work, and therefore you are assured of anonymity of information that you provide. I will appreciate it if you participate in the interview; however, participation is entirely voluntary. Thank you.

Section A: Issues About Quality Assurance (Conceptual Issues)

1. How do you understand quality assurance in higher education?
2. In your opinion, have the current quality assurance system in the University/College/School/Unit worked effectively?
3. What is your understanding of distance learning?
4. Please describe the process for the implementation of quality assurance for the distance education programmes in your University/College/School/Unit.

Section B: Roles and Responsibilities of Quality Assurance Unit and NAB

1. How has your University/College/School/Unit been ensuring quality of the distance education programme?
2. What are the roles and responsibilities of your Quality Assurance Unit?
3. How was NAB involved in the development of your quality assurance policies and systems?
4. Is there a set of national standards for distance education programmes spelt out by the NAB?
5. What role has NAB played so far in assuring quality in distance education?
6. Has the distance education programme been accredited by the NAB?
7. What role has NAB played so far in managing the distance education programmes?

Section C: Enhancing and Ensuring Quality Assurance in Distance Education

1. What mechanisms are there to ensure quality in distance education?
2. What are the standards of quality assurance for the distance education programmes with respect to:
 - a) Curriculum and instruction?
 - b) Assessment and evaluation?
 - c) Teaching of courses?
 - d) Liaison with the students?
 - e) Teaching resources & technology to support distance education?
3. What are the prevalent methods of quality assurance in distance education?

4. What procedures are in place in your University/College/School/Unit to ensure quality assurance?
5. How does this University/College/School/Unit assess or evaluate quality assurance practices?

Section D: Challenges and Constraints in Enhancing and Ensuring Quality Assurance

For Distance Education Programmes

1. What are the challenges and constraints in enhancing and ensuring quality assurance of distance education with respect to the following:
 - a) Funding?
 - b) Resources (a framework for resource generation for quality management)?
 - c) Infrastructural facilities including building, library facilities, learning resources, laboratories, hostel and accommodation facilities?
 - d) Teaching/learning practices?
 - e) Technology enhanced learning (e.g., e-learning activities)?
 - f) Administration structure challenges for the existing quality assurance policies?
 - g) Trained support staff?
 - h) Programme review?
 - i) Developing a comprehensive quality assurance structure?
 - j) Assessment, monitoring and evaluation?
 - k) Performance indicators (a framework for the quality management)?

2. In what ways do you think these challenges and constraints can be addressed?
3. In what ways do you think the current quality assurance practices can be improved?
4. Has there been any improvement in the quality of distance education in recent times?



APPENDIX 2

**UNIVERSITY OF GHANA BUSINESS SCHOOL
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND HEALTH SERVICES
MANAGEMENT**

QUESTIONS FOR FACULTY/ TUTORS/ LECTURERS

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a graduate student from the University of Ghana Business School, Department of Public Administration and Health Services Management. I am conducting a research on the topic “**Quality Assurance in Distance Education in Public Tertiary Educational Institutions: A Comparative Study of University of Cape Coast and University of Ghana**”. The study is primarily for academic work, and therefore you are assured of anonymity of information that you provide. I will appreciate it if you participate in the survey; however, participation is entirely voluntary. Thank you.

Date of Interview..... Name of University/Dept. Time Started/
Ended.....

SECTION A: APPRAISAL OF COURSES AND TEACHING

1. Was a course outline made available to students?
2. If yes, who provided the course outline?
3. At what period was it made available to students (beginning of semester or later)?
4. Is it the same as the one being used by the regular programme?
5. How many times did you teach students in a week/ semester?

SECTION B: MODE OF DELIVERY

6. Is the mode of delivery the same as compared to the regular programme?

7. Who examined students when it comes to quizzes, assignments, student presentations, exams etc.?
8. How often were tutorials organized for the students (weekly/ bi-weekly)?
9. Were students given appropriate reading materials for the course?
10. At what period were students provided with the reading materials (beginning of semester or later)?
11. Most students have observed that there are many mistakes in the course modules, have you observed that?
12. If yes, what is being done to rectify them?
13. If you compare quality of students, distance and regular is there any difference?

SECTION C: DELIVERY / CONTENT / ASSESSMENT

14. Were the course materials well explained for easy understanding by students?
15. In the course of my interaction with the students, most students expressed grave concerns about the quality of teaching by the course tutors engaged for the distance education programme. Are you aware of the concerns raised about the quality of teaching by Tutors? If yes, what should be done to improve the quality of teaching in the distance education programme?
16. Who sets questions for the end of semester exams?
17. Are you the one who prepared the course materials used by the students?
18. Were the end of semester exams questions based on the course material?
19. Students are complaining that time allocated for face to face is not sufficient. Do you think that the time allocated for tutorials/lectures is sufficient for students understanding of the course?
20. In your opinion, do regular students attend more lectures and tutorials than Distance Education students?
21. Would you agree to the notion that regular students are better educated than Distance Education students?

SECTION D: QUALITY ASSURANCE

22. Is there a Quality Assurance unit monitoring the distance education programme?
23. Were the distance education students given the opportunity to assess the course and also evaluate Tutors/Lecturers?
24. What are some of the challenges you have experienced with the distance education programme?
25. Any recommendations to address the challenges mentioned?

