

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317580368>

Assessment of Challenges in Distance Education at University of Ghana

Article in *Open Learning* · May 2017

CITATIONS

0

READS

18

1 author:



Samuel Amponsah
University of Ghana

9 PUBLICATIONS 9 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS: AJPC SPECIAL EDITION 2017 [View project](#)



Call to publish in Special Edition of African Journal of Pedagogy and Curriculum [View project](#)

Assessment of Challenges in Distance Education at University of Ghana

SAMUEL KOFI BADU-NYARKO and SAMUEL AMPONSAH
*Department of Adult Education and Human Resource Studies, College of Education,
University of Ghana, Ghana*

Abstract: The purpose of this study was to assess main challenges in implementation of a distance education (DE) programme at tertiary level at University of Ghana. Quantitative data was collected from 49 tutors and 139 students. The key survey questions to tutors were on their background education, training received, challenges in tutoring, courses taught and inter-relationship between them. The important survey questions to students were on their profile, challenges in registration process, adequacy of tutorials, timeliness, prompt evaluation and feedback related to assignments. Qualitative data was also obtained from coordinators and organizers on main challenges inhibiting the implementation of the distance education programme. Inadequacy of training, inadequate financial motivation, learners shifting from one tutor to the other, inadequacy of time allocated for tutorial, late attendance of students, faulty public address systems, late delivery of modules to students and overloaded modules to be treated within the semester were major challenges reported by tutors. Majority of the students felt that registration process at the beginning of the semester was very difficult, tutorial periods were not enough and they were not enthused with assignments given to them during tutorials. The coordinators felt that some members of the implementation committee were not experts in the field of distance learning and that they had to learn on the job. Other major problems faced in implementation of the programme included the difficulty of getting course writers and low fee for writing the modules. To address the challenges it is recommended that finance and other logistics should be ensured beforehand and all stake holders should be duly informed and offered the necessary training to equip them with the requisite skills and knowledge to take part in new programmes.

Keywords: Distance education, Challenges, Ghana

Introduction

According to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 (2008), everybody has the right to education. From the cradle to the grave, human beings learn in order to develop and adjust to changes in the society. The United Nation's 1959 Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the UN International Convention on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) declared education to be a fundamental human right. Also, the Education for All conferences held in Thailand in 1990 and in Senegal in 2000 as well as the report of International Commission on Education for the 21st Century to the United Nations

Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 1948 (UNESCO, 2008), discussed the need for all citizens of the world to be educated. In spite of the attempts and discussions to get people educated, questions such as what amounts, qualities, forms, and content of education meet the minimum requirements to fulfill the right of being an educated person still remain to be answered. Similarly, Lindahl (1997) poses the question of who is responsible to provide the needed education, for whom it is provided, how it should be provided, with what content and under what conditions should it be provided?

Likewise, both Amedzro (2005) and Walters (2010) claim that learning has become a very important strategy to survive so people continue to learn throughout life either non-formally, formally or informally. They learn in schools and through the process of self-education in reading, travelling, and discussion, watching and listening. Amedzro (2005), however, warns that the effectiveness and quality of a self-directed learning throughout life cannot be ascertained as it is not supervised and evaluated and could be disastrous. In order to avoid the pitfalls associated with self-directed learning, it must be supported, supervised, promote the spirit of inquisitiveness and acquisitiveness and be taken in partnership with an external agent. In this light, Simpson (2013) suggested that making use of blended teaching will be much beneficial to learners in a distance education programme and help in retaining these students as much as the mainstream students.

With all the discussions and efforts put in place for all citizens of the world to be literates, it is sad to note that universities or higher education institutions are experiencing situations where admissions for many prospective students have to be turned down due to lack of space and other facilities. Badu-Nyarko (2000) indicates that the highly-selective admission system, residential status of institutions, distance from the university, and lack of financial support for non-resident or off-campus students serve as major challenges in pursuing full-time study at the tertiary level in Ghana. On the part of the students, many of them are working and some have to take care of families and other chores, which make it impossible for them to be enrolled at the universities as full time students (Amponsah, 2010). In order to cater to educational aspirations of this class of students, Oyeleye, Uche & Otedola (2015) indicated that African countries invested heavily in expanding their educational systems after attaining political independence and that distance education has the potential of meeting their diverse human and social needs.

Badu-Nyarko (2000) further cites Aggor et al., (1992) that high costs associated with the country's traditional residential higher education system have put higher education out of the reach of many. For this reason a recommendation is made that distance education (DE) has the potential to contribute to workforce requirements of the country's efforts. So it comes with little surprise that a survey on distance education (Lokken & Mullins, 2014; Simpson, 2013) emphasise that DE programmes continue to grow due to the increase in students' enrollment. In a similar fashion, the Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (2010) (GPRS II, 2006-2009) also establishes how tertiary institutions are not able to absorb all applicants at the tertiary level and recommends the need for critical policy issues that relate to inadequate physical infrastructure to absorb the growing number of young adults who seek admission to tertiary institutions.

It is important to note that in spite of the urgent calls for DE programmes, its implementation is not void of challenges. As Badu-Nyarko (2000) establishes, DE in Ghanaian universities is

a new phenomenon and that its introduction has been received with mixed feelings by both the public and academics. He further noted that in the academic community, there has been some concern regarding the parity of DE mode to a traditional delivery mode. In further touching on the major challenges facing the programme as it was being implemented, lack of finance and resistance by faculty overarched the other challenges that were identified in this study (Oyeleye et. al., 2015).

Medlin (2001) believes that Roger's (1962) Diffusion-Innovation Theory is the most appropriate for investigating adoption and implementation of educational programmes so it became useful in investigating how the University of Ghana implemented distance learning by considering the innovation-decision process based on Rogers' diffusion of innovation theory. This study considers that innovation-decision process among faculty members was not in isolation. In 1995, Rogers commented that, "the communication channels used to diffuse an innovation may influence the innovation's rate of adoption" (1995; 207) therefore, the communication channels used by individuals to inform others about a new or an existing innovation might eventually be of great significance for this study. Dearing (2009) also believes that when the time to implement an intervention programme is limited and the programme is going to have an impact on many people, Roger's theory becomes very useful.

Touching on challenges in implementing programmes, Amponsah (2010) is of the belief that implementing programmes does not happen by accident. He indicates that challenges are bound to be encountered whenever efforts are made to implement a programme. Hence, on the challenges in the implementation of the DE programmes, Badu-Nyarko (2000) writes that DE at the tertiary level has been controversial among university lecturers and that the need for it has received mixed reactions. He further indicates that although the support is laudable, it cannot be said to transcend all category of lecturers due to skepticism regarding the equivalency of DE mode to traditional delivery mode. In a similar vein, Keast (1997) cites Moore (1994) who asserted that the major problem associated with bringing about an innovation is not technological or pedagogical rather is associated with organizational change, change in faculty roles, and change in administrative structures. Simpson (2013) also enforces that emphasis should not be on teaching alone but communication channels should also be improved as a way of enhancing students' learning motivation as they partake in the distance mode of learning. Simpson's assertion is enforced by Burns (2011) that DE has more than one aim and audience. The authors of this work are, therefore, of the view that all efforts must be made to make the implementation and running of DE programmes as smooth as possible.

Furthermore, Saade (2005) corroborates Badu-Nyarko's (2000) findings and establishes that the implementation of an online learning system (distance education) does not ensure high-quality education. She indicates that there are still many problems commonly related to technological factors, including issues of access, connection and internet familiarity. Although, the advancement of technology has overcome or minimized these obstacles, it seems that the problems have shifted to the learners' side when using a distance learning system because the learners may feel isolated and unmotivated. Hence, if distance learning is to overcome the obstacles that students face, it is necessary to study the acceptance of distance learning from the students' perspective (Amponsah, 2010). The significance of this assertion is that where students are not put at the centre of the learning process, all efforts to implement and keep DE programmes running will be futile.

Additionally, faculty may be resistant to public exposure for fear that their course materials/content or their teaching styles may come under attack. This situation may lead the faculty who are not committed to the implementation of a DE programme, to resist its implementation or reject it outrightly by (Badu-Nyarko, 2006). Conversely, the resistance by faculty might not only accrue from the changes that might be happening because of many academics, but the belief that if more students are admitted, standards may fall. This seems to reflect the economic principle that what is scarce is of more value. An additional concern is that the high student-teacher ratio will involve more work, equipment and other facilities (Blix, et al., as cited in Badu-Nyarko, 2006).

Harris (1987), however, shares the view that the reluctance of faculty members to co-operate rests on the grounds of the “culture industry” which is about keeping to the status quo, which holds that university learning must occur on campus where the teacher controls the instruction. This view is supported by Johnsrud, Harada, and Tabata (2005) that:

... non-participation in distance education which include: technology use and skills, training and development, course design and technical support, copyright and intellectual property, perceived quality of distance education, faculty workload and compensation, and institutional and organizational administration (p.37).

Hellman (2003) holds a contrary view and believes that the inception of DE programmes ‘has inspired hope and dismay, as well as excitement and fear’. Corroborating Herman’s beliefs, Croy (1998) criticized the essence of distance education and asked some questions that he feels both advocates and critics of adult education are likely to pose. His questions follow:

- What’s at stake?
- Will quality be maintained?
- What is the substance of [college] education?
- Who will control distance education?
- Will student choice be expanded?

Furthermore, drawbacks to the implementation of DE programmes include cost and capital intensity, time constraints and other pressures on faculty, isolation of students from instructors and peers, difficulty of evaluating students that faculty members have never met, dropout rates which are higher than that in conventional education and deskilling of teachers (Hellman, 2003; Woodley & Simpson, 2013). In no fewer words, Truman (1995) as cited by Amponsah (2010) explains that, ‘obvious barriers to adopting and implementing distance education are money, equipment and staff...’ Poor teaching strategies are exaggerated in distance teaching, and territorialism among states and institutions (where there is no strong centralized government)’.

In nutshell, the planning and implementation of DE programmes have thrived in the face of numerous challenges that only the focused and determined can overcome to see to an effective implementation of such programmes when quality communication is established and good structures and systems are put in place.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to establish the challenges that characterized the implementation of the Distance Education Programme at the University of Ghana (UGDEP) at its inception.

Research Methodology

This study is underpinned by the 'positivist-constructivist research paradigm'. The rationale for choosing this combination paradigm was to enable the researchers critically explore the challenges faced in implementing the University of Ghana DE programme through use of survey and interviews to collect data which was analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively so as to cover enough ground for the sake of generalizability and transferability.

Research design

The researchers employed the sequential mixed methods design which was conducted in two phases. The use of the mixed methods enabled the researchers to use the survey (quantitative design) to collect data from a large group of respondents after which interviews (qualitative design) was used to collect in-depth data from participants. In sum, the quantitative results from the study provided a general picture of the research problem, while the qualitative results helped to extend the general picture through specific interpretations via the themes, subthemes and categories that emerged (Giddings & Grant, 2006; Van Wyk & Taole, 2015).

Sample and sampling procedure

The study captured the opinion of present and past Coordinators of the DE programme as well as regional organizers, tutors and students of the programme. The sample was chosen because they are believed to have deep insight into the implementation of the DE programme, as well as the challenges that were encountered in the implementation process. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the present and past coordinators of the programme as well as the five organizers for the purpose of interviewing them for this study. The purposive sampling allowed the researcher to use deliberate judgment and effort to obtain a representative sample of respondents who had the exact information on the challenges in implementation of the DE programme (Kerlinger, 2003). The proportional sampling was used to select 49 out of 104 part-time tutors representing 47.1 per cent of tutors on the programme in Accra and Koforidua, and 139 students who are doing level two hundred and level three hundred.

Data collection instrument

The instruments used for collecting data were the interview guide and the survey questionnaire. The study made use of two sets of unstructured interview guides which solicited information from coordinators and centre organizers of the DE programme. The interview guide contained open-ended questions which allowed for generation of in-depth information and also enabled the researchers to ask follow-up questions to strengthen the information already gathered. The open-ended interview guide also helped respondents to freely express themselves without any restrictions and the interviewer was also able to

promptly record responses given and ask respondents for clarification where issues were not clear. A survey questionnaire that contained both close and open-ended questions was used to solicit information from the part-time tutors as well as the students. Van Wyk (2007) believes that a questionnaire can be administered without the presence of the researcher, and because it is often straightforward to analyze, it is an effective tool for collecting data for research purposes.

Data analysis

The questionnaire and interview generated both quantitative and qualitative data which was analyzed independent of each other using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The quantitative data was edited, coded and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for analysis. The qualitative data responses obtained from the interviews were summarized, organized and interpreted thematically.

Ethical considerations

According to European Union (2010), research is beneficial to society but should be conducted in such a way that it carries no harm to people and society at large. Similarly, Punch (1986) suggests that field researchers exercise common sense and moral responsibility, always putting subjects first, the study next and themselves [researchers] last. Following the guidelines set by Punch, the researchers sought permission from the university authorities, after which the subjects of the study were duly notified about their role in the data collection process.

Preamble were provided at the beginning of each questionnaire that informed respondents about the background of the researcher, the purpose of the study, assurance of confidentiality of biographic information, and experiences relating to the study. Prior to each qualitative phase of data collection process, the researcher sent a consent letter to inform each of the participants to introduce the purpose of the study, assured them of confidentiality of information to be given as part of the study, and secure their voluntary participation by means of the consent form which was read and signed by each participant before the commencement of each focus group discussion (Best & Khan, 2006). Finally, the researchers ensured that all information solicited from participants in all data collection phases were kept confidential and used solely for the purpose of conducting this research and not disclosed to any party for whatever the reason might be.

Results of the Study

Phase 1: Quantitative data

The challenges facing any programme can be looked at from different perspectives. These may come from programme administrators, students and teachers as well. In this study the tutors who were handling the students and the students themselves became the focus. As a result, the survey questionnaire, first, sought to know from tutors on the UGDEP the challenges they encounter as being one of the main stakeholders in executing their work and secondly, the students on challenges they face as being a part of the programme.

Background of tutors

For DE to be implemented successfully and turn out quality products, there is the need to involve good tutors. The researchers, therefore, sought background information on the tutors and the results showed that out of 49 respondents, 12 representing 24.5 per cent were holders of first degree and the remaining 75.5 per cent held a second degree. In terms of gender, 23 representing 47 per cent were males while the remaining 26 (53 per cent) were females.

Challenges facing tutors

It is worth noting that the last phase of any meaningful recruitment process is initial training, hence recruiting tutors to handle course in a DE programme calls for training to equip them with the necessary skills needed to do their work. It is for this reason that tutors were asked if they were given adequate training. The result is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Training for tutors

Rating	Frequency	Percentage
Disagree	15	30.6
Uncertain	10	20.4
Agree	19	38.8
Strongly agree	5	10.2
Total	49	100.0

From Table 1, it can be ascertained that 49 per cent of the respondents agreed that they were given adequate training after being recruited while 30.6 per cent disagreed. Another 20.4 per cent were uncertain. Certainly, such a situation, where tutors are not given the necessary training, would not be beneficial to a newly established DE programme.

Respondents were further probed into other challenges they face in their work as tutors in a newly implemented DE programme. Their reflections are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Challenges facing part-time tutors

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage
Inadequate financial motivation of tutors	15	30.6
Learners changing tutors during tutorials	5	10.2
Inadequacy of time allocated for tutorial	15	30.6
Late attendance of students	4	8.2
Faulty public address system	5	10.2
Late delivery of modules to students	5	10.2
Total	49	100.0

Table 2 indicates that 30.6 per cent of the respondents identified inadequate financial motivation as a major challenge while another 30.6 per cent saw the inadequacy of time allocated for tutorials as yet another major challenge facing the implementation of the programme. The next set of challenges included learners changing tutors on their own volition during tutorial sessions, faulty public address systems used during tutorials and the late delivery of modules to students. Late attendance by students was the least challenge.

Further analysis of responses to establish if there was any relationship between the challenges the tutors faced in their work and disciplines they were handling is provided in Table 3.

Table 3. Relationship between challenges faced and course(s) taught

Challenges	Courses taught						Total
	Psychology	Linguistics	Sociology	Social Work	Information Studies	English	
Yes	3 (75%)	11 (91.7%)	4 (100.0%)	12 (92.3%)	2 (50%)	12 (100%)	44 (89.8%)
No	1 (25%)	1 (8.3%)	-	1 (7.7%)	2 (50.0%)	-	5 (10.2%)
Total	4 (100%)	12 (100%)	4 (100%)	13 (100%)	4 (100%)	12 (100%)	49 (100%)

In the survey, all Sociology and English tutors indicated that the discipline itself posed a challenge to them. With the tutors handling Social Work, 92.3 per cent found it difficult to handle the course. This was similar to 91.7 per cent of Linguistics tutors. Lastly, 50 per cent of Information Studies tutors regarded their discipline as a challenge.

The study further sought to identify if any relationship between tutor challenges and adequacy of training existed and the results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Cross-tabulation of tutor challenges and adequacy of training

Challenges	Adequate training for tutors				Total
	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree	
Yes	14(31.8%)	8(18.2%)	18 (40.9%)	4 (9.1%)	44 (100%)
No	1 (20.0%)	2 (40.0%)	1 (20.0%)	1 (20.0%)	5 (100%)
Total	15 (30.6%)	10 (20.4%)	19 (38.8%)	5 (10.2%)	49 (100%)

Relationship between tutor challenges and the adequacy of training received by tutors was established in Table 4, where 50 per cent of those facing challenges agreed that adequate tutor training had been offered to them while 31.8 per cent felt they had inadequate training. A similar trend was found in the case of those not facing any challenges.

On the whole, the tutors expressed that the challenges they faced resulted from the inadequacy of training they received, inadequate financial motivation, learners shifting from one tutor to the other, inadequacy of time allocated for tutorial, late attendance of students, faulty public address system, late delivery of modules to students and the overloaded modules to be treated within the semester.

Challenges facing students

The students on the programme also had their fair share of challenges as a result of being on the programme.

Table 5. Profile of the students

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	67	49
Female	72	51
Total	139	100
Age	(years)	
Less than 20	33	24
21-30	64	46
31-40	24	17
41 and above	18	13
Total	139	100
Qualification		
SHS	64	46
Diploma	40	29
Mature	35	25
Total	100	100

As is evident from Table 5, there is a fair distribution between male and female respondents. About 49 per cent of respondents were males and 51 per cent of them were females. Unlike other DE institutions, majority of the students on the UGDEP has more young people. About 46 per cent of the students were between the ages of 20 to 30 years and 13 per cent were 41 years or above. In terms of their entry qualifications, 46 per cent used their Senior High School Certificates and 25 per cent came in as mature students.

The researchers delved into the challenges students faced during their registration process and their views are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Registration process

Registration process	Frequency	Percentage
Very difficult	83	61.0
Difficult	34	25.0
Easy	17	12.5
Very easy	2	1.5
Total	136	100.0

Responses as indicated in Table 6 revealed that majority (61 per cent) of the respondents found the registration process at the beginning of the semester very difficult. Another 25 per cent found the process to be just difficult. Only 14 per cent of the respondents found it to be easy. This calls for some measures to reduce the burden and hassles students go through to register on-line.

Tutorial periods

Tutorials serve as one of the few occasions where the students meet various tutors for clarification and also to have a feel of campus life. In order to ascertain whether the tutorial

periods for each course were enough or not, the researchers asked the students for their views. The researchers further looked into the relationship between the challenges faced and the adequacy of tutorial sessions. The results are presented in Table 7 and 8.

Table 7. Tutorial Periods

Adequacy of Tutorial Period	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	40	28.8
No	97	69.8
Sub total	137	98.6
N/R	2	1.4
Total	139	100.0

The indication from the result presented in Table 7 is that 97 of the respondents (69.8 per cent) answered that tutorial periods were not enough while 28.8 per cent found the time for tutorial periods adequate. This might emanate from the fact that learners do not read their modules before attending tutorials.

Table 8. Cross-tabulation of challenges faced and sufficiency of tutorial sessions

Challenges	Adequate Tutorial periods		Total
	Yes	No	
Yes	34(28.3%)	86(71.7%)	120(100.0%)
No	6 (35.3%)	11 (64.7%)	17(100.0%)
Total	40 (29.2%)	97(70.8%)	137(100.0%)

Table 8 revealed that of those who found the tutorial sessions not adequate were mostly those who had challenges as DE students. This is reflected when as much as 71.7 per cent of those who faced challenges disagreed that the tutorial periods were enough whereas only 28.3 per cent agreed that the tutorial periods were adequate.

Respondents were asked to rank the quality of modules using the scale; 5-Strongly Agree, 4-Agree, 3-Uncertain, 2-Disagree and 1-Strongly Disagree.

Table 9. Assignments given to learners

Issues	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total	
	%	%	%	%	%	Mean	SD
Assignments are given on time	27.3	17.3	34.5	15.1	5.8	2.54	1.2
Assignments are promptly marked	36	25.2	30.2	5	3.6	2.15	1.08
Feedback on assignments are given	30.9	44.6	20.1	2.2	2.2	2	0.89
Assignments are well structured	9.4	21.6	36	24.5	8.6	3.01	1.09

N=139

The results are presented in Table 9 which indicates that respondents were not enthused with assignments given to them during tutorials. On the question whether assignments submitted by them (learners) were promptly marked and if feedback on assignments was given to respondents, the respondents disagreed. Lastly, on the issue of assignments being

well structured, the respondents were again uncertain. Overall, the respondents agreed that assignments were well structured with a mean of 30.1 on the 1-5 ranking scale and on whether feedback was given on assignments, most respondents disagreed, with a mean of 2.1.

Phase 2: Challenges facing the programme identified by the implementers – Coordinators and Organizers

Coordinators views

The main challenges inhibiting the implementation of the DE programme were identified in the personal interviews with the Coordinators. Some of the Coordinators strongly believed that the greatest challenge in implementation of the UGDEP was that some members of the implementation committee were not experts in the field of distance learning and that they had to learn on the job, which made the whole process very difficult and not as smooth as it should have been. For example, the first Coordinator of the programme put it as follows:

The challenge was the fact that we were not experts running the programme so we had to learn along with those who were already working on it.

Implementing any programme cannot see the light of day if finances are not made available. As established already in this study, module writers had to be trained and paid, tutors had to be paid, logistics needed to be procured, and other staff members needed to be paid. However, the second major challenge encountered during the implementation process of the UGDEP, was finance. This is because the administration of University of Ghana provided no financial support, hence support was sought from external agencies which proved to be a herculean task and also took a lot of time. In his reflection on the issue of finance, the third Coordinator of the programme contended that:

Finance was not much of a problem, apart from the course writers who were demanding upfront payment, some lecturers and heads of departments were damn against the idea of distance education. There was also the demand for payments to programme administrators – Centre heads and their staff as well as tutors and printers of the modules.

The reflections of the third Coordinator of the programme, as shown above, raised the issue of faculty resistance in addition to that of finance. He also added the challenge of work load while presenting his views. The views expressed by the third Coordinator are quoted below:

Also, the idea that course writers must be the same faculty teaching the course compounded the problem as they had teaching load on Main campus and at the City Campus. This tended to delay the development of the materials for students. In fact, at the time of the programme only few modules were ready and this did not auger well for the take off the programme (sic).

The second Coordinator added that for him, the challenge was mainly that of structure. In other words, the administration of the programme was not a good one. That means there were no clear cut units for operating the system and very little control and reporting systems established. The Coordinator was tasked to perform many of the functions. Thus, although the Implementation Committee headed by the Pro-Vice Chancellor proposed the hiring of

staff such as editors, instructional designer and other critical staff, yet at the time the programme started, nothing had been done in that regard and it affected the smooth operations of the programme at the onset.

Other significant challenges identified were delays in developing materials for the learners and very weak staff strength at the Distance Education Unit. In all, there were only six workers in the Unit making it very difficult for them to work efficiently as expected. The staff had to combine many functions with overlapping roles.

The Coordinator at the time the programme started in 2007 stated as under:

In fact students had to be admitted to the programme for funds to be mobilized for payment to course writers, module printers and starting tutorials; not to mention equipment for the programme such as computers, photocopiers and cabinets to file students' records. The integration of the two systems where the Academic Registry did all things including handling students' records and services compounded the problems (sic).

He further stated that at the implementation stage, the tutors who were selected could not possibly be the best as many of them had never taught before, not even at the secondary school level. They had no basic teaching skills. Many of them had completed their university courses and were willing to offer their services. The import being that a tutor might have graduated with a first class degree or good grades but may not be necessarily a specialist in the subjects they were given to tutor on the DE programme.

Additionally, tutorial periods were deemed woefully inadequate. This corroborates what was earlier established in the quantitative phase of the study (refer to Table 2). The finding was that the one-week tutorial training was not enough to provide them with the needed skills. In the regions (Study Centres) it became very difficult to even get tutors for specific courses such as Linguistics and English at the beginning of the programme.

In furtherance to the above, one critical challenge that cropped up during the implementation of the programme stated by the Coordinators at the beginning was where to keep the modules as they arrived from the printers. As stated by the First Coordinator of the programme:

There was no storage facility for the modules both at the Head office at Legon and study centres. Even where rooms had been identified, there were no shelves to place them. This became a problem as the stock kept increasing by the day. There was also no qualified Store-keeper to handle the modules and so National Service Personnel working in the Unit were given the responsibility.

Response from organizers

Aside the challenges identified by the Coordinators, the organizers of the programme also identified some other challenges. First of all, they indicated that tutorial facilities especially at the main campus of University of Ghana at Legon, were woefully inadequate. This, they believed was due to the fact that DE still struggles with the regular university programmes for the same facilities during tutorial sessions.

In addition, the late arrival of modules at the study centres and the late release of examination results were seen as a major challenge by one Organizer. He reflected that:

The main problems are the late arrival of the modules which affects tutorials at my centre and the late release of examination results which makes students unable to know whether they had performed well or not before completing the semester or academic year. Most of the time, learners at my centre tend to feel that I am not on top of my job.

Work overload surfaced as an implementation problem in the views of the organisers of the programme. One Organizer indicated:

As an Organizer, before the distance education programme started, we had our schedules. So when distance education came in as additional responsibility, we had to take care of the office administration and the short non-formal programmes, as well as distance education. So we combine that with other works and at times it becomes quite challenging (sic).

It also became evident from observations of the Organizers that lack of information to the centres and also to students from the Head office at the main campus impeded the smooth running of the programme. Information was issued on the notice boards at main campus at Legon and those to the centres by dispatches through courier system which could take a week to arrive at the destinations. This made some of the students miss some tutorials or registration of courses.

Discussion of Results

The main challenge at the inception of the programme was that the university did not understand the concept of distance education and was hostile to the whole idea of bringing onboard the UGDEP. Some lecturers thought it was an additional job for them, while others thought it was going to replace the mainstream programmes, thereby making them lose their jobs (Badu-Nyarko, 2000). This is in line with what Moore (1994) as cited in Keast (1997) suggested that barriers impeding development of distance education are not technological, nor even pedagogical.... The major problems are associated with organizational change, change in faculty roles, and change in administrative structure.

In agreement with the suggestion made by Moore, Badu-Nyarko (2000) writes that distance education at the tertiary level has been controversial among university lecturers and that the need for it has received mixed reactions. He adds that although the support is laudable, it cannot be said to transcend all category of lecturers. He continues that in the academic community, there have been some concerns regarding the equivalence of distance education mode to conventional education.

The implementers of the programme intimated that funding was also a major problem since the university did not see DE as its own and did not support it in terms of finance. However, in order to ensure the programme saw the light of day, funds had to be sourced externally to support the programme. In buttressing the fact that funding was a challenge in the implementation process, Truman (1995) and Lokken and Mullins (2014) explain that, obvious

barriers to adopting and implementing DE are money, equipment and staff. The essence of Truman's statement is that the challenge with finance that the implementation of the UGDEP faced is not in isolation because other institutions and organizations have had to contend with the same challenge in their bid to bring onboard a new programme.

Other major problems faced in the implementation of the programme included the difficulty of getting course writers from the departments and the fee for writing the modules which was very low compared to what the module writers were demanding. In view of the challenges relating to finding course writers and the cost involved, a past Coordinator of the programme reflected, "*One lecturer told me government wanted to exploit them so he asked for ten thousand dollars to write one module*". Burns (2011) establishes that in developing countries printed materials should be resorted to but in the case of this study, it was noted that getting writers to put modules together and transportation of the modules that have been printed were major challenges, hence, culminated in the delays of delivering the modules to the various centres on time for the students.

Putting down proper structures to start the programme was another challenge which made management and operation of the programme rather difficult. One past Coordinator puts it this way, "*the old mill is still grinding the new corn*". The Coordinator supported this by stating that the same lecturers who mark scripts for the main campus and city campus are the same who develop the study material. They, therefore, demanded high remuneration in getting them to write materials. In addition to the high demands by course developers, the Distance Education Unit is seriously under-staffed. At the inception of the programme, there were six staff members working in the unit including the Coordinator of the programme. The part-time tutors were not capable of handling the courses as some had not done the courses or new dimensions introduced before, and this trickled down to the students having their own share of challenges which impinged on their ability to effectively and smoothly be on the programme.

Another challenge identified was communication or information flow. The indication was that something needed to be done to facilitate easy communication between the head office and regional centres. This means that apart from the telephone, other gadgets for communication were not available, which meant that information sharing between the regional centres and the head office was impossible most of the time. It is a bad case where the problem of lack of communication is allowed to defy the channels outlined in Roger's 1962 which foregrounds this research.

Conclusion

Implementation of the UGDEP was confronted with many challenges that might have overwhelmed the programme implementers. It was identified that some of the challenges were indirectly self-inflicted because the members of the implementation committee were not experts in the field of distance learning so they might not have seen that finance and resistance by faculty could be major challenges. A lesson drawn from this is that finances and other logistics should always be made available before the start of any programme, while all stake holders are duly informed and offered the necessary training to equip them with the requisite skills and knowledge to participate in new programmes.

The part-time tutors appointed to handle courses were not well groomed in the art of teaching at the tertiary level and some had never taught hitherto their appointment as DE tutors. As a result they had to take time to gain the necessary experience to fit into the programme. Although they were offered training, some were experimenting and not applying the tutorial methods taught to them. It is, therefore, imperative that tutors should not be given blanket training and the training programmes should not be rushed with the notion that they know their disciplines already as indicated in this study. The tutors should be grouped according to their disciplines and the levels they are going to tutor for the experts from the various departments to systematically walk them through the modules and possibly, they should be given time to discuss and ask questions on the modules so that they can handle their disciplines expertly. Similarly, students should be given the necessary orientation and support enabling them have a smooth ride and enjoy the programme.

Finally, it must be considered that implementing programmes take time, particularly when it is new to the organization and this requires putting in measures that would make the take-off smooth. In many instances, it demands a critical evaluation of all the stages to be adopted and clear directions and establishment of structures and clear functions and responsibilities with personnel well-grounded in distance education to be able to make implementation and sustenance of the programme smooth and successful.

References

- Amedzro, K.A.D. (2005). *Theory and practice of adult education*. Accra: Ghana University Press.
- Amponsah, S. (2010). *The evolution and implementation strategies of the University of Ghana bachelor of Arts distance education programme*. Unpublished M.Phil. Thesis University of Ghana.
- Badu-Nyarko, S.K. (2006). Faculty attitudes towards distance education: A review of the literature. *International Journal of Instructional Technology and Distance Learning*, 3(5), 22-28.
- Badu-Nyarko, S. (2000). Faculty attitudes towards participation in university-based distance education in Ghana. *Ghana Journal of Literacy and Adult Education*, 195-212.
- Best, J.W., & Kahn, J. (2006). *Research in education*. New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India Pvt. Ltd.
- Burns, M. (2011). *Distance education for teacher training: modes, models, and methods*. Washington: Education Development Centre.
- Croy, J.M. (1998). Distance education, individualization, and the demise of the university. *Technology in Society*, 20, 317-326
- Dearing, J. (2009). Applying Diffusion of Innovation Theory to Intervention Development. *Research in Social Work Practice*, 19, 503-518.
- European Union (2010). *Studies and reports: European textbook on ethics in research*. Belgium: European Commission.
- Giddings, S.L., & Grant, M.B. (2006). *Contemporary Nurse*, 23(1), 3-11.
- Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS II) (2010). *Human Resource Development*.

Handbook.

- Harris, D. (1987). *Openness and closure in distance education*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Hellman, J. (2003). Distance Education: Its advantages and shortcomings. *UN Chronicle online edition*. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/Pubs/chronicle/2003/issue4/0403p47.asp> on August 13, 2004.
- Johnsrud, L.K., Harada, H.V., & Tabata, L.N. (2005). Faculty attitude, adoption, and application of technology in higher education: implications for distance education policy. University of Hawai: Hawai Educational Policy Centre.
- Keast, D. (1997). Towards an effective model for implementing distance education programme. *The American Journal of Distance Education*, 11(2), 39-55.
- Kerlinger, N.F. (2003). *Foundations of behavioural research (2nd Ed.)*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Lindahl, W.E. (1997). Ethical issues in fundraising. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 8(2), 189-191.
- Lokken, F., & Mullins, F. (2014). Distance education survey results. Trends in e-Learning: tracking the impact of e-Learning at community colleges. Instruction Technology Council.
- Medlin, B.D. (2001). The factors that may influence a faculty member's decision to adopt electronic technologies in instruction (Doctoral dissertation, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2001). ProQuestDigitalDissertations. (UMI No. AAT 3095210).
- Oyelele, A.O., Uche, I.K., & Otedola, M. (2015). Electronic education (e-education) and its effects in distance learning programmes in Nigeria. *The online journal of distance education and e-Learning*, 3, 8-14.
- Punch, M. (1986). *The politics and ethics of fieldwork*. Newbury, CA: Sage.
- Rogers, M. (1995). *Diffusion of innovations (4th ed.)*. New York: Free Press.
- Saade, R.A. (2005). The impact of cognitive absorption on perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use in On-line Learning: An extension of the technology acceptance model. *Information and Management*, 42, 317-327.
- Simpson, O. (2013). Student retention in distance education: are we failing our students? *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning*, 28(2), 105-119, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02680513.2013.847363>
- Truman, B. (1995). *Distance education in post secondary institutions and business*. University of Central Florida. Paper Submitted for an Instructional Technology Graduate Class.
- United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (2008). 60th Anniversary Special Edition 1948-2008. The United Nations Department of Public Information.
- Van Wyk, M.M. (2007). *The use of cooperative learning in economics in the further education and training phase in the Free State Province*. Unpublished Doctoral thesis. University of the Free State: Bloemfontein.
- Van Wyk, M.M., & Taole, M. (2015). Research design. In C. Okeke and M.M. Van Wyk (Eds.) *Educational research: an African approach* (pp. 164-185). South Africa: Oxford.
- Walters, S. (2010). The planet will not survive if it's not a learning planet: sustainable

development within learning through life. *International journal of lifelong education*, 29(4), 427-436.

Woodley, A., & Simpson, O. (2013). Student dropout – the elephant in the room of distance education. In O. Zawacki-Richter, and T. Anderson (Eds.). *Online Distance Education-Toward a Research Agenda*. Edmonton: Athabasca University Press.

Dr. Samuel Kofi Badu-Nyarko possesses a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and Sociology, a Master of Philosophy in Adult Education, Master of Education in Curriculum Development with specialisation in Distance Education and a Post-Graduate Diploma in Adult Education. He was formally the Coordinator for the University of Ghana Distance Education Degree Programme, the current Head of Department for the Department of Adult Education and Human Resource Studies of the School of Continuing and Distance Education, College of Education, University of Ghana. He has been lecturing at the University of Ghana for the past 24 years. Author may be contacted at skbnyarko@ug.edu.gh

Dr. Samuel Amponsah is a lecturer at the Department of Adult Education and Human Resource Studies, College of Education, University of Ghana. Amponsah holds a Diploma of Labour Studies and a Bachelor in Basic Education both from the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. He also holds a Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.) degree in Adult Education from the University of Ghana and a Doctor of Education (D.Ed.) degree in Curriculum Studies from the University of South Africa. Prior to his appointment, Amponsah lectured at Esayidi Technical Vocational Education and Training College (Umzimkhulu Campus) in South Africa, where he taught at all levels and also headed the Farming Management Department. Until 2010, he worked as a teacher with the Ghana Education Service and also served as a Graduate Assistant at the Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, University of Ghana. Dr. Amponsah may be reached at samponsah@ug.edu.gh