

Unified Journal of Educational Research and General Studies
Vol 1(3) pp. 021- 028 November, 2015.
<http://www.unifiedjournals.org/ujergs>
Copyright © 2015 Unified Journals

Original Research Article

Learning by Distance: Prospects, Challenges and Strategies

Isaac Kofi Biney^{1,2*} and Emile Kwadwo Worlanyo¹

¹School of Continuing and Distance Education (SCDE), College of Education, University of Ghana, Legon

²University of Ghana Learning Centre – Accra Centre & Tema Office

Accepted 20th November, 2015

The advancement in teaching and learning technologies places learning by distance at the centre in higher education institutions. Hence single-mode tertiary institutions are becoming dual-mode institutions, delivering distance education (DE) opportunities, to a critical mass of learners. Today, people are working and learning simultaneously, to adjust to the changing work environment. This paper explores prospects, challenges and strategies in DE. On prospects, it was revealed that higher education institutions involved in DE saves money as student number increases while overheads cost remain relatively stable. Many unreached students are reached. University education is sent to the doorsteps of learners. The issue of time and space is bridged. Student-centred teaching and learning is encouraged. Low and late supply of learning materials, low quality of instruction, negative perception of family members towards DE and poor attitudes of tutors toward tutoring were revealed. Lack of timely feedback from lecturers, lack of interaction among learners, and lack of support by the faculty were identified. It recommends that managements of DE programs should be selfless in providing services to students. Lecturers should adopt teaching technologies to engender meaningful learning amongst students.

Key words: Distance learning, distance-learner, technologies, prospects, challenges, strategies

INTRODUCTION

Distance education, as an alternative to face-to-face instruction, has witnessed steady growth in higher education since its beginning in the mid-1800s. This growth is evidenced by the fact that in 1990, nearly 30 percent of all adult students in the United States were receiving education, in some distance format (Roberts, 2006). The influx of adults taking distance education course has occurred in part, because of the proliferating demand of our technological society, and the complexity of modern life. Distance education, apart from widening access to education particularly at the university level, [it

also] has the potential to provide an affordable [and] quality education to the majority, and can improve the socio-economic status of individuals and their nations (Asunka, 2008); Keegan, 1990; Kuhanga, 1990; UNESCO, 2002; Daniel, 2007; Krishnan, 2012).

Society demands for lifelong learning, employment and family responsibilities, call for adults to seek forms of education other than traditional face-to-face instruction (Moxley, 2006). Distance education provides adults with the opportunity for formal education while allowing for flexible scheduling. The reality is that it appears the

*Corresponding Author's E-mail: ikkbiney@yahoo.co.uk

emergence of distance education at the University of Ghana, is accompanied by some challenges that need to be addressed, to make the objective of learning by distance realised. It seems the biggest challenges facing adult learners are about balancing school and life, accessibility, and costs of the programme.

Tracing the intake of students into University of Ghana from the 2009/10 academic year, 1097 learners were admitted into the programme, and another 2,508 learners were admitted for the 2010/11 academic year in addition to 748 mature students (University of Ghana Basic Statistics, 2007). The sheer quantum leap in admission numbers alone is a challenge with limited academic logistics to cater for learners on the distance mode even though the issue of access is addressed.

According to Carr (2000), the distance mode of learning is not without problems. This is due to the fact that most distance learning programmes are beset with higher attrition rate. Dibiase (2000) argues that with the growth of distance education over the years, there has been problems of high degree of learners in most distance learning institutions worldwide, including the University of Ghana Distance Education Programme (UGDEP) learners' enrolment, and completion rate in any distance learning institution should get continuous attention from researchers and providers. Administrators hope that distance learning methods will help make higher education more cost-effective (Dibiase, 2000), but (Huan, 2004) indicated that the success of such programmes depend largely on extensive research that will provide information that may help in developing better and appropriate student support services to improve the effectiveness and efficacy of programme delivery and success.

In view of the challenges that the distance learners encounter in UGDEP, this study seeks to highlight prospects, challenges, and also establishes the strategies that when adopted, and implemented, the UGDEP would achieve the objectives of distance learning as envisaged by the University of Ghana, Legon.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study were to:

- (i) Find out the prospects of distance learners pursuing UGDEP.
- (ii) Identify challenges faced by learners of UGDEP.
- (iii) Suggest strategies that DE tertiary institutions can implement the programme.

LITERATURE REVIEW

With the advent of the revolution in information technology, community colleges and four year colleges and universities have begun to carry education beyond the walls of their respective campuses (Johnson et al., 2009). Distance learning, or distance education, is an attempt by institutions to reach the traditional college-

aged students, as well as an older population, without having them leave their homes (Johnson et al., 2009 cited in Oduro-Mensah & Biney, 2013). Distance education allows these populations to earn college certificates, diplomas, degrees, and even master's degrees using the Internet, two-way television fiber optic technology, digital phone lines, and satellites. Any study or studies on distance education must be underpinned by a solid theory that comprehensively explains what distance education innovation is all about.

Theory, as mentioned here, is invaluable in guiding the complex practice of a rational process such as teaching and learning at a distance. Education is a purposeful activity and theory provides us with the understanding necessary to take effective action. Every theory of learning has a focus depending on what its objective is. The challenges distance learners encounter is varied in both nature and context. This study is underpinned or guided by the social constructivists theory, which is of the view that "knowledge is a function of how the individual creates meaning from his or her experiences; it is not a function of what someone else says is true" (Krishman, 2012; Daniel, 2011; Hart and Venter, 2013 cited in Niwagila, 2014: 49). They argue that this belief is not analogous to behaviourists and cognitivists perspectives, which hold the view that knowledge is mind-independent and can be mapped onto a learner. Rather, they believe that humans create meaning as opposed to acquire it. To the social constructivists, both the learner and environmental factors are critical, and the interaction between these two, is what creates knowledge.

When developing a distance education programme, according to constructivism theory, designers must create stimulating environments that capture learners' attention and also enable them to formulate knowledge and derive meaning for themselves. These environments allow for collaboration between learners and the facilitator, and encourage meaningful dialogues so that understanding can be individually constructed. "Knowledge... is language mediated" (Krishman, 2012; Daniel, 2011; Asunka, 2008) and computer-mediated communication (CMC) supports this belief because learners attempt to interpret, clarify, and validate their understanding through sustained dialogue (i.e., two-way communication) and negotiation. Stacey (cited in Abel, 2010), compared CMC to face-to-face interaction and noticed that CMC provided "more intense communication than face-to-face groups, where the lack of social pressure and the greater freedom to express their views, without struggling for the right of the audience, enabled participants to react to the content, and not the author, with more reflective and effective communications (p. 57).

In terms of evaluation from a constructivist point of view, there is no single solution to a problem, and students are encouraged to justify their own solutions and show how they arrived at their conclusions. This theory is

appropriate for the study since adult learners, on distance programme, have a lot of life experiences that may serve as a guide to proffer solution, as to overcome the challenges they face in their studies.

To Johnson et al. (2009), distance teaching and learning is also achieved by simultaneous communication between an educator and adult learners at several different sites, usually via satellites. Learning course material through a series of audio recordings and/ or videotapes is also considered distance learning. In short, distance learning is a non-traditional way of delivering, conveying, and learning information via the Internet, the World WideWeb, the modem, satellite hookups, VHS tapes, cassette tapes, CD-ROM, and interactive multimedia courses. Indeed, tele-conferencing and video-conferencing are all channels of carrying out distance learning and education programme. Thus, all distance education programmes are made effective in terms of delivery, today, through improved Information Communication Technology (ICT).

That notwithstanding, Wilson (cited in Bates & Poole, 2003) critiquing the use of technology in facilitating teaching and learning in our learning environment, aptly put it in this way:

“It’s [that teaching with technology] about serving learners and not about using technology. First of all, designing educational experience around technology is a foolish chase. You cannot possibly keep up with the technology. The paradox of technology enhanced education is that technology changes very rapidly and human beings change very slowly. It would seem to make sense for proponents of e-learning to being with the students. At least that is a relatively slow moving target. Deployment of technology then becomes an exercise in applying a rapidly improving technology to a very consistent set of goals” (p. xiii).

But as to whether learning with technology is fundamentally different from classroom learning, we tend to agree with Bates and Poole (2003) that an understanding of both learning, and the nature of technology, is essential to the appropriate use of technology for teaching. It must be said, however, that the fast changing nature of workplace due essentially to ICT, equally makes it imperative that today’s learners are taught with technology, and also made to become proficient with the use of technologies in their studies. When that is done, it will reflect positively in the execution of work, at workplaces. We also agree with (Kwapong, 2008) that the needs of our learners and the demands of the subject matter, not technology, should drive our teaching. After all, technology is a tool, a means to end, not an end in itself. In any case, it is an undeniable fact that effective teaching leads to, or engenders, meaning learning. That certainly should arrest our attention even as we brace ourselves to adopt technology to drive teaching and learning in our learning settings.

The above discussions notwithstanding, the demand for tertiary education in Africa has now been high, and that is giving a boost to distance education and electronic

learning (DEEL). Perhaps it is this basis that Kwapong (2008) opines that open and distance learning has proved to be a sure way of widening access to education especially for women. She adds that distance education is an educational philosophy that seeks to overcome or remove as many barriers as possible to education. The assertion by Kwapong that distance education has come to stay, considering the number of students whom out of their own volition, or due to circumstances beyond them, opt for distance education rather than the traditional synchronous mode of learning. However, it must be noted that, for universities to incorporate or fully go the distance mode goes with a lot of effort, time and cost.

Research indicates that the success of students in distance education depends on three factors: support services, logistics/administration and learning materials (Dzakiria, 2008; Daniel, 2010). However, in many institutions more emphasis is placed on course development than on the other factors (Simpson, 2000, 2002). As a consequence of this, some students often lose motivation, become isolated, perform poorly and even drop out as they lack the core support that is crucial to their success (Simpson, 2002, 2012; Dzakiria, 2005, 2008; De Hart & Venter, 2013).

Hence, quality implementation strategies should be put in place for distance programmes to start and run effectively. Aggor et. al (1994) therefore recommended some systematic strategies to the National Distance Education Secretariat (NDES) to be adopted in the design and delivery of distance education courses by Ghanaian Universities. The recommendations include the following:

- The universities should examine and carefully select suitable course materials produced by other tertiary institutions for use, with modifications in initiating their first programmes (p.3). To this Asunka (2008) also states that the fastest way to eliminate uneasiness in a distance-delivered class is to contact local sites or individual students prior to the start of class and get to know them as individuals, not just students.
- The universities through NDES should adopt a team approach in the planning and production of core course materials.
- Course writers and instructional staff should be paid adequate remuneration and courses shall belong to academic departments.
- The universities should plan to use a wide range of media to maximize student access and to meet their learning needs and situations. Radio, audio and video recordings can be used to supplement and enhance print materials and other instructional methods.
- The NDES must establish effective instructional and student support services by using existing physical and human resources of the University and Institute of Adult Education Centres (p. 13).

Lastly, “effective distance education administrators are more idea people. They are consensus builders, decision-makers, and facilitators. They maintain control of technical managers, ensuring that technological resources are effectively deployed to further the institution’s academic mission. At the same time, they lead and inspire faculty and staff in overcoming obstacles that arise” ((Benakani, 2009)). This is in agreement with what (Dzakiria, 2008) suggested earlier that in addition to change on an individual level, change must be collective in that it must occur simultaneously on the level of organizational structure and function.

Despite the challenges in learning by distance, in tracing the phases the University of Ghana Distance Education Programme (UGDEP), Adda (2004) states that various efforts have been made by the Government of Ghana, the universities and international agencies like the Commonwealth of Learning (CoL) to integrate distance education into the nation’s tertiary education system. Higher Education has an important role to play in national development and in keeping academic pursuits and augmenting of knowledge (Benakani, 2009). Aside from that distance education students are perceived to have more challenges than their conventional counterparts (Mhehe, 2002) and this has the tendency to cause distance learners to drop out from their programmes. This argument was further expatiated by (Mhehe, 2002) who stressed that dropout is a phenomenon caused by learners’ characteristics (educational background, personality, motivation, aptitude and so on) and life circumstances (occupation, relationship with family and peer group, health and so on).

These challenges of learners for the most part results in non-completion of programme on schedule or dropout. In summary, effective distance education requires the integrated interest, participation, and enthusiasm of faculty, students, facilitators (tutors), support staff, and administrators. The informed involvement of these related participants will help meet the challenges that may arise in the implementation of the programme. Numerous studies have centered on the application of a variety of traditionally based theoretical models on distance education setting (Abel, 2010). However, there has not been any empirical study on addressing challenges of distance learners based on students’/organisers’ perspective at the University of Ghana. The advancement of technology, therefore, has made geographical distance less of an issue in the practice of distance education (Macintyre and Macdonald, 2011).

However, in some parts of the world, particularly in rural developing areas where there is poor infrastructure and a low level of technology, the issue of access to technology remains a real one. Hence, the establishment of centres close to students’ environments, the provision of suitable support services, and the opportunity to regularly interact with other students and tutors is

imperative. Most of the studies conducted in the field of distance education have a western orientation and have less significance for developing countries (Abel, 2010). The few existing studies have a tendency to homogenise the students’ experiences in terms of abilities and generally fail to consider individual differences among learners (Abel, 2010; Mhehe, 2002; Srivastava and Reddy, 2007). Specific studies conducted on distance students looked at the experiences from an institutional point of view (Abel, 2010; Mahai, 2008; Ng’umbi, 2009), while some reflected on gender (Mhehe, 2002). Again, in these studies students’ experiences are often homogenised, neglecting to take into account the fact that learners have different experiences regarding their learning as distance students (Asunka, 2008).

Nevertheless, the under-resourced nature of Distance Education Universities, particularly in Africa, acts as a hindrance to the effective provision of support (Asunka, 2008). Although the above linkages between educational provision and socio-economic development seem straightforward, realising these goals depends on access to a high quality education through which individuals can fulfil their personal goals, as well as help meet the socio-economic needs of the nation (Bhalalusesa, 2006). This study intends to contribute to the delivery of high quality education by exploring distance adult students’ experiences on the programme at the University of Ghana in terms of prospects, challenges and strategies that can be adopted to address the challenges they face. Having considered the challenges that students on the distance mode encountered, the objective of the study highlights the prospects that learners can derive from learning by distance and strategies that can help address the challenges.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A constructivist-interpretivist perspective formed the grounds for this paper. The chosen perspective of this study leans on the qualitative design, hence this research made use of an exploratory qualitative design. Abel (2010) believe that with the anti-positivist or constructivist paradigm, meaning is constructed and (over time) constantly re-constructed through experience resulting in many differing interpretations. In the same vein, this research sought to get into the inner world of the distance learners and organisers of the UGDEP in order to be abreast of challenges and solicit some views on strategies address the problem of learners.. The participants were all the present and last students of the distance learning programme, as well as present Centre Organisers. The participants were purposively selected since they are the ones who have been experiencing the challenges that come with distance programme.

The study made use of two sets of structured interview guides which solicited information from students and

centre organizers of the distance education programme respectively. The interview guide was made up of eight open-ended questions. Open-ended questions were used because it allowed for generation of in-depth information and also the researcher was able to ask follow up questions to strengthen the information already gathered. The open-ended interview guide also helped respondents to freely express themselves with a focus on the objective of the study and the interviewer was also able to promptly record responses given and asks respondents for clarification where necessary. The interviews were audio recorded verbatim, transcribed and analysed by using the constant comparison data analysis process adopted from Glasser and Strauss (1967).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the extent to which a study can be replicated in another context in qualitative research (Merriam, 2002). The participants of the study were sufficiently engaged as a way of ensuring the credibility of the study. Enough contextual information about the fieldwork site and participants were provided in the study to ensure transferability. In terms of dependability and conformity of this study, the research methods used were vividly explained as well as the objective for the research, projection of limitations.

Ethical Considerations

Before embarking on this study, clearance was sought from the university authorities, while the participants were informed in writing concerning the objectives of the study, the time and meeting place, as well as what is expected of them during the interview. The participants were assured of strict confidentiality of information that they give and their right to opt out of the interview without any repercussions since their participation was purely voluntary. Participants were also made aware that the interviews will be tape recorded and the data will be kept for a period of six months after the study and will be destroyed afterwards.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Any good idea conceived and not put into action forever remains an idea and nobody apart from the one who conceived the idea without making it public will ever be privy to the unborn idea. For this reason, ideas have to move from the drawing board to the implementation stage. It is in this light that the researchers having taught at the University of Ghana Distance Education Programme came out with the study to bring out strategies that if adopted would help streamline the distance programme. During the interviews with the students of the programme, the following themes which encapsulate the strategies unfolded.

Personal interactions

A major component of the interviewing process was having personal interaction with the students as key stakeholders in order to get their perspective of what distance learning programme in the university meant to them. This was contained in a statement by "one student" of the distance education programme (last) thus:

Learning by distance gave me the opportunity to maintain my job while going to school. This is crucial because in this day and age getting a job in Ghana is difficult. He, however, lamented that the fees for distance students is too high as some of them are not working.

In an attempt to find out reasons for choosing distance learning modules as a student, one respondent (present student) gave this reply which is captured here as an anecdotal evidence:

Am a breadwinner and thus cannot stop work and attend school, as such the opportunity to go school while working is second to none. And it helps me not to waste my time after work since I have something to learn as a student.

The question as to specific challenges faced as distance learners attracted the following responses from three students (two present students and one last student):

We encounter many challenges, but a few of them that when addressed urgently would make learning by distance appealing include; irregular changes in tutors, high tuition fees, late release of examination results that lead to non-completion of programmes by some students, and helping in how to manage stress associated with distance learning programme.

As well, another student of the distance education programme (present), further remarked:

Am police woman and a mother, learning through distance mode really helped me because I don't have anybody to send and bring my kids to and from school and flexibility is good. The worry I have is that some of the tutors are really not on top of their courses that they teach. And this makes it difficult for you to get the stuff right from the tutorials. What makes matters worse is that we, the distance learners are supposed to use a module which invariably comes very late and this is of great concern to us.

Material Development

The value of (quality) course materials in a distance education cannot be overemphasized. Aggor et al. (1992) advise that the universities should examine and carefully select suitable course materials produced by other tertiary institutions for use, with modifications in initiating their first programmes. Due to the premium placed on quality course materials in the distance learning enterprise, this research investigated the materials provided for students soliciting students

evaluation of reading materials (modules) given them and all students (ten) (seven present and three last) had this to say:

As for the modules, apart from forgivable topographical errors their contents are self-explanatory, thus easy to use. They are, for the most part, summarized and technical terms are always explained in brackets against them. The modules have self-assessment parts that make interesting reading them. The modules sometimes even guide you as to where you can go to get further materials to augment your knowledge on a subject matter. Even students in the main stream were borrowing our books to study can you imagine that?

Role of the Organizers

As indicated earlier in this research, the organizers play very instrumental roles in the success of distance learning programme. They are at the operating core of the programme at the Regional Study Centres. Among their roles are helping in the recruitment of tutors, liaising between tutors, learners and administration and ensuring that the various centres are well prepared for tutorials to be held. In reiterating the roles of their roles, an organizer aptly puts it this way that:

As an organizer, I liaise between tutors, students and the administration. In fact, this forms the core of the work. We also make sure that the module is ready; the place is swept and have the materials. We also monitor tutors' attendance (Tamale Organizer).

Aside what has just been noted, one Organizer reflected on how he had to take on additional roles in addition to the main roles as an Organizer. He indicated:

I designed what you call the module covers and the colours before one was chosen. Apart from modules, I am deeply involved in the organization of tutorials. For Accra centre, I am involved in recruiting of tutors, preparation of tutorial time table for the academic year, semester and the weekly tutorial as well, I make sure that logistics are in place when the learners come for tutorials (Legon Organizer).

This organizer was made to add on additional tasks by virtue of his proximity to the national centre for the entire UGDEP. He was the organizer for Legon where everything was being coordinated and implemented; hence he had to do a bit of administrative work for the programme to start on time.

The Organizers in this study are actually performing multiple tasks, which range from ensuring that rooms for interaction sessions are cleaned and are ready for the day's work. They also ensure that materials are available for facilitators to use. It is also the duty of the organisers to ensure facilitators are present and also serve a liaison duty between students, facilitators and the administrators of the programme.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Personal interactions

(Benakani, 2009) postulates that the emerging technologies of distance learning can have a positive effect on the educational system if it is recognized that change is a journey, not a blueprint and that the development of new skills, behaviours, and beliefs is a complex process that must embrace the problems inherent in change. The question that arises is how will people accept change if it is not properly communicated to them. The whole idea of incorporating distance education to the existing synchronous model sent shivers to the spine of some faculty, with the anticipation that they would be over tasked or may lose their jobs (Badu-Nyarko, 2000). That notwithstanding, those entrusted to translate the UGDEP from an idea into reality did very well as evidenced from the study results despite the teething challenges that are inherent.

Abel (2010) suggested that when carrying out a distance education programme, monitoring and support must follow. He explained that during this stage, efforts during planning and initiation become translated into sustainable programme improvement. One cannot but agree with Keast that for every programme to succeed continuous monitoring or supervisory strategies must be put in place so as to see the pros and cons in order to put in corrective measures should if the need be so that the success of the programme will be ensured. To a very large extent, the putting in place course organisers for the distance programme is a laudable idea.

Challenges of the Distance Learner

The quantum leap in the admission numbers alone portends a possible challenge for both the institution (University of Ghana) and learners in the distance education programme. Kwapong (2008) argues that programme such as open and distance learning has proved to be a sure way of widening access to education, especially for women who by virtue of cultural constraints, for the most part would not have had the opportunity to access high education. Further congruent with this point is the assertion made (Benakani, 2009) that higher education has an important role to play in national development and in keeping academic pursuits and augmenting of knowledge.

But evidence abounds that aside from the fact that distance education has the prospects of overall development of society, the reality also exists that distance education students are perceived to have more challenges than their conventional counterparts (Kwapong, 2008) and this has the tendency to cause distance learners to drop out from their programmes.

This argument was further expatiated and corroborated in a study (Benakani, 2009) stressing that dropout is a

phenomenon caused by learners' characteristics (educational background, personality, motivation, aptitude and so on) and life circumstances (occupation, relationship with family and peer group, health and so on).

This is where the rules of programme organizers as liaison between learners and faculty is key since (Kwapong, 2008) hinted that open and distance learning has proved to be a sure way of widening access to education. There has to be a way for some of these challenges that learners are likely to face to be managed to levels that are bearable. Again, it needs proper planning and strategies as indicated in this research to be able to successfully implement quality programmes (Amponsah, 2010).

The fact that the whole idea of distance learning has come to stay based on the current number of applicants to universities who universities the world over cannot use only the face-to-face mode to deal with. However, one can also argue that at the end of the day, the should new systems put in place using technology as a means to address the challenges that if not checked can defeat the good idea that distance education programme has. This can be achieved through putting in place the right systems and structures.

Material Development

The quality of modules developed for the programme is corroborated by a recommendation by Aggor et al (1992) that the universities should examine and carefully select suitable course materials produced by other tertiary institutions for use, with modifications in initiating their first programmes.

As a matter of principle, the modules were made to a standard that contained quality content and was also user friendly, so as not to scare the students from enrolling on the programme. As a matter of fact, all students on the programme attested to the quality of modules given them and that students in the main stream were borrowing their books to study. This gives an indication of the quality of the modules prepared for the students.

Role of the Organisers

Kwapong (2008) gives a vivid description of the role(s) people in the forefront of distance education, such as Organizers in this study, should play. In reality it can be concluded that the organisers did not only play the role of organisers, as their job title indicates, they played very important roles in ensuring that the programme succeeds. In this research, it could be deduced that proper structures were in place, but push factors by way of pressure is posing a challenge that the University must bring along learners by updating on their challenges so that they can meet each other half-ways.

CONCLUSION

The study explored distance learning by looking at the prospects, challenges and strategies thereof. In relation to the objectives of the study, it can be concluded that in the development of the UGDEP, proper identification and inclusion of all structures with flexible adjustment were in place. To ensure smooth implementation of UGDEP, there should be involvement and deliberations with faculty, training and retraining of course writers, training for tutors recruited for the programme, as well as training of all stakeholders involved in UGDEP. The MDGs on education for all, places more responsibility, in terms of provision, to tertiary institutions. It thus gives UGDEP a real meaning. Hence, many people are expected to pursue their education by distance, in institutions providing DE in Ghana, including the University of Ghana. The University of Ghana has to be ready to address challenges confronting adult learners. The sheer quantum leap in admission numbers into the University of Ghana Distance Education Programme (UGDEP) alone is encouraging. However, the challenge here has to do with limited academic facilities and logistics to cater for learners on the distance mode, even though the issue of access is addressed. The learners on the other hand should be sufficiently oriented on what go into pursuing higher education through DE mode, in order to cope with some of the challenges involved in UGDEP. The good news, however, is that new innovations are being put in place, which in no time would make some of these challenges; sufficiently addressed. The administrators of the DE programme being run at the University of Ghana have seen massive advancement in terms of delivery. The UGDEP has moved from textbook to web platform- Sakai Teaching and learning Management Platform. This gives an ample indication that the UGDEP has come to stay and will continue to be a force to reckon with in the near and distant future.

It is, therefore, imperative that lecturers in UGDEP should adopt technology supporting tools to engender meaningful teaching and learning among students.

REFERENCES

- Abel, W. S. (2010). *Higher Education and Development: A Critical Nexus*. SARUA Workshop on Investment in Higher Education for Development: New Directions. Held on 5th August, Tanzania, University of Dar es Salaam.
- Adda, K. (2004). *An Assessment of the Operations of the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) for Distance Learners in Ghana*. (Unpublished MPhil Thesis). Accr: University of Ghana.
- Aggor, R. A., Kinyanjui, P.E., Pecku, N. K., and Yerbury, J.C (1992). *Survey on Distance Education in Ghana*. A Report for the Deputy Secretary, Higher Education. MOE Ghana.
- Amponsah, S. (2010). *The evolution and implementation strategies of the University of Ghana bachelor of Arts*

- distance education programme*. (An Unpublished M.Phil Thesis). Accra: University of Ghana.
- Asunka, S. (2008). Online Learning in Higher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Ghanaian University Students' Experiences and Perceptions, *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 9(3), 1-23.
- Badu-Nyarko, S. K. (2000). Faculty attitudes towards participation in university-based distance education in Ghana. *Ghana Journal of Literacy and Adult Education*. 2.(1), 195-212.
- Bates, T.W. (2005). Technology, E-learning and Distance Education, (2nd ed.). London:Routledge.
- Bhalalusesa, E. P. (2001). Supporting Women Distance Learners in Tanzania, *The Journal of Open and Distance Learning*, 16(2), 155-168.
- Bhalalusesa, E. P. (2006.) The Dynamics of Teaching at a Distance in Tanzania, *Open Learning*, 21, 49–58.
- Bukaliya, R. (2012). Distance Education and the Rural-Urban Professional Migration Implications for Efficiency, *International Journal on New Trends in Education and Their Implications*, 3 (2), Article: 06, 71-83.
- Butcher, N., Latchem, C., Mawoyo, M. & Levey, L. (2011). Distance Education for Empowerment and Development in Africa, *Distance Education*, 32 (2), 149-158.
- Carr, S. (2001). Union publishes guide citing high cost of distance education. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 47 (35), 39-41.
- Daniel, J. (2007). The Expansion of Higher Education in the Developing World: What Can Distance Learning Contribute? *CHEA International Commission Conference*, 1st February, Washington, DC. Retrieved August 29 2015
- Daniel, J. (2010). Distance Education: Ends, Means, Opportunities & Threats. *Paper Presented in Shanghai International Forum on Lifelong Learning*, May 19 to 21, Shanghai, China.
- De Hart, K. L & Venter, J. M. P (2013). Comparison of Urban and Rural Dropout Rates of Distance Students. *Perspective in Education*, 31 (1), 66-76.
- Dibiase, D. (2000). Is distance education a Faustian bargain? *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 24 (1), 130-136.
- Dzakiria, H. (2005) The Role of Learning Support in Open and Distance Learning: Learners Experiences and Perspectives, *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 6 (2), 95-109.
- Dzakiria, H. (2008) Students' Accounts of the Need for Continuous Support in a Distance Learning Programme, *The Journal of Open and Distance Learning*, 23 (2) 103-111.
- Keegan, D. (2000). *Distance Training: Taking Stock at a Time of Change: Harbinger of the New Millennium*. London & New York: Routledge Falmer.
- Krishnan, C. (2012) Student Support Services in Distance Higher Education in India: A Critical Appraisal. *International Journal of Research in Economics & Social Sciences*, 2 (2) February, 459-472.
- Kuhanga, N. A. (1990) The Need for, and the Possibilities of, Distance Education at Tertiary Level in Tanzania, *A Symposium to Mark 20 Years of Adult Education in Tanzania*, 3r -7th September, University of Dar es Salaam.
- Kwapong, O. A.T.F. (2008). A Case for Using Open and Distance Learning (ODL) to Widen Access to Tertiary Education for Women. *International Journal of Instruction Technology and Distance Education*. 5 (5) 47.
- Kwapong, O. A .T. (2007). Widening Access to Tertiary Education for Women in Ghana through Distance Education, *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 8 (4), October.
- Lee, J. (2001). Instructional Support for Distance Education and Faculty Motivation, Commitment, satisfaction. *British Journal of Education Technology*, 32(2) , 153-160.
- Macintyre, R. & Macdonald, J. (2011). Remote from What? Perspectives of Distance Learning Students in Remote Rural Areas of Scotland, *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 12 (4), 1-16.
- Mahai, L. (2008). Provision of Institutional Support Services to Distance Learners: A Case Study of Mwanza and Kagera Regional Centres for the Open University of Tanzania. *Studies of Adult Education (SAED)*, 64, June. Dar es Salaam: Institute of Adult Education.
- Mahai, L. (2012). ICT Based Support for Rural Students of the Open University of Tanzania: Perceptions, Challenges and Prospects. In Amiel, T & Wilson, B. (Eds.), *Proceedings of World Conference on Educational Multimedia, Hypermedia and Telecommunications*.
- Mhehe, E. G. (2002). *Women Enrolment and Participation Issues at the Open University of Tanzania*, Thesis (PhD), Edmonton: Alberta.
- Merriam, S.B. (2002). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. California: Jossey- Bass.
- Mokhele, M.L. (2011). *Teachers' Perspectives on Continuing Professional Development: A Case Study of the Mpumalanga Secondary Science Initiative (MSSI) Project*. Doctoral Thesis: University of South Africa.
- Ng'umbi, M. W. (2009). *Support of Retention of School- Based Distance Learners: First Year Experience of the Licensed Teachers Programme in Tanzania*. Thesis (Thesis), University of Reading: UK.
- Simpson, O. (2012). *Supporting Students for Success in Online and Distance Education*. (3rd Ed.), UK & New York: Routledge
- Srivastava, M. & Reddy, V. (2007). How Did They Study at a Distance? Experiences of IGNOU Graduates. *International Journal of Distance Education Technologies*, 5(3) 93-102.
- UNESCO. (2002). *Open and Distance Learning: Trends, Policy and Strategy Considerations*. Paris: UNESCO Division of Higher Education.