



Contribution of Open and Distance Learning Programmes to Human Capacity Development: the Case of the Primary Education Programme of the National Open University of Nigeria

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Abstract. Though open and distance learning (ODL) has gained prominence in many countries, there are widespread fears for the quality of ODL programmes. Taking the case of the Bachelor of Arts in Primary Education programme of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), this paper examined the effectiveness of these programmes in their efforts to contribute to the development of human capacity. Noting the scepticism society holds against ODL programmes, the study sought to establish the comparability of the competence of ODL and conventional face-to-face programme finalists. The findings were that there is no significant difference in the competence of the two groups. Therefore, it is concluded that the public should rest assured of the credibility of ODL as an avenue for the development of human capacity and take advantage of ODL programmes.

Keywords: Programme evaluation; ODL; Human capacity development

1 Introduction

It is well recognised that education is an instrument of social and economic transformation. The open and distance learning (ODL) system, as an approach to the delivery of education, has gained much prominence all over the world. In terms of widening access to learning, the system has made remarkable progress especially in the field of higher education. It is incontestable that the ODL system has continued to open up access to education for millions of people in Africa and elsewhere who otherwise would not have had the opportunity particularly those who could not gain access to university education in the conventional system due to varied reasons of socio-economic and geographical factors. The emergence of ODL has marked a turning point in the provision of

educational opportunities across the globe. According to UNESCO (2002), open and distance learning is one of the most rapidly growing fields of education and its potential impact on all education delivery systems has been greatly accentuated through the development of internet based information technologies.

Despite the ODL success story, the concern being expressed among leaders and experts in ODL is that of quality of output (Daniels, 2010). Most ODL institutions in their bid to achieve mega status tend to focus mainly on access (quantity) and in the process the issue of quality of output/ human capacity development, which is critical, has been relegated to the background. Daniels (2010) echoed this concern in his opening speech at the 6th Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning in India.

Existence of a large pool of human population does not automatically translate to a productive resource. Human beings become productive resource only when they are able to contribute meaningfully to productive economic activities. As argued by Omolewa (2008), size should not be a driving force in ODL. What is important according to him is to ensure that education is able to adequately prepare learners for the demands of the global learning society of the twenty first century. Thus, providing access alone cannot be considered a real contribution unless it translates into success. Success as used in this context is not just completing a certifiable study programme but completion of a study programme that results into the enhancement of human wellbeing, upgrading of competencies and skills that enable the learners to use their new skills and knowledge for the development of themselves and their communities. Daniels (2010) has charged ODL practitioners to judge their efforts not only by enrolment figure but also by success of their learners. Floyd (2008) argues that ODL can meet the quality challenge and can do so in ways that produce highest quality outcomes than are easily achieved by other methodologies. The key is to balance access with quality.

If Africa, and indeed Nigeria, is to compete in the global knowledge economy, there is need for ODL providers to move beyond the customary focus on access to ensure that the opportunities offered by ODL prepare learners for success. The only way to achieve this aim is to subject ODL programmes to continual evaluation particularly in the light of public perception of distance education. Evaluation is an essential element of successful distance education programmes. Therefore, the focus of the study is justified on the need to assess ODL contribution to human capacity development.

1.1 ODL and Human Capacity Development

Any effort to increase human knowledge, enhance skills and productivity and stimulate resourcefulness of individuals is an effort in human capacity

development According to Akingbade (2007), human capacity development is the human capability and productivity engendered through knowledge and skills acquired from education, training and experience; and facilitated by an enabling environment. It is the intangible factor of the production process that contributes to human intellect, skills and competencies in the production and provision of goods and services. Human capacity development is about supporting and investing in people, using a variety of means, including education, training, coaching, mentoring, internships, capacity building programmes, organisational development and human resource management. It, therefore, implies building an appropriate balance and critical mass of human resource base and providing an enabling environment for all individuals to be fully engaged and contribute to development efforts. According to Adamu (2002), human capital formation transcends mere acquisition of intellectual ability through formal education system towards the transformation of the total man to enhance his productivity. He argued that human capital investment is an indispensable component of the development process and a force that can help in tackling inequalities and poverty in any nation.

Anuwar Ali (2008) notes that the role of universities in human capital development can be seen in two ways; first, to supply the skills for national economies; and secondly, on the demand side, to increase the drive within the national population for a process of “up-skilling” by opening doors to greater access in higher education. ODL has been, and continues to be a viable way through which professionals may enhance their professional competencies while continuing to work, thus earning a living while learning (Braithwaite, 2010). Therefore, ODL is seen as enabling human capacity development.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Over the years, ODL tertiary institutions particularly in developing countries have faced a number of challenges. According to Braithwaite (2010), the most contentious of these challenges has been the poor public perception of the quality of ODL programmes. A common perception is that distance learning is not as effective as the traditional (face-to-face) education (Harrison, 2001 as cited in Adeoye and Salawu, 2010). Consequently, the acceptability of ODL certificates by labour market is affected because of fear of quality compromise. Although public perception may be un-informed and misguided, it is capable of distorting the intended gains of distance learning. Therefore, there is an urgent need to address the challenge otherwise ODL will continue to be viewed as an inferior alternative, good enough for failures and one that only produces mediocre graduates (Mboya, 2008; 99). On the other hand, empirical evidence abound indicating no significant difference in the quality of education received through distance learning versus the classroom (Russell, 2002; Sukati, et al.,

2010). However, there is dearth of research on ODL and human capacity development with focus on learners of the National Open University of Nigeria. This study is therefore a contribution to fill the existing knowledge gap.

1.3 B.A. (Ed) Primary Education Programme of NOUN

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) is a single mode university that operates an exclusively ODL mode of education. With a student population of 65,000 as at 2011 academic year, NOUN offers 128 academic programmes and over 1,000 courses across five Schools (School of Arts and Social Sciences, School of Education, School of Law, School of Management Sciences, School of Science and Technology) and one academic Centre (Centre for Lifelong Learning and Workplace Training).

The B.A. Primary Education Programme was launched in the School of Education in the 2003/2004 academic year. The programme provides access to diverse learners such as primary school teachers who aspire to upgrade their skills and move upward in their career paths, acquire a Bachelor's degree in Primary Education while on their job, as well as non-teaching members of the population, who are interested in finding careers in teaching. The programme is aimed at the development of professional skills and competence required by teachers for effective teaching-learning process at the primary level. The specific objectives of the programme, as highlighted in NOUN Students Handbook (2008/2009), are to enable practicing teachers to:

- Demonstrate practical applications of the theory and practice of primary education in classroom situations
- Demonstrate skill in care giving
- Demonstrate competence in classroom management

The programme delivery system includes the multi-media approach: self-instructional printed materials, audio visual tapes, CD-ROMs, radio broadcasts, tutorial sessions, practical work, projects, assignments, counselling sessions.

The programme is structured to run for a minimum of four years and maximum of eight years for students starting at 100 level (i.e. students without the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) qualification which is a teaching qualification awarded after three-year post-secondary education) or minimum of three years and maximum of six years for students starting at 200 level (i.e. students with NCE qualification). To be eligible for the award of the B.A. Ed. in Primary Education, a student must pass a minimum of 120 and 90 credit units for the 4 year- and 3 year- degree programmes respectively.

The choice of NOUN B. A. (Ed) Primary Education programme as case study was hinged on several factors. One, as the only single mode ODL

University in Nigeria and West Africa Sub-region, NOUN occupies a very strategic position in Nigeria's education landscape. Second, primary education as the foundational level of the educational system is of paramount importance to the attainment of national development. It is the educational level at which societal members acquire their basic reading, writing and numeracy skills, which are some of the indices used internationally to rate the development levels of nation states. Moreover, a substantial proportion of students who enrol in the B.A. (Ed) programme are in-service primary school teachers, meaning that what affects the programme automatically affects them and their work.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The broad aim of the study was to assess the contribution of ODL to human capacity development in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study were to:

- Find out the level of teaching competence among in-service primary school teachers who enrolled in the Primary Education degree programme of NOUN
- Find out the level of self-esteem among in-service primary school teachers who enrolled in Primary Education degree programme of NOUN
- Compare the teaching competence between the in-service primary school teachers who enrolled in Primary Education degree programme of NOUN and their counterpart pursuing similar programme through the conventional face-to-face mode
- Compare the level of self-esteem between the in-service primary school teachers who enrolled in Primary Education degree programme of NOUN and their counterpart pursuing similar programme through the conventional face-to-face mode

1.5 Research Questions

The following questions were raised:

- What is the level of teaching competence among in-service primary school teachers who enrolled in Primary Education degree programme of NOUN?
- What is the level of self-esteem among in-service primary school teachers who enrolled in Primary Education degree programme of NOUN?
- What difference is there in teaching competence between the in-service primary school teachers pursuing Primary Education degree

programme of NOUN and their counterpart pursuing similar programme through the conventional face-to-face mode?

- How do primary school teachers who enrolled in Primary Education degree programme of NOUN compare in self-esteem with their counterpart pursuing similar programme through the conventional face-to-face mode?

1.6 Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the investigation:

Ho1: There is no significant difference between the teaching competence of the in-service primary school teachers who enrolled in Primary Education degree programme of NOUN and their counterpart pursuing similar programme through the conventional method

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the level of self-esteem between the in-service primary school teachers who enrolled in Primary Education programme of NOUN and their counterpart pursuing similar programme through the conventional method

2 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

A combination of descriptive and ex post facto research design was adopted. Descriptive method was used to ascertain the current status of the level of professional development among the primary school teachers who enrolled in NOUN Primary Education programme. The ex post facto method was chosen because the situation studied was already in existence at the time the research was carried out. The method allowed selection of two groups of subjects on the basis of pre-existing independent variables for comparison on measures of the respective dependent variables.

2.2 Population

The study was conducted in Lagos State, Nigeria. The population of the study involved all primary school teachers in Lagos State public primary schools. This includes teachers pursuing the B.A. (Ed) Primary Education programme of NOUN and teachers pursuing similar programme from conventional university in face-to-face mode.

2.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

NOUN's data records showed a total of 1,115 students enrolled in Primary Education programme at various levels as at 2011 academic year out of which 212 were in final year of study. The breakdown further showed that of the 212, a total of 107 students registered under Lagos Study Centre. From this, a sample size of 60 was drawn to form the NOUN group. Purposive sampling was applied to ensure that those selected constituted the primary school teachers from public schools. Lagos Study Centre was purposely selected because of its peculiar characteristics serving about 50% of the university's student population. The choice of final year students was based on the fact that they have spent sometime in the programme and so in a position to ascertain programme impact (the institution was yet to graduate its first set of degree students at the time of the study). Table 1 summarises the sampling composition.

Table 1: Composition of primary school teachers who enrolled in NOUN Primary Education degree programme by study centre and year of study

Year of study	NOUN Study centres		Total
	Lagos centre	Other centres	
Final year students	107*	105	212
Students in other levels	475	428	903
Total	582	533	1,115

*107, from which 60 NOUN participants were drawn

In line with the design of the study a comparable group was sampled. Consequently, from a pool of conventional universities that run Primary Education programme, the Lagos State University (LASU) was selected for convenience purpose. The University runs sandwich (long vacation) Primary Education programme through face-to-face course delivery mode, hence justified for inclusion to serve the purpose of the study. Thus, from the total sandwich student teachers in final year, 40 were drawn and referred to as "non-NOUN group". To control the influence of extraneous variables, purposive sampling was used in the selection such that both groups (NOUN and non-NOUN) were matched and equated on relevant characteristics - years of teaching experience, age, sex, and educational qualification. Baseline qualification was the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE), because this is the minimum teaching qualification for teaching in Nigerian primary schools (National Policy on Education, 2004).

2.4 Research Instruments

Two sets of quantitative instruments were used to collect data - Teacher Competency Measure (TCM) and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). The TCM was a 31-item structured questionnaire designed to measure respondents' level of teaching competency. It was developed by the researcher based on a set of competencies required for effective teaching derived from literature on teacher education. These components include: lesson planning, preparation and presentation, classroom management, professional responsibilities and teacher's personality. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A sought necessary background information. Section B contained 24 items divided into six sub-sections with each set of items measuring different aspects of the respondents' competency. Each item was assigned a 3-point response scale of high, average, low with corresponding values of 3,2, and 1 respectively. The instrument was content validated by experts in the field of education evaluation, while the Cronbach's alpha method was used to test for the internal consistency with a coefficient value of 0.87 obtained.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) was a 10-item standardised inventory developed by Rosenberg (1989). Rosenberg considered self-esteem a unipolar concept that reflects the person's general experience about his/her personal abilities and evaluation of his/her personal characteristics. It was adopted in this study to measure respondents' level of self-esteem. Each item was placed on a 4-point response scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree with corresponding values of 4,3,2, and 1 respectively. Negative items were reverse-scored. The scale is reported to have high reliability coefficients said to be in the range of .82 to .88, and Cronbach's alpha for various samples in the range of .77 to .88 (<http://www.bsos.umd.edu/socy/research/rosenberg.htm>).

In an attempt to obtain qualitative data to complement responses from the questionnaires so as to gain a deeper insight on the subject of enquiry, personal observation as well as semi-structured interview schedule were included as additional input. Thus, 10 subjects were randomly selected from the sampled subjects as participants. With observation and interview guides developed, observation was conducted on participants' lesson note, physical appearance and classroom environment. The observation guide had three parts. Part A contained detail list of the five major parts that constitute an ideal lesson plan with which the researcher assessed the appropriateness/ inappropriateness of lesson plan prepared by participants on a specific topic in Social Studies - one of the compulsory subjects at the primary level. Section B assessed the physical appearance –neatness, composure. Section C assessed classroom environment – presence/absence of instructional materials, and sitting arrangement. Individual Interview schedule was held. The interview guide contained six open-ended question items designed to elicit information on how participants benefited

from programme intervention, impact of the programme on them as teachers, further education aspiration, willingness to recommend the programme to other colleagues, and challenges encountered. The various mixed methods were intended to capture different facets of the study.

2.5 Procedure

The process of data collection started with identification and selection of NOUN and non-NOUN subjects through the process of matching. The questionnaires were personally administered face to face to all NOUN subjects (N=60) during tutorial sessions at the Lagos Study Centre. Thereafter, observation was conducted with selected sample (N=10) at their respective schools followed by one-on-one interview (N=10). Non-NOUN subjects (N=40) completed the questionnaires during regular classes at the Ojo campus of the LASU. This was followed by observation with selected sample (N=10) in their places of work, and then followed by one-on-one interview (N=10). In order to eliminate interaction effect and ensure internal validity, the two groups were selected from different schools. In all, 27 public primary schools were visited to collect data with the help of three trained research assistants. The data collection process lasted four weeks.

2.6 Analysis

The quantitative data were analysed using basic descriptive statistics such as the mean and frequency counts for answering the research questions. The mean scores were computed by multiplying the frequencies of response with respective scale values. The obtained value was then divided by the total number of respondents. The obtained value was judged for significance or non-significance against a cut-off point which was obtained by summing the scale values and dividing by number of scale points. The t-test for independent samples was used for the hypotheses to test the mean difference between the two groups in the variables of investigation, at the 0.05 level of significance. Any item with t-calculated value greater than table value was rejected. If the reverse is the case it was accepted for that item. Data collected from observation and interviews were subjected to content analysis for easy interpretation.

3 Findings

3.1 Question One

To answer the question, the responses to items on the Teacher Competency Measure were analysed with the use of frequencies and weighted mean scores.

The mean scores were computed by multiplying the frequencies of response with respective scale values (3, 2, 1). The obtained value was then divided by total number of respondents. The cut-off point for judging the significance /non-significance of scores was set at 2.0. This was obtained by adding the scale values and dividing by 3 (i.e. $3+ 2+ 1= 6/3=2$). Hence, any item with a mean rating of 2.0 and above was considered high while any item with a mean rating below 2.0 was regarded low. Since the 24 items were divided into six sub-sections each measuring different competency variable, scores obtained on each sub-section were summed and averaged to yield scores on each variable. The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Teaching Competence among Teachers Enrolled in NOUN

Competency	Response categories			Total	Mean score	Cut-off point
	High	Average	Low			
Lesson planning	72	40	16	128	2.1	2.00
Lesson preparation	57	48	17	122	2.0	2.00
Lesson presentation	66	46	15	127	2.1	2.00
Classroom management	72	48	12	132	2.2	2.00
Professional responsibility	69	52	11	132	2.2	2.00
Teacher personality	81	46	10	137	2.3	2.00
Average	69.5	46.7	14	129.6	2.15*	2.00

Overall competency mean score = 2.15* (significant)

Table 2 reveals that all the variables put together yielded competency mean rating of 2.15, which was above the cut-off point indicating high level of teaching competency among respondents. A closer look at Table 2 shows that the variables had mean scores ranging from 2.0 to 2.3, which met the cut-off point. Although the mean scores on each of the variables were fairly high, on a closer look teacher personality had the highest mean score while lesson preparation had the least score. It is evident from Table 2 that the level of teaching competency among primary school teachers enrolled in Primary Education degree programme of NOUN appear fairly high as indicated by overall mean rating of 2.15.

3.2 Question 2

To answer the question, the responses to items on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale were analysed with the use of frequencies and weighted mean scores. As a one-dimensional scale, mean scores on self-esteem were computed by multiplying the frequencies of response with respective scale values (4, 3, 2, and 1) after reverse-scoring all negatively worded items (2, 5, 6, 8, and 9). The

obtained value was then divided by total number of respondents. The maximum possible score was 40 and the minimum 10, higher scores indicating higher self-esteem. The cut-off point was obtained by summing the values 10, 20, 30, 40 and dividing by 4 ($40+30+20+10 = 100/4=25$). Hence, a mean score above 25 is indicative of high self-esteem, while mean score below 25 suggests low self-esteem. The result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Self-esteem among Teachers Enrolled in NOUN

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean score
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	100	84	10	2	196	3.26
At times, I think am no good at all	7	10	93	68	178	2.96
I feel that I have a number of good qualities	84	90	12	3	189	3.15
I am able to do things as well as most other people	104	78	14	1	197	3.28
I feel I do not have much to be proud of	5	20	96	52	173	2.88
I certainly feel useless at times	1	6	81	116	204	3.4
I feel that my worth is equal to that of others	72	54	30	9	165	2.75
I wish I could have more respect for myself	6	14	81	84	185	3.08
All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure	3	2	78	120	203	3.38
I take a positive attitude towards myself	92	81	6	2	181	3.01
Total					1871	31.2*

Key: SA = Strongly agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree
31.2* Significant

As observed in Table 3, the self-esteem measure yielded a mean rating of 31.2, which was more than the cut-off point of 25 indicating that the level of self-esteem was high. This implies that primary school teachers pursuing primary education programme of NOUN reported high level of self-esteem.

3.3 Question 3

Table 4: Performance of NOUN and Non-NOUN Teachers (cut off point 2.00, N=100)

Competence	NOUN group		Non-NOUN group	
	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank
Lesson planning	2.1	3 rd	2.1	3 rd
Lesson preparation	2.0	4 th	2.2	2 nd
Lesson presentation	2.1	3 rd	2.4	1 st
Classroom management	2.2	2 nd	2.2	2 nd
Professional responsibility	2.2	2 nd	2.0	4 th
Teacher personality	2.3	1 st	2.2	2 nd

The analysis presented in Table 4 reveals that for NOUN group all the variables analysed met the cut-off point of 2.0. For non-NOUN group the trend appears

the same as all the variables met the cut-off point, indicating high level of teaching competency. The ranking of the scores shows that NOUN-group ranked first in teacher personality, followed by professional responsibility with classroom management tied for second place, lesson presentation and lesson planning both of which tied for third position and lastly lesson preparation which ranked fourth. The non-NOUN group ranked first in lesson presentation, followed by lesson preparation with classroom management and teacher personality all three tied for second place. Lesson planning and professional responsibility ranked third and fourth, respectively. From Table 4, it is observed that NOUN group ranked higher than non-NOUN group in teacher personality and professional responsibility, while non-NOUN group ranked higher in lesson preparation and lesson presentation. However, both groups tied in the same ranking position in lesson planning and classroom management. Therefore, it can be said that NOUN group is comparable with non-NOUN group in all aspects of teaching competencies except in lesson preparation and lesson presentation.

3.4 Question 4

The self-esteem mean score for NOUN group was 31.2, which was more than the cut-off point of 25 indicating that the level of self-esteem was high. That of non-NOUN group was 31.4 which was also more than the cut-off point of 25 indicating the group's level of self-esteem was high. This implies that primary school teachers pursuing Primary Education programme of NOUN are comparable in self-esteem with those of non-NOUN group pursuing similar programme through conventional F2F mode.

3.5 Research Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no significant difference between the teaching competence of the in-service primary school teachers who enrolled in Primary Education degree programme of NOUN and their counterpart pursuing similar programme through the conventional method. The hypothesis was tested using the t-test for independent samples and computed on each competency variable. The result is presented in Table 5. In Table 5, the calculated t-values of 1.15, 2.31, 25.0, 0.11, 22.2, and 1.02 were obtained for lesson planning, lesson preparation, lesson presentation, classroom management, professional responsibilities and teacher personality, respectively.

Table 5: Difference between Teaching Competence of NOUN and non-NOUN teachers

Competences	Group	Mean	SD	t-cal	t- table	Decision
Lesson planning	NOUN	2.1	0.52	1.15	1.96	Accepted
	Non-NOUN	2.1	0.60			
Lesson preparation	NOUN	2.0	0.51	2.31*	1.96	Rejected
	Non-NOUN	2.2	0.69			
Lesson presentation	NOUN	2.1	0.52	25.0*	1.96	Rejected
	Non-NOUN	2.4	0.72			
Classroom management	NOUN	2.2	0.55	0.11	1.96	Accepted
	Non-NOUN	2.2	0.69			
Professional responsibilities	NOUN	2.2	0.54	22.2*	1.96	Rejected
	Non-NOUN	2.0	0.36			
Teacher personality	NOUN	2.3	0.34	1.02	1.96	Accepted
	Non-NOUN	2.2	0.69			

* = Significant at 0.05 level

A close look at the values in Table 5 shows that three of them were found greater than the critical t- value of 1.96 at 0.05 alpha level which implies rejection of the null hypothesis while three were less than the critical t-value indicating acceptance. Therefore the hypothesis that there was no significant difference between the teaching competence of the student teachers enrolled in Primary Education degree programme of NOUN and those pursuing similar programme through the conventional face-to-face mode was upheld in terms of lesson planning, classroom management, and teacher personality. It was, however, rejected in terms of lesson preparation, lesson presentation in favour of non-NOUN group and professional responsibilities in favour of NOUN group.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the level of self-esteem between the in-service primary school teachers who enrolled in Primary Education programme of NOUN and their counterpart enrolled in similar programme through the conventional face-to-face mode. A t-test for independent samples was used to test the hypothesis and the result is summarised in Table 6.

Table 6: Difference between Self-esteem of NOUN and non-NOUN groups

Group	N	Mean	SD	Md	df	t-cal	t-table
NOUN	60	31.2	7.05				
Non-NOUN	40	31.4	6.93	0.2	98	0.53	1.96

As indicated in Table 6, NOUN group obtained a mean score of 31.2 while non-NOUN group obtained 31.4, this yielded a mean difference of 0.2 between the groups. A t-test for equality of mean yielded a calculated t-value of 0.53, which was less than the critical t-value of 1.96 at the 0.05 level of significance.

Hence, the null hypothesis was accepted indicating that there was no significant difference in the level of self-esteem between the two groups.

3.6 Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data obtained via observation revealed that virtually all the lesson notes (95%) prepared by both NOUN and non-NOUN participants conformed to appropriate standards and contained details of the five parts ideal lesson note should have. On physical appearance, there was no obvious difference as the two groups appeared equally neat, wore appropriate dressing and appeared composed. Also, no discernable differences between the two groups in respect of teaching aids found in class and in sitting arrangement. However, very few teaching aids were sighted and mostly charts.

During interviews, NOUN participants reported having benefited from study programme; acquired skills and competences which were absent before they enrolled in the programme, the impact on their teaching performance and enhanced self-confidence to the envy of other teacher colleagues. They reported how these colleagues, having seen the impact, come to them for guidance and advice and also request to borrow their course materials. Majority expressed willingness to enrol in NOUN Masters programme but lamented the long duration of their Bachelor's programme which had dragged endlessly having spent six to seven years for a supposedly three/four year full time programme. This, they said, had caused many of their course mates to drop out. Other teacher colleagues are said to have shown interest to enrol but got discouraged by the length of time it takes to graduate. One female participant had this to say:

“...I've benefited so much from the programme in terms of my teaching performance. Also, my self-confidence has improved. Even the way I relate with my colleagues has also improved. Some of them come to ask for guidance and even borrow my course materials. Yes, there are challenges but the main snag is the delay in graduation. I've spent six to seven years on the programme without graduation. Many students have dropped out for this reason. I know people who have shown interest to enrol but got discouraged. This is giving the university a bad image”

Interviews with non-NOUN participants yielded positive responses as those of NOUN group but differed in terms of challenges encountered. They reported having achieved a lot from the programme including greater confidence and additional skills that enhanced their job performance. They reported that they were given more responsibilities from their places of work. Two participants stated they were given higher classes to teach. There was a general consensus that the programme had improved their ability to plan and manage the teaching-

learning process including how to better motivate learners and monitor learning progress. On further education aspiration, majority expressed desire for further studies and indicated willingness to recommend the programme to other colleagues who were yet to enrol in degree programme.

4 Discussion

The foregoing provides evidence of the contribution of ODL programme to human capacity development. Evidence yielded by the study reveals that student teachers who enrolled in the Primary Education degree programme of NOUN reported high level of professional competence and enhanced self-esteem, and also found comparable with those of non-NOUN group pursuing similar programme through conventional face-to-face mode. This finding is contrary to expectation. The general opinion in the society is that the distance learners are not as good as learners in conventional system (Ken-Maduako, 2011). However, the non-significant difference between NOUN products and non-NOUN products in certain aspects of competencies (lesson planning, classroom management, teacher personality and higher in professional responsibilities) proves otherwise and agrees with the literature on distance education, which claims no difference between distance and conventional learning (Ojokheta, 2011; Russell, 2002; Sukati, et al., 2010). These competencies had been established as the criteria of teaching effectiveness.

One of the most important factors that contributed to the modest success of the Primary Education programme of NOUN may be the quality of its self-instructional materials that it produces and distributes among its students as well as other support systems put in place to help learners. In distance learning, because teachers and students are separated in time and space self-instructional materials are at the centre of learning in order to ensure comparable learning experiences as their counterparts in the conventional setting. These course materials have been highly rated not only by the students but also by the conventional tertiary institutions in Nigeria who see the materials as “hot cake”. As research has consistently shown, well-designed and well-written course modules engender good levels of learning achievement among students and facilitate effective achievement of educational objectives (Etuk, Akpanumoh, Etudor and Ngerebara, 2006). Also, findings from this study, as seen from how the teacher colleagues request to borrow the course materials, point to the same direction. According to Schlenker (2005), the quality that comes out of a process is affected by the quality of what goes in and what happens at every step along the way. This explains why the participants recorded high level of professional competency. The findings are also consistent with that reported in Osunde and Omoruyi (2004), which demonstrated the impact of teacher training programme by distance to teacher job performance. And also

consistent with the study by Umar (2008) which compared results of NTI's NCE (by DLS) graduates with those of conventional colleges of education showing no significant difference in their classroom performance.

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

Arising from the study, the public should be rest assured of the credibility of distance education as avenue to develop human capacity and take advantage of ODL programmes. This will ensure that greater number of citizens have expanded access to quality higher education. Primary Education programme should be recommended to all primary school teachers as a means to upgrade their professional competencies for the benefit and growth of primary education in Nigeria. Effort should be made to assess the programme regularly to ensure its effectiveness and efficiency. Teachers should be exposed to constant training, as this will contribute to improvement of the quality of education at the primary level, which is considered the foundation for sustainable development of any nation. Finally, this study should be replicated for other academic programmes of the National Open University of Nigeria.

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