



**A Study of the Distance Learning Programme of the University of  
Maiduguri and Access to Higher Education in Borno State,  
Nigeria**

**Étude Du Programme D'enseignement A Distance De  
L'université De Maiduguri Et De L'accès A L'enseignement  
Supérieur Dans L'état De Borno, Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

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*The open and distance learning (ODL) programme is being regarded as one of the most practical way through dual mode which Universities across the world are increasingly adopting in order to increase access to Higher Education. This paper studies the distance learning programme of the University of Maiduguri and access to higher education in Borno State, Nigeria. The objectives of the paper were: to examine the enrolment status of the Distance learning programme from 2012/2013 to 2017/2018 academic sessions; to examine the nature of the programme in terms of flexibility of access and to identify the challenges faced in terms of the programme. The research design used is survey research design. The study used both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data was obtained through self-administered questionnaire to 260 part 1-5 ODL students of the University of Maiduguri and 6 Heads of Department in the University whose programmes are offered through distance learning, 6 e-tutors of the same programmes and 5 heads of Units at the Centre for Distance learning. The secondary data on Centre for Distance Learning students*

*admission for the period of six Academic Sessions (2012/2013, 2013/2014, 2014/2015, 2015/2016, 2016/2017 and 2017/2018) and the total number of students from part one to five for 2017/2018 Academic Session were obtained from office of the Admission officers of the University of Maiduguri. The study found that access to higher education into University of Maiduguri through the distance learning programme increased every academic session as shown in Figures 2 and 3 with 76%. The study further found that the University of Maiduguri distance learning programme is flexible in mode of operation in terms of admission requirements and conduct of semester examinations as shown in Figure 4. However, the study established that one fundamental challenge of the distance learning programme was inadequate trained e-tutors for effective and efficient service delivery as shown in Figure 5. The study concludes that despite the major challenge the University of Maiduguri Open Distance Learning programme has continued to record increase in enrolment thus providing access to University education in Borno State for both residents of the state and even the entire Northeast region and beyond. The study recommends that the Centre for Distance Learning train more e-tutors to fill the present gap.*

### **Résumé**

*Le programme d'enseignement à distance (ED) est considéré comme l'un des moyens les plus pratiques d'améliorer l'accès à l'enseignement supérieur par le biais d'un double mode que les universités du monde entier adoptent de plus en plus souvent. Cet article étudie le programme d'enseignement à distance de l'Université de Maiduguri et l'accès à l'enseignement supérieur dans l'Etat de Borno, Nigeria. Les objectifs du document sont les suivants : examiner l'état des inscriptions au programme d'enseignement à distance de l'année 2012/2013 à 2017/2018 ; examiner la nature du programme en termes de souplesse d'accès et identifier les difficultés rencontrées dans le cadre du programme. Le plan de recherche utilisé est un plan de recherche par sondage. L'étude a utilisé des sources de données primaires et secondaires. Les données primaires ont été obtenues au moyen du questionnaire auto-administré, adressé à 260 étudiants de la première à la cinquième année de l'enseignement à distance de l'Université de Maiduguri et à six (6) chefs de département de*

*l'Université dont les programmes sont domiciliés, 6 formateurs en ligne des mêmes programmes et Cinque (5) directeurs des sous-départements du Centre d'enseignement à distance. Les données secondaires sur l'inscription des étudiants du Centre d'enseignement à distance pour la période de six années scolaires (2012/2013, 2013/2014, 2014/2015, 2015/2016, 2016/2017 et 2017/2018) et le nombre total d'étudiants de la première à la cinquième année 2017/2018 ont été obtenues du bureau des responsables des inscriptions de l'Université de Maiduguri. L'analyse a montré que l'accès à l'enseignement supérieur à l'Université de Maiduguri par le biais du programme d'enseignement à distance augmentait chaque année scolaire comme le montrent les figures 2 et 3 avec 76%. L'étude a également montré que le programme d'enseignement à distance de l'Université de Maiduguri est flexible en termes de conditions requises pour l'inscription et le déroulement des examens semestriels, comme le montre la figure 4. Toutefois, l'étude a établi que l'un des défis fondamentaux du programme d'enseignement à distance était le manque de la formation des tuteurs en ligne pour une prestation de services efficace et efficiente, comme le montre la figure 5. L'étude conclut qu'en dépit du défi majeur, le programme d'enseignement à distance de l'Université de Maiduguri a continué de connaître une augmentation des inscriptions, permettant ainsi aux résidents de l'État de Borno et même de toute la région du nord-est et au-delà d'accéder à l'enseignement universitaire. L'étude recommande que le Centre d'apprentissage à distance forme un plus grand nombre de tuteurs électroniques pour combler la lacune actuelle.*

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**Keywords:** *Open and Distance Learning Education, Access to higher education, University of Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria.*

**Mots-clés :** *Enseignement à distance, Accès à l'enseignement supérieur, Université de Maiduguri, Etat de Borno, Nigeria.*

## **Introduction**

The statement "education for all" is commonly quoted among education experts and researchers. It means access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied it as a necessity. It also suggests that education is supposed to be accessible to everyone regardless of their socioeconomic backgrounds (Commonwealth of Learning, 2002). As rightly stated by the United Nations (1948), "higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of meritö. Similarly, the United Nations (1966) stated that higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, in particular by the progressive introduction of free education.

Open and distance learning education was borne out of the need of people to learn at their convenience outside the confines of the brick and mortar of the traditional conventional system of education (Commonwealth of Learning, 2002, 2012). However, developing countries, such as Nigeria, are still struggling to provide higher education to potential candidates. Some researchers (Badat, 2004; Bekhradnia, 2004; Brennan, 2004; Smith and Casserly, 2006) have all independently observed that access to higher education still exist in various parts of the world. In Nigeria, especially Northeastern Nigeria, access to higher education is said to be so low and disturbing (UNESCO 2003).

Distance education is not new to Nigeria and dates back to 1887, when several students enrolled as external students for the University of London matriculation examination. The University of Lagos established the Correspondence and Open Studies Unit in 1973, which is now the distance learning Institute. This was subsequently followed by other universities largely for teacher education, and the National Teachersø Institute was established in 1976 as the dedicated distance education institution for teacher training. With such a strong foundation of distance education, Nigeria was a natural partner for Commonwealth of Learning (COL).

There are challenges of access to higher education in Borno State (supporting that too with citation or statistics from other studies

showing that there is problem with access in higher education in Borno. Borno state is one of the states without state university as such huge number of applicant applied yearly but just a few gain admissions into tertiary institutions in the state, leaving hundreds of thousands of qualified candidates not getting a place. A scenario that has deprived many from accessing higher education while others have not been able to study due to job schedule and other challenges that would not allow them enroll on a regular programme. These challenges have necessitated the emergence of more flexible programmes that would provide access. Higher institutions across the state have one form of programme or the other: part time programmes, sandwich programmes and open distance learning programme to fill this access gap in Borno State. One of such institutions in Borno state is the University of Maiduguri which established an open distance learning programme. Hence, this study examines the programme its contribution to access to higher education in Borno state.

According to Garrison (2000) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2003), two principal interlocking factors are directly responsible for the flourishing of distance learning. They include the desire by individuals to upgrade their skills and current qualification and the unparalleled innovation and advancements in technologies which have effectively cleared the road blocks impeding access to education which previously, was only accessible through classroom based-learning. Most distance learning learners have professional responsibilities (jobs), social responsibilities (families), are interested in part time studies, lack access to on-campus based studies or are away from formal education (Akintayo & Bunza, 2000) and distance learning becomes the readily available option for them to upgrade their qualifications.

According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2003), the General Education Requirement (GER) for tertiary education in Nigeria was just over 13 per cent in 2010. This is well below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which is far below the average of 40-50 per cent required for sustainable development. Over the period 2004 to 2009, there has been a steady increase in the number of qualified applicants seeking admission to Nigerian

Universities, yet the intake has not exceeded 19 per cent during this time. Open and distance learning was seen as a viable option for clearly absorbing the increasing demand for tertiary education.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

Distance learning programmes as a viable option for access to higher education for the majority of working adults who were previously excluded from accessing higher education opportunities by conditions beyond their control cannot be overemphasized. Realizing the promises that come along with distance learning, University of Maiduguri is one of the institutions of higher education in Borno state which runs distance learning programme. Considering the ever increasing number of qualified applicants who could not secure admission year in year out into the conventional system of the University of Maiduguri there is the need for an alternative access to higher education in the state.

This study focus on the University of Maiduguri distance learning programme and access to higher education in Borno State and in particular on the flexibility and challenges of open distance learning (ODL) as an alternative mode of access to higher education in Borno State, Nigeria.

### **Aim and objectives of the study**

The aim of the paper was to examine distance learning programme of the University of Maiduguri in bridging the gap on access to higher education in Borno State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are: to examine the enrolment status of the Distance learning programme from 2012/2013 to 2017/2018 academic sessions of the University of Maiduguri; to examine the nature of the programme in terms of flexibility of access and to identify the challenges faced in terms of the programmes.

### **Literature Review**

The benefits associated with dual mode Universities that are offering distance learning programmes cannot be overemphasised. The benefits range from students' perspectives to individual institution's perspectives. The very basic concept of distance learning is now very clear; an arrangement by the University to provide access to education to set of students that are geographically separated from the tutors or

lecturers is the primary objective of distance learning. As rightly observed by Lentell (2012) that such a programme enables Universities to provide access to quality education to learners who are rarely, if ever, on a campus. Distance learning programme provide access to higher education to learners in remote locations who, due to some factors, may not be able to gained access for conventional (face to face) system of education.

Distance learning programme provide access to adult working class who would otherwise not be able to pursue tertiary education and obtain higher qualifications Altman (2007). For so many reasons such would not be able to pursue university education if face to face, full-time, campus-based higher education as the only avenue for accessing higher education. As rightly observed by Pityana (2009) open and distance learning programme is a promising and practical strategy to provide access to higher education in the developing Nations.

The Commonwealth of Learning (2003) argues that "open and distance learning can expand the limited number of places available for campus-based institutions which are few in number and have stringent entrance requirements" thereby making higher education accessible to the majority of the world. The mission of COL is to help Commonwealth member states and institutions to harness the potential of distance learning and technologies for expanding access to education and training.

UNISA (2008) regards open and distance learning programme as a multi-faceted concept aimed at bridging the time, geographical, economic, social, educational and communication distance between the students and the institution, the students and the academics, the students and courseware and the student and their peers. Open distance learning focuses on removing barriers to access learning, providing flexibility of learning provision, Student-centeredness, supporting students and constructing learning programmes with the expectation that students can succeed Bopape and Constable (2011).

There are four basic advantages that have propelled the growth of distance learning programmes over the years as observed by Perraton (2000)

- i. They have less pressure to build school buildings;
- ii. They have reduced the number of teachers and school administrators;
- iii. They allow people with jobs an opportunity to learn while keeping their jobs, and
- iv. They know no boundaries as they can be offered over long distances and cater for widely scattered students.

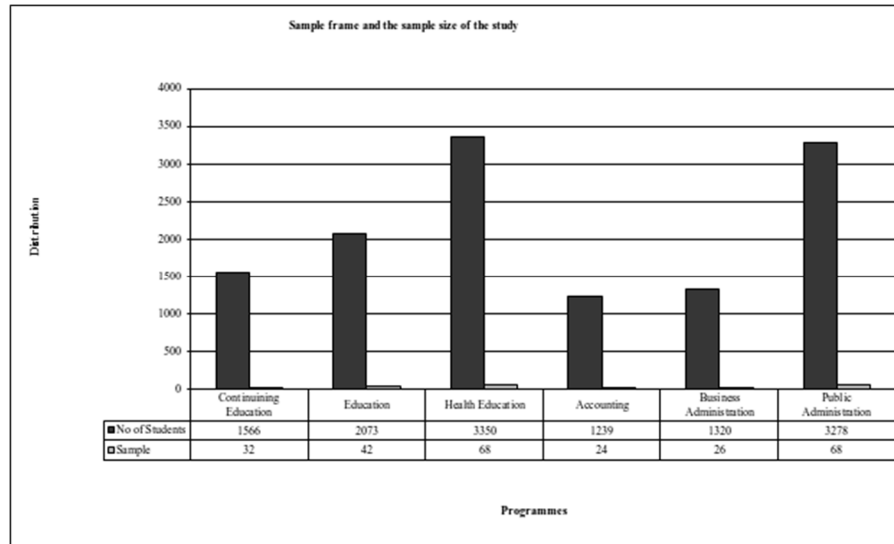
There are a number of opportunities and promises in the adoption of distance learning by Universities; however, it is not free from challenges. Valentine (2002) identifies several challenges that impinge upon the adoption and implementation of distance learning programmes. Valentine observes that "much of the instruction depends on the attitude of the administrators and instructors". Some distance learning stakeholders especially administrators perceive distance education as of low quality as compared to conventional (face-to-face) system. The Commonwealth of Learning (2002) observed that some administrators, who are key decision makers, perceive distance learning as second grade programmes. It is on the basis of this that some researchers like Lentell (2012) have strongly advocated the need for continued and unconditional support from University managements for distance learning programmes to hold their ground and to remain sustainable.

Martindale (2002) argues that it is not actually the location that determines the effect of an instruction but rather it is the interaction between the e-tutor and the student. Martindale, 2002 observed that it is actually the course designers, the personalities of teachers, and the subject matter of the course, and the environmental factors that determines the interactions. Equally observed that, poor structure of the course, inadequate and inappropriate media of communication, as well as ineffective feedback to students can significantly affect the efficiency of delivery process in Open and Distance Learning which can consequently lead to negative impact on teaching and learning experiences.



**Methods**

The research design used for this study is survey research design. The study used both primary and secondary sources of data. The target population for the study is the students of the Centre for distance learning one to 500 levels, for 2017/2018 academic session which constitutes the sample frame and the sample size as shown in Figure 1.



Source: Field Survey, 2018

**Fig.1: Sample Fame and Sample Size of the Study**

The six Heads of Department of the six approved programmes, six e-Tutors of same programmes one from each programme and five Heads of Units of the Centre. The primary data was obtained through self-administered questionnaire to 260 Distance Learning students of the University of Maiduguri, six Heads of Department in the University whose programmes are offered through Distance Learning, six e-tutors of the same programmes one from each and six Heads of Units at the Centre for Distance learning were purposively selected. The secondary data on Centre for Distance Learning students admission for the period of six Academic Sessions (2012/2013, 2013/2014, 2014/2015, 2015/2016, 2016/2017 and 2017/2018) was obtained from office of the Admission officers of the University of Maiduguri. These academic sessions were selected because they were the students under the six approved programmes of the Centre.

A questionnaire consisting both closed-ended and open-ended questions was administered to a total sample size of 260 students. It is only six programmes that are offered through the distance learning and the researchers found it plausible to administer a questionnaire, consisting of only open-ended questions to 260 part one to five students that were selected using simple random sampling technique. All of the six Heads of Department, six e-tutors and five Heads of Units in the Centre for distance learning were purposively selected.

Apart from background information which had six questions, the students' questionnaire had three additional sections (each with a mix of closed-ended and open-ended questions) which included, mode of admission and instructions (five questions), benefits of distance learning (five questions), and challenges faced (five questions). The lecturers' questionnaire consisted of nine questions which were all open ended and they gathered data about mode of instruction, benefits of Distance Learning, and challenges faced. All the respondents were purposively selected.

Data generated from respondents were sorted in order to facilitate analysis by coding quantitative data into numeric data. To do this, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to determine frequencies and percentages. Some frequencies and percentages were imported from SPSS to Microsoft Excel to produce charts and figures. The Frequency distributions are shown in Tables and Charts.

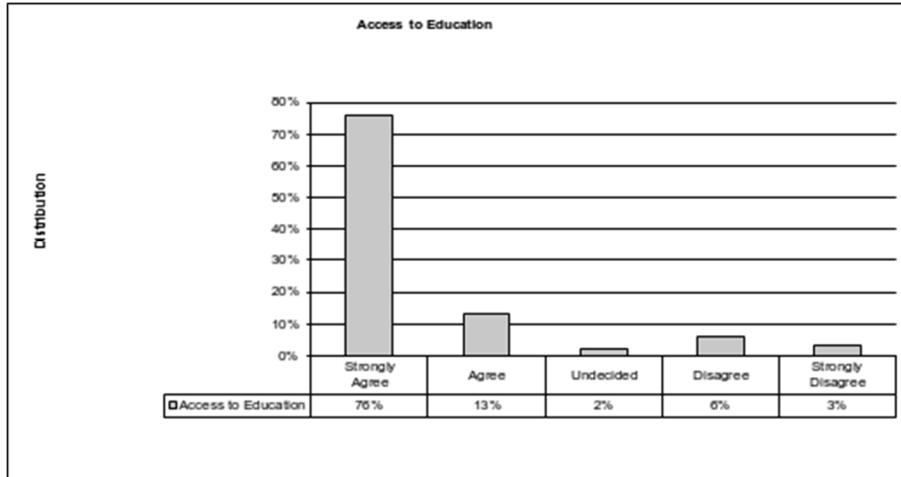
### **Results and Discussion**

The results are analysed and discussed below based on the objectives of the paper: covering students' enrolment, nature of the programme in terms of flexibility and the challenges faced in the Programmes. Out of the 260 questionnaires administered to students, Heads of Department and e-tutors, only 250 were returned and found usable.

#### **Students' Enrolment into the CDL Programme from 2012-2018**

The students' enrolment into the Centre for distance learning programme from 2012-2018 is shown in Figure 2.

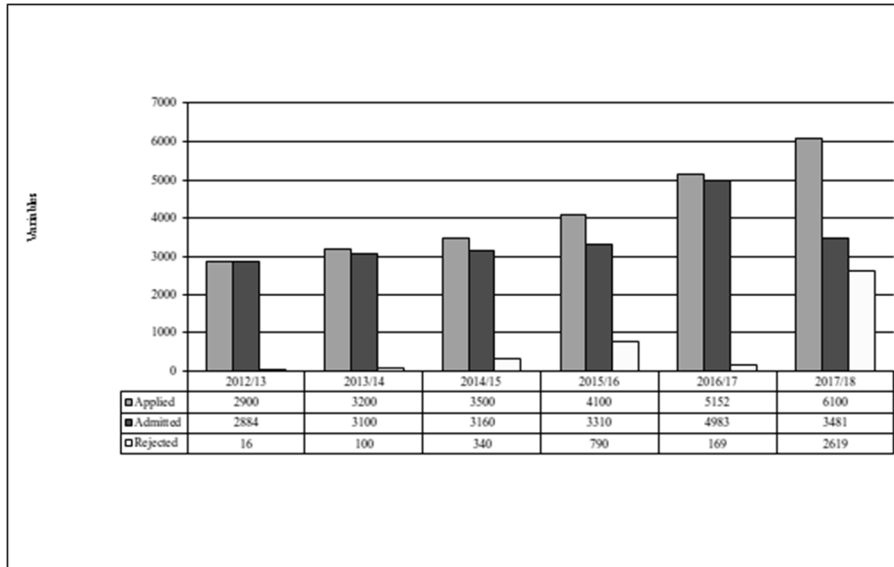
The findings of the study has demonstrated the potential of distance learning programme of the University of Maiduguri towards achieving access to higher education in Borno State, as shows on Figure not just to the working group but to other who cannot access it through campus-based learning.



Source: Field Survey, 2018

**Fig.2: Access to Higher Education**

Figure 2 shows that the number of applicants and enrolment is on the increase from 2012 to 2018. This is made a possible due to the flexible nature of the programme whereby students are allowed to study while working. Figure 3 shows an increase in application and admission status every new academic session from 2012/203 to 2016/2017. However, there was a drop in 2017/2018 academic session which could be because there was no second batch admission due to time frame. Other sessions had first batch and second batch admission. Unfortunately, due to lack of adequate time to consider the second batch in the 2017/2018 session (the centre was behind schedule of its calendar of event), the Centre was stock with only the first batch.

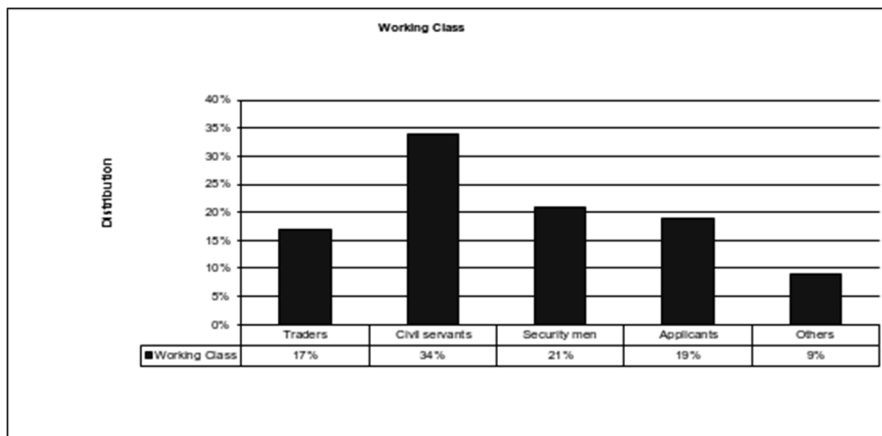


Source: Field Survey, 2018

**Fig 3: Students' Enrolment from 2012-2018 Academic Sessions**

### The Nature of the Programme in Terms of Flexibility

Under this section the study sought to establish the nature of distance learning programmes in terms of flexibility from students.



Source: Field Survey, 2018

**Fig. 4: Categories of Students of the programme**

Most of the students indicated they had benefitted from the programme because it had accorded them an opportunity to access higher education which is affordable and flexible. Most of the students are currently working with various Ministries, Agencies, Private and Public Organizations, Military, Paramilitary and Non-Governmental Organizations as shown in Figure 4.

These Ministries and Organisations would not want to have their employees away from duty for a long period of time but with the establishment of distance learning Programme it offers these students an opportunity to study while working. The Students seemed to be very happy to have accessed University education; some of the students expresses similar fillings as it has made me access University education after being left out by all Universities in Nigeria despite my good grades but with the establishment of distance learning Programme, I am able to continue working, look after my family while doing my university education.

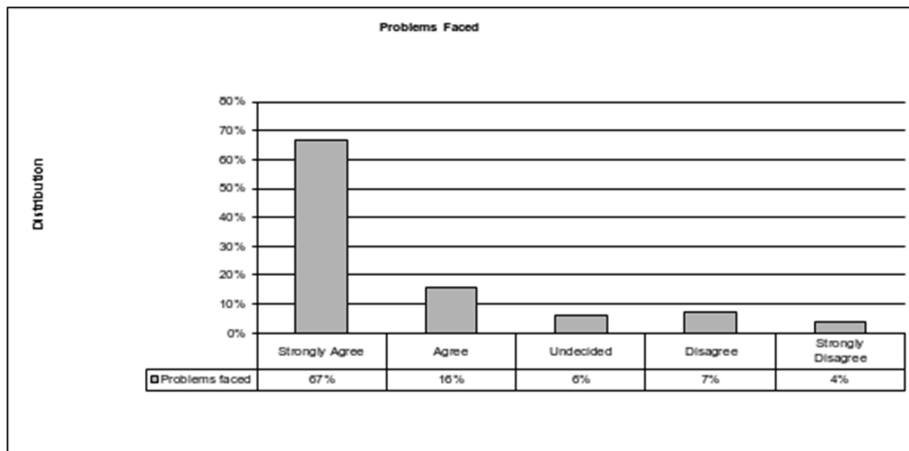
The findings of the study agree with what was observed in the past by the Commonwealth of Learning (2003) that open and distance learning programmes has the potential to expand the limited number of apace available for campus-based Institutions which are few in numbers and have stringent entrance requirements. Therefore, distance learning offers opportunities for education outside the conventional system by providing flexibility in pursuing courses and taking examinations.

The study also shows that some of the students which formed part of civil servants as shown in Figure 4 with 34% are Government secondary and Primary School Teachers who are also in possession of Ordinary National Diploma / National Certificate of Education or Primary School Teaching Certificate. The findings are in line with observations made by Akintayo and Bunza (2000) that distance learning Programme makes learning convenient for the working class. However, the results of the study further show that there are some students who are currently applicants.

### **The Challenges Faced in the Programmes**

Although University of Maiduguri Open and Distance Learning programmes have come along with various benefits as discussed in the

preceding section, it is faced with a number of challenges. Thus, respondents were asked to states the challenges confronting the operations of Open and Distance Learning at the University of Maiduguri.



Source: Field Survey, 2018

**Fig.5: Problem Faced by the students**

Most of the students as shown in Figure 5 with 68% are faced with problem of ineffective and inefficient online tutoring as also attested by four out of the six Heads of Department, three out of the five Heads of Units and five out of the six e-tutors who suggested that the Centre should recruit and train more e-tutors to improve online facilitation for effective and efficient service delivery to the students.

The study established that there is strong need to recruit e-tutors for education courses as evidenced by a statement made by one of the Heads of Department that reads: University of Maiduguri Centre for distance learning has the potential to increase access to higher education and reduce shortage of teachers as observed by COL that Currently, we need 2.7 million additional teachers globally. Open and distance learning can play a role in helping achieve such scale but needs to be handled by well-trained e-tutors who can tutor students in carrying out experiments such as micro teaching and teaching practice which are must in education based courses as observed by Boughey (2005).

Four out of the Six Heads of Department rightly observed the problem of negative perception of distance learning programmes, especially by the general public, to the extent that one of them commented that "some people think that distance learning students are half-baked simply because they study online in comfort of their working places and at home." The problem of bad perception of distance learning has been established by some researchers such as Valentine (2002), Commonwealth of Learning (2002), and Wilson (2008), and who have all independently observed that some key officers, who are policy makers, perceive distance learning Programmes as sub-standard. The scale of the challenge requires alternative approaches. Braimoh observed that distance education and technology-enabled learning can help us increase access, reduce costs and improve quality, and it is for this reason that COL has been working with various institutions in Nigeria to enable them to harness the full potential of open and distance learning (ODL).

### **Conclusion**

There is no doubt that the introduction of distance learning programme has eased pressure on Universities to meet the demand of the increasing number of qualified students in need of University education. Over the years, the number of qualified applicants applying for higher education into University of Maiduguri has increased, yet the Universities do not have the capacity to admit or accommodate all these qualified applicants.

Notwithstanding the above challenges, it is the position of this study that a well-managed open and distance learning has the potential to widening access to higher education especially for the previously disadvantage individuals who might not have had the opportunity to access higher education and by extension, acquire tertiary qualifications through conventional, full-time, campus-based face to face mode of operations.

The study has established the potential of distance learning programme of the University of Maiduguri towards enhancing access to higher

education in Borno State. This is made possible due to the flexibility of the programme whereby students are allowed to study while working.

### **Recommendations**

The study recommends that the Centre for distance learning should train more e-tutors to fill the present gap for effective and efficient service delivery to the students. This will go a long way in providing timely feedback to learners' online facilitation.

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