



**Trend Analysis of Access to Higher Education Through the Distance Learning Programme in the Northeast, Nigeria**

**Une Analyse Des Tendances De L'accès À L'enseignement Supérieur Grâce Au Programme D'apprentissage À Distance Dans Le Nord-est Du Nigéria**

**John Abdullahi**

Department of Geography, University of Maiduguri, PMB 1069, Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria

Email: [drajohn74@gmail.com](mailto:drajohn74@gmail.com) Phone No. 08036821438, 08026497508

**Dr. Nwachukwu Ruphina Ukamaka**

Department of Adult Education and Extra Mural Studies  
University of Nigeria, Nsuka

Email: [ruphina.nwachukwu@unn.edu.ng](mailto:ruphina.nwachukwu@unn.edu.ng) Phone No. +2347015378097

**Peter Y. Mshelia**

Department of Library and Information Science  
Faculty of Education  
University of Maiduguri

Email: [petermshelia@unimaid.edu.ng](mailto:petermshelia@unimaid.edu.ng) Phone No. +2348060608884

**Abstract**

---

*This study analyzed open and distance learning (ODL) programme in providing access to higher education in Northeast, Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to: identify institutions that run ODL programme in the northeast; analyse students' admission, enrolments, graduation (completion) and identify the challenges faced by such ODL centres. The study used secondary data obtained from two purposively selected ODL centres (Modibbo Adamawa Federal University of Technology and University of Maiduguri) and survey for primary data. The data generated were analyzed using SPSS version 23 and presented in graphs and tables. The study found that Adamawa State University, Taraba State University, Modibbo Adamawa Federal University of Science and Technology and University of Maiduguri are the institutions that currently operate the ODL programme in the Northeast. The study revealed that students' admission, enrolment and graduation from the ODL programme have increased in the two institutions.*

*The programme has contributed significantly to access to higher education in the Northeast. The programme, however, faces crucial inadequacies including funding, ICT facilities and trained personnel. The study recommended increased funding for ODL programme by the Federal and State government to enable the programme to be effective and achieve its goal. It also suggested the upgrading of ICT facilities and deployment of personnel to the ODL programme, and continuous training and re-training of ODL staff.*

**Keywords:** Access, Higher education, distance learning, Northeast Nigeria

---

### Résumé

*Cette étude a analysé le programme d'enseignement ouvert et à distance (FOAD) dans le nord-est du Nigeria. Les objectifs de l'étude étaient les suivants : identifier les établissements qui gèrent le programme FOAD dans le nord-est : analyser l'admission des étudiants, les inscriptions, l'obtention du diplôme (achèvement) et cerner les défis auxquels font face ces centres. L'étude a utilisé des données secondaires obtenues auprès de deux centres de FOAD choisis à dessein (Modibbo Adamawa Federal University of Technology et University of Maiduguri) et a mené une enquête pour obtenir les données primaires. Les données générées ont été analysées à l'aide de la version 23 de la SPSS et présentées sous forme de graphiques et tableaux. L'étude a révélé que l'Université d'État d'Adamawa, l'Université d'État de Taraba, l'Université fédérale des sciences et de la technologie de Modibo d'Adamawa sont les institutions qui opèrent actuellement le programme FOAD dans le nord-est. L'enquête a révélé que l'admission des étudiants, les inscriptions et les diplômes du programme FOAD ont augmenté dans deux établissements (lesquels ?). Le programme a contribué de manière significative à l'accès à l'enseignement supérieur dans le nord-est. Cependant, le programme, fait face à des insuffisances cruciales, notamment en matière de financement, d'équipements TIC et de personnel formé. L'étude a recommandé une augmentation du financement du programme FOAD par le gouvernement fédéral et local afin de permettre au programme d'être efficace et d'atteindre son objectif. Elle a également suggéré la mise à niveau des équipements TIC, le déploiement de personnel au programme FOAD, la formation continue et le recyclage du personnel FOAD.*

---

**Mots-clés :** accès, études Supérieures, enseignement à distance, nord-est du Nigéria

## **Introduction**

Access to education at all levels is one of the fundamental human rights globally. Despite this, access to higher education in Nigeria generally and Northeastern Nigeria in particular is a mirage for many people in spite of the availability of numerous federal, state and private universities in the country. The institutions are unable to cater for the ever increasing number of potential and qualified applicants competing for the limited number of vacancies because of the inadequacies of vacancies for them and facilities including learning and teaching (Okojie, 2008). Also, the high cost of providing quality higher education by government and/or the inability of prospective students to pay for the service are an important hindrance for millions of people.

In an effort by the federal government to provide lasting and reliable solution to this problem of access to higher education, some universities were authorized to adopt the distance education programme as a viable complement to the regular or conventional face to face on-campus system, (Ogunlela & Ogunleye, 2014). The University of Maiduguri (Unimaid) and Modibbo Adamawa University of Science and Technology Yola (MAUTEC) are among the six universities that were granted license to operate the dual mode programmes. All the six institutions availed themselves of the opportunity to become dual mode institutions providing both regular and distance learning programmes concurrently.

The distance learning programme was envisaged to significantly create equitable access to potential applicants, affordable and flexible higher education that is compatible with that of the conventional. The distance learning programme offers the opportunity to those who under normal circumstances would find going to the conventional university system unattractive or for such reasons as family, age, work obligations, competition, affordability and other logistics. Both Unimaid and MAUTEC currently have a total of 10, 000 and 5,000 students respectively (Examination and Records, 2019).

This paper analyzed the trends of admission, enrolment and graduation or completion of degree programmes in Unimaid and MAUTEC distance learning programmes for a period of six years (2012- 2017). The paper contextualized admitted students as the number of applicants that were offered admission to pursue a programme. Enrolled students as number of admitted students that registered and participated in the programmes while graduated

students is the number of students that successfully fulfilled all the requirements of a programme and are found worthy of certification and were or would be awarded certificate by their institution.

The study used trend analysis which is anchored on longitudinal consideration of records indicating what actually happened in the past, what the present situation is, and upon the basis of that determined what is likely to occur in the future (Bell and Best, 1986). According to Koul (1995), trend analysis is carried out through documentary survey at repeated intervals. Okojie, (2008) defined programme completion as a reflection or outcome measure that addresses the quality of a programme's success with respect to students' achievement. The Council further observed that completion or graduation reflects multiple facets of the effectiveness of a programme. Other scholars like Ndudzo and Nyatanga (2013) used the push and pull theory that explains the factors which attract students to distance learning programmes as well as those factors which discourage students from enrolling into distance learning programmes. Ndudzo and Nyatanga (2013) found that convenience of the programme is one of the strongest pull factors. Other pull factors include flexibility, affordability. They observed that the major push factors discouraging people from enrolling into the ODL in Nigeria include inaccessibility of computers and internet, inadequate funding for education and limited time for online tutoring. Rashid, Jahan, Islam and Ratna (2015) carried out a study on pull and push factors to ODL programme and revealed that push factors are institution based. They include work load, factors associated with examination, financial constraint and lack of understanding of course materials among others. Waldrop (2013) observed that decreasing enrolment and low completion rates in distance learning programmes is well documented. According to Dede as reported in (Waldrop, 2013), distance learning programmes since 19<sup>th</sup> Century is characterized by rapid growth of students enrolment and the challenges of retention and completion. Similarly, Wang and Baker (2015) observed that there is a low rate of completion of students in ODL programmes attributing it to family challenges, social responsibilities and busy schedules at workplaces, among others. Wang and Baker (2015) further observed that it is not clear among distance learners whether finishing within the stipulated time is actually their priority. Hickman (2003) observed that many students are faced with financial difficulties which result into deferring their studies hence contributing to low rate of graduation among the ODL students. Gachugi (2013) said that distance learners are not

only adults but mostly parents as well. Thus, they are facing the challenges of handling multiple roles which result in not only low performance but also low rates of graduation.

The importance of application of new technology for educational purposes cannot be overemphasized as it has become the most powerful tool in open distance learning systems Ogunleye and Apata (2018). Technology-driven teaching and learning has helped significantly in bridging the physical barrier between teachers and learners by enabling the flexible delivery of qualitative education that is not affected by distance, age, time and place (Tailor, 2006). This is gaining ground gradually but not totally free from challenges such as high cost of owning personal computers as well as limited ICT infrastructure coupled with limited networking capacity still associated with ODL in developing countries (Okopi & Oguneye, 2016).

This study analyzed ODL programme in providing access to higher education in Northeast, Nigeria. The goal or aim of the study was to have an understanding of the performance of the ODL programme in the study area, the northeast region of Nigeria to point ways to its improvement. The realization of this aim was pursued through some objectives which provided answers to the research questions.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The specific objectives of the study were to:

- I. identify institutions that run Open and Distance Learning programme in the northeast;
- ii. analyse students' admission, enrolments, graduation (completion of programme); and
- iii. identify the challenges faced by the ODL Centres in the northeast, Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were used as a guide for the study

- i. How many institutions operate ODL programmes in the northeast?
- ii. What is the admission, enrolment and graduation rate of the ODL programmes?
- iii. What are the challenges faced by the ODL centres in the northeast?

### **Methodology**

Two centres were purposively selected because they were among the early ODL centres in the northeast and only those that have experienced the full cycle of the programme from admitting to graduating students. Primary and

secondary data were used to obtain information on admission, enrolment and graduation of students in the ODL programmes of University of Maiduguri (Unimaid) and Modibo Adamawa Federal University of Science and Technology, Yola (MAUTECH) from 2012 to 2017. The study used a survey design linked with trends analysis. Primary data on problems faced by the centres were obtained from two key informants (principal officers) from each centre of the two universities through interview. Secondary data on admission, enrolment and graduation from 2012 to 2017 were obtained from the Examination and Academic Records Office of the two centres. The data generated for the study were analyzed using SPSS version 23 and presented in graphs and tables.

## **Results**

The findings of the study with respect to its objectives are presented in the sections that follow.

### **Identification of Institutions Running ODL Programme in Northeast Nigeria**

The study found that four institutions in the study area have ODL programme. These institutions are the University of Maiduguri, Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola, Adamawa State University, and Taraba State University, Jalingo. The study also found that only the University of Maiduguri and Modibbo Adama University of Technology have the ODL programme that have run full cycle, that is, have admitted students, enrolled and graduated them.

### **Admission Trend of University of Maiduguri and Modibbo Adama University of Technology (2012 to 2017)**

The admission trend of students into the ODL programme of University of Maiduguri and Modibbo Adama University of Technology from 2012 to 2017 is presented in Figure 1. Figure 1 shows that the number of students admitted into the ODL programme was more or less the same for the first four academic sessions 2012 to 2015; it rose sharply to its peak in 2016 when 5000 students were admitted into the programme. The number of students given offer of admission declined to about 3500 in 2017. The trend line shows a somewhat a steady increase for the period.

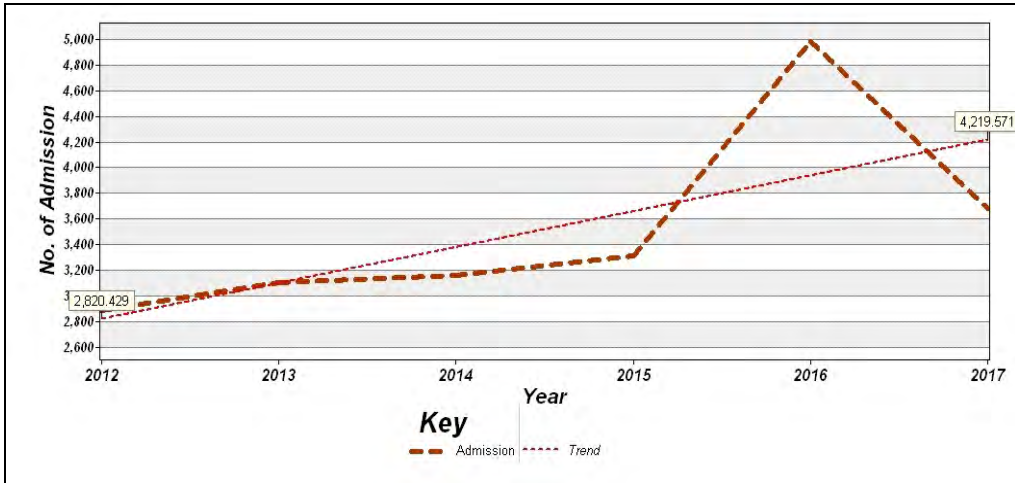


Figure 1: Graph Showing Admission trends from 2012-2017

### Enrolment Trend of University of Maiduguri and Modibbo Adama University of Technology from 2012 to 2017

With regards to actual number of students who registered into the ODL programme after being offered admission, there was an increase from 2012 to 2013. This was followed by a sharp reduction in 2014 followed by an increasing trend that peaked in 2016 as shown in Figure 2. The depression in the trend of enrolment in the year 2014 could be attributed to the rise in terrorist activities of the Boko Haram insurgency with its epicentre in the northeast, which scared students from enrolling even after being admitted into the ODL programme. The seeming contradiction between the ODL programme being more or less a virtual school and fear of the atrocities of the Boko Haram insurgents probably had to do with the fact that enrollment into fieldwork- and laboratory-based programmes required students to go to the mother campus for fieldwork and practicum each year. Also, in the blended mode of instruction, students are required to have face to face contact with their course instructors at the mother campus at least twice per semester. Thirdly, orientation at the beginning of the programme is always done at the mother campus. Naturally, the increase in enrolment began again with the substantial reduction of the activities of the insurgents and significant improvement in the security situation in the northeast that began in 2015 and improved even more in 2016. Student's enrolment has been a great challenge in ODL programmes as observed by Rashid *et al* (2015). Their findings revealed that financial constraint, examination related issues (failure) and lack of proper comprehension of course materials among others.



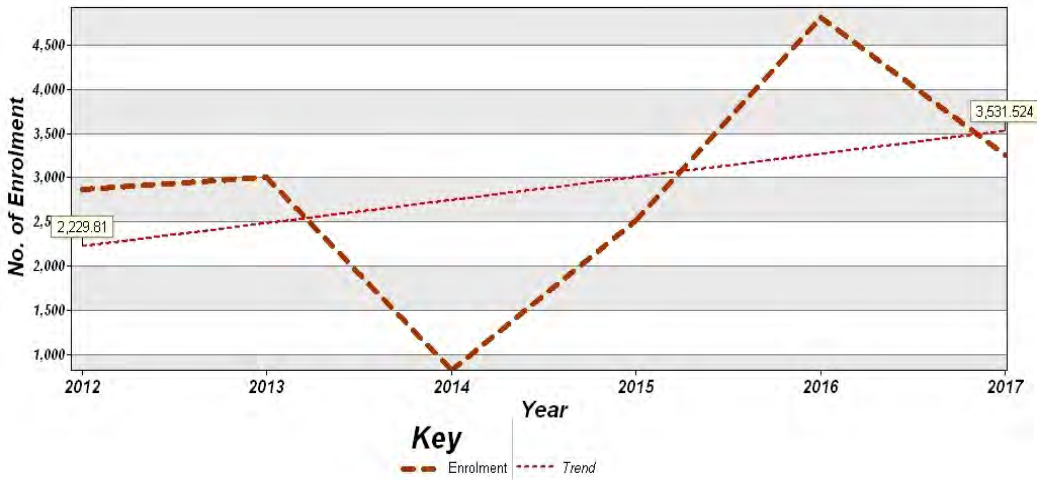


Figure 2: Graph Showing Enrolment Trends from 2012-2017

**Graduation Trend of University of Maiduguri and Modibbo Adama University of Technology (2012 to 2017)**

Figure 3 shows the trend of graduation in the two campuses under study. The trend is relatively low compared to those of admission and enrolment for the same period, 2012-2017. This state of affairs could be attributed to the economic recession which made some students not to register and complete their programme, and graduate as required by the policy of the universities. Some other students were scared by the terrorist activities of the Boko Haram in the northeast. The factors militating against students' graduation have been reported by other studies. Hickman\ (2003) reported that ODL students are faced with financial problem which results into deferment of studies. Gachugi (2013) observed that ODL students are faced with the challenges of managing limited time and resources for their workplaces and family as most of them are workers and parents.

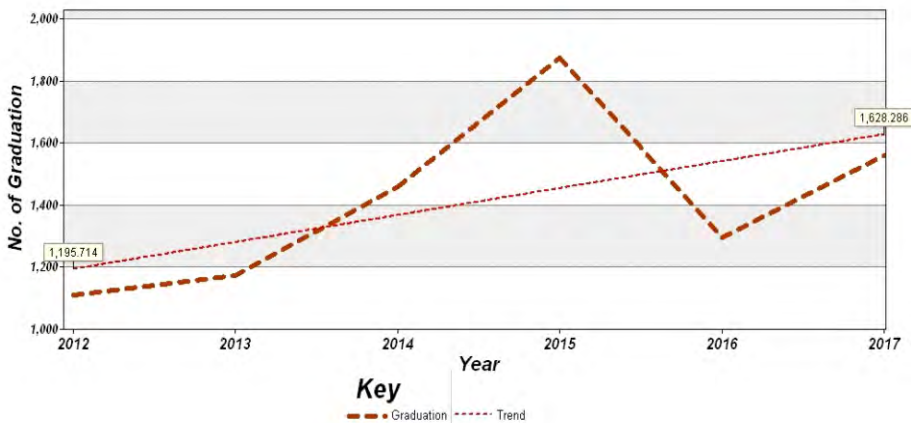


Figure 3: Graduation Trends from 2012-2017



### Admission, enrolment and graduation trends from 2012 to 2017

The combined graph in Figure 4 shows the parameters under study at a glance. Their presence in a single graph affords a panoramic view of their trends. The rationale for their respective trends has earlier been given. It has been noted that there was a general progressive trends of admission, enrolment and graduation in the programmes across the years under review. However, the graduation is relatively low compared with the admission and enrolment which may not be unconnected with the flexible nature of the programme as well as the problems faces by the ODL students. This was equally observed by Hickman (2003) that many students of ODL are faced with financial difficulties which translate into deferring their studies hence results into low rate of graduation among the ODL students. It was equally reported by Gachugi (2013) that distance learners are both adults and parents therefore are facing the challenges of handling various responsibilities as such contributing to low performance and low rates of graduation.

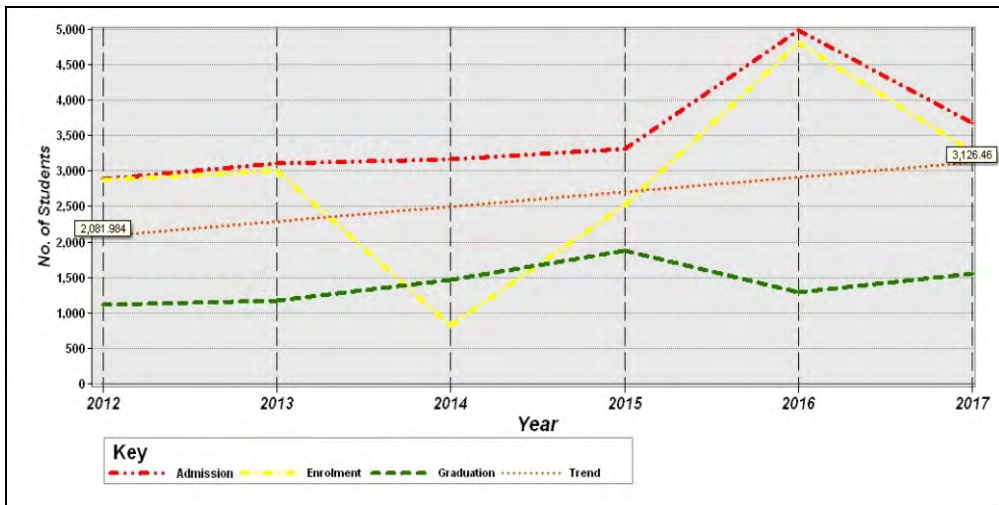


Figure 4: Admission, Enrolment and Graduation Trends from 2012-2017

### Problems faced by ODL Centres in the Northeast

The trends across the two study institutions show that there is increasing trend of admission, relative enrolment with decreasing graduation for some years under study. The decreasing trends in graduation (see Figures 2 & 4) raise concerns about the sustainability of the programmes. Key informants in both

the University of Maiduguri and Modibbo Adama University of Technology were not worried about the trend, noting that it is not peculiar to the two centres but it is one of the characteristics associated with ODL programmes elsewhere. According to the key informants there may be other reasons linked to the drop in graduation. These problems according to them include inadequate facilities and infrastructures, inadequate trained staff and heavy workload, low level of quality management system as well as limited funding from government. These challenges were equally observed by Woldetensae (2013) as problems militating against delivery of quality higher education in Africa.

### **Discussion**

Four institutions, namely, Adamawa State University, Taraba State University, Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola and University of Maiduguri licensed by the National University Commission (NUC) are currently operating the ODL programmes. Only two, Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola and University of Maiduguri have operated the programme full cycle from admitting to graduating students. The other two are new and are somewhere between admitting and graduation of students. These institutions were given license to operate based on the baseline minimum standard set as stated by Okojie (2008) that regardless of proprietorship, government is absolutely responsible for the licensing of Universities in Nigeria. According to Erimma (2016), University of South Africa (UNISA) was the first to commence the ODL programmes using the e-learning and currently has a total student population of 300,000 including students from 130 countries worldwide. Erimma (2016) reported that ODL has become a panacea for providing access to higher education to significant number of potential applicant who could not gain admission into the conventional systems. Although more people have access to education, it is only worthwhile if the education they have is of good quality, that is, education that gives them skills and makes them employable and productive in the society. Inadequate education is both inappropriate education and it is also dangerous education.

The finding of the study shows that admission and enrolment rates into the programmes is on the increase progressively over the years under study as shown in Figure 4. However, graduation rate seems to be relatively low which could be attributed to the flexible nature of the program. This finding agrees with the observation of Bharat and Lalita (2007) that student retention and graduation in ODL is comparatively low with conventional systems. This was equally reported by Gabriel (2014) that ODL students are parents that have to settle children school fees first before considering their as such it affects their graduation when they failed to settled both. This was equally observed by Erimma (2016) that the rate of graduation is very low in UNISA with same trend in Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Tanzania.

The problems of inadequate funding, high enrolment in the circumstances of inadequate facilities and infrastructures as well as inadequate trained staff, have been noted by Woldetensae (2013). These problems have serious implications for the success or sustainability of the ODL programme in the study area in particular and the country in general. Those charged with the provision and management of ODL programme should work hard to ensure that the programme meets the aspirations of its important stakeholders including those that established it as well as the aspirations of the students.

### **Conclusion**

Four institutions in the northeast region of Nigeria have the ODL programme. Of these four, only two institutions have operated the programme full cycle. The programme has contributed significantly to access to higher education in the Northeast as the number of people gaining access to higher education has increased through it. However, the quality of the ODL programme and its laudable goals will be jeopardized by inadequacies of funds, facilities and trained staff. These problems if urgently attended to will make the ODL programme to succeed. To realize this, the study makes the following suggestions.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the researcher recommends that:

- I. ODL centres should adopt strategies that will increase the rates of enrolment and graduation. This is based on the findings of the study that the rate of graduation is gradually dropping in the programmes.
- ii. The programmes are faced with the challenges of inadequate funding, inadequate ICT facilities and inadequate trained personnel. The study recommends that there is need for increased funding for ODL programme by the Federal and State government.
- iii. ICT facilities and personnel should be deployed into the ODL programme and continuous training and re-training of ODL staff.

## References

- Bell, P., & Best, R. (1986). *Supportive education*. Oxford, Blackwell.
- Bharat, I., F. & Lalita S.K. (2007). Mobile Learning and Student Retention. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*. Vol.8.No.2.
- Erimma, G.O. (2016). Sustainable Distance E-Learning for Enhanced Students Retention and Support. *West African Journal of Open and Flexible Learning*. Vol.5 No.1
- Gabriel, K. (2014). Strategy for a Sustainable Quality Delivery Model of ODL Programmes for Massive Enrolments and E-learning: The Case for Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Higher Education*. Vol.3.No3.
- Gachugi, J. (2013). *Factors influencing completion of bachelor of education distance learners at Kenya Methodists University: A case of Nyeri municipality* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nairobi).
- Hickman, C. J. (2003). Results of survey regarding distance education offerings. Washington, DC: University Continuing Education Association (UCEA) Distance Learning Community of Practice (Research Committee report).
- Koul, B. N. (1995). Trends, directions and needs: A view from developing countries. In *Open and distance learning today*, ed. F. Lockwood, 23-31, London and New York: Routledge.
- Ndudzo, D. & Nyatanga, E. K. (2013) Push and Pull Factors in ODL Service Delivery: A Case Study of Learners at the Zimbabwe Open University *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (AJHSS) Volume 1(3)*.
- Okojie, J. A. (2008). Licensing, Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Nigerian Universities: Achievements and Challenges, CHEA Summer workshop.
- Ogunleye, B. O. & Apata, F. S. (2018). Integrating intelligent pedagogical agents into learning management systems for student exposure to science experiments in the National

Open University of Nigeria. *KIU Journal of Education*, 13 (2), 31-51.

- Ogunlela, V. B. & Ogunleye, B. O. (2014). Promoting quality assurance practices for ODL programmes in West African higher education institutions: The role of RETRIDAL. *International Open and Distance Learning Journal*. 4<sup>th</sup> ACDE 2014 Special Edition, 95-108.
- Okopi, F. O. & Ogunleye, B. O. (2016). Staff and students' assessment of quality of learner support services in the National Open University of Nigeria. *International Journal of Education, Science, Humanities, Mathematics and Environmental Studies*, 8 (1 & 2), 138-153.
- Rashid, M. M. Jahan, M., Islam, M. A., & Ratna, M. M. (2015). Student enrollment and dropout: An evaluation study of diploma in computer science and application programme at Bangladesh Open University. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*.
- Taylor, J., Sharples, M., O'Malley, C., Vavoula, G. & Waycott, J. (2006). Towards a task model for mobile learning a dialectical approach. *International Journal of Learning Technology*, 2(2/3), 138-158.
- Vincent A.T., Olugbenga D. O., Yemisi I.O., Anthonia B., Y. & Dorothy, O. (2016). Minority Students in Graduate Studies: An Exploration into Women's Accessibility to Higher Education through the Open and Distance Learning Mode in Nigeria. *West African Journal of Open and Flexible Learning*. Vol.5 No. , 1-23.
- Waldrop, M. (2013). Campus 2.0. *Nature*, 495, (160-163) Woldetensae, Y. (2013). The overall landscape of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Africa.' African Union Commission.

