E-SUPERVISION OF STUDENTS' RESEARCH WRITING IN NIGERIAN OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

[1]FASASI Yunus Adebunmi AWODIJI Omotayo Adewale ADEWALE, [2]Sulaimon

Abstract

Research is an aspect of the academic programme which students in tertiary educational institutions are expected to undergo. It involves identification, investigation and suggestion of solutions to societal developmental problems. Higher education students in open and distance learning institutions and centers make use of print and electronic media in knowledge and skill acquisition with minimal physical contact. Their research activities are also electronically supervised. This paper examines prospects and challenges of using electronic method of research project supervision in Nigeria. It also discusses the roles of a supervisor in assisting distance learners to achieve the objectives of conducting an academic research. More funding of ICT education for lecturers and students, Public and Private Partnership (PPP) for the provision of facilities among others were recommended by this study to ameliorate the challenges of E-supervision in Nigerian higher institutions.

Keywords*: E-supervision, E-learning, Academic Research, Open and Distance Education, Challenges, Prospects.*

1.Introduction

Acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies through education is vital to the development of a nation. In Nigeria, the Government has adopted education as an instrument for self-reliance, dynamic economy and national unity (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013).The Government is therefore investing on education sector of the nation as reflected in annual budgetary allocation and development plans. Also, the Government implemented educational policies and programmes at different periods of national development. For example, there were free education programmes in 1976 and 1979. In 1999, the Government introduced Universal Basic Education as a demonstration of its commitment to the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All (Universal Basic Education Commission, 2004). Consequently, educational institutions at primary and secondary levels experienced an increase in student population. This had implications on tertiary education as secondary school leavers are seeking admission into higher educational institutions.

Tertiary educational institutions comprise of universities, polytechnics, monotechnics, colleges of education and other institutions above secondary schools. The institutions are to admit candidates based on their carrying-capacities (human and material resources available to take care of students in the institutions). Hence, many qualified applicants could not secure admission. This scenario led to expansion of existing institutions and establishment of others. As conventional institutions, they basically admit full time students and engage in face-to-face classroom teaching and learning process. In response to increasing demand for higher education, many of these institutions also created units, departments, institutes, study-centres and outreaches which admit students on part-time studies.

[1] Department of Educational Management, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria
[2] Department of Management Science, COMSATS Islamabad Pakistan

The Government established National Teachers' Institute (NTI) at Kaduna in 1976 for training of teachers. Also, in 2002, the Government established the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). These are open and distance educational institutions and they are to complement efforts of conventional tertiary institutions in addressing educational expansion. They enroll students on part-time for specialization in different academic and professional fields based on the student's choice and relevance to national needs. Their activities are in line with Federal Government Policy which states that tertiary institutions would be expected to pursue their manpower training and other goals through full-time, sandwich and other flexible learning programmes (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013).

Students in higher educational institutions (Open and Distance Education inclusive) are required to conduct researches on different aspects of their academic programmes. This is a requirement for completion of their courses and graduation. The students are to be supervised by their lecturers who are specialists in their fields of study. Open and Distance Education Centres are designed as e-learning centres where students and their lecturers have minimum face-to-face interaction and make use of print media, internet and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities for teaching and learning process. This mode of interaction makes electronic supervision of students' research studies imperative since they are e-learning students whose physical interaction with teachers and colleagues is very minimal. Electronic research supervision could either be facilitated or frustrated by certain factors which need to be identified and addressed in order to be able to achieve desired objectives.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to unveil the status of E-supervision of students' research writing in Open and Distance Education (ODE) institutions in Nigeria. In this paper, challenges and prospects of electronic supervision of open and distance learning students' research projects cum roles of government are examined. The paper concludes with recommendations for making e-supervision effective.

1.2 Significance of the Study

It is believed that findings of this study will be of immense benefits to government, educational planner, lecturers and students in Nigeria and other countries of the world. The findings will provide direction on how to boost the capacity of higher institutions in the area of open and distance education and E-supervisory relationship between lecturers and students in particular. It will call the attention of government to doing the needful in Nigeria tertiary institutions.

2.Literature Review

2.1 Open and Distance Education (ODE)

Open and Distance Education (ODE) is a learner-centred process of knowledge and skill development where the teacher and the learner are not necessarily in the same location at the time of teaching and learning interaction. They contact one another through print and electronic media and occasional face-to-face at appointed time and designated study-centres. Open and Distance Education is also referred to as Correspondence Education, Distance Education, Extra-mural Studies and Home-based Studies (Fagbamiye, 2000, Jayeola-Omoyeni, 2000).These terms reflect a variety of methods and nature of ODE.

In open and distance education, there is open learning. There is openness in admission, teaching media, space, time, course content and course objectives. Also, distance learning implies that teacher and learners are in different locations and not necessarily together in a

classroom or any other location at the same time. They are always distant to one another (Fasasi 2004). ODE takes place in different settings. There are single mode and dual mode institutions. The institutions specifically established for ODE run a single mode of administration. Examples are the National Teachers Institute which provides distance education at sub-degree level for training of teachers and National Open University of Nigeria provides distance education at degree level. Universities and other higher educational institution which operate conventional face-to-face teaching-learning processes and also has open-distance education programmes are referred to as dual mode institutions (Fagbamiye, 2000, Fasasi, 2004).

ODE operation either as a single or a dual mode has the goals of providing access to quality education, meeting employers and employees' special needs and encouraging life learning opportunities (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013) In pursuit of these goals the educational institutions mounted courses for ODE learners. For example, NTI prepares students for Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE), Post Graduate Diploma in Education, Advanced Diploma in School Supervision and Inspection, Advanced Diploma in Guidance and Counselling and Advanced Diploma in Early Childhood Education (National Teachers Institute, 2015). The National Open University of Nigeria offers courses in agriculture, administration, art, science, social sciences, education and basic medical sciences (NOUN, 2015). The conventional universities which operate dual mode system offer courses which are accredited by National Universities Commission as having facilities for Open and Distance Education. The students are prepared towards knowledge and skill utilization in their fields of specialization. In addition, they are expected to identify developmental challenges in their fields, conduct researches and suggest ways of resolving the challenges. This is done in research projects which they embark upon and complete as a necessary requirement for graduation.

2.2   Student Research Project

An academic research is a careful study of a subject with a view to discovering new ways of doing things. According to Nworgu (2006), it is a controlled enquiry which is directed towards solving identified problems and its outcome provides basis for societal development. In the same vein, Kulbir (2013) states that a research is a scientific investigation which is meant to discover new idea, correct old practice and suggest solutions to existing problems. It is a careful search for solutions to problems which incapacitate mankind.

In order to assist students in the conduct of research, the students are expected to offer courses in research process before they are assigned to research supervisors. As observed by Ajala (2002) many students lack ability to apply the knowledge of research-related courses which they acquire at lower to the practical aspect of research process while some have phobia for research study. The students therefore require guidance and motivation by their supervisors.

2.3   Concept of E-Supervision

Supervision is a process of stimulating, guiding, improving, refreshing, encouraging and overseeing activities of agroupwith the hope of seeking their cooperation towards accomplishment of organizational task(Ogunsaju, 2006;Awodiji, Famaye, & Afolabi, 2015). It refers to direction, guidance and coordination of the activities of the supervisees (Albar, 2012). Hase and Kenyon(2000) opined that supervision can be described as heutagogy, which recognizes the need for flexible and autonomous learning environments, where students are able to determine their paths of learning while teachers provide attendant resources to support them in the process. Thus, supervision is an administrative function which is directed towards ascertaining that efforts in all units of an organization are in line with set goals. Generally,

supervision takes a form of face-to-face between the supervisor and the supervisees. As observed by Fasasi and Alabi (2015), this traditional nature of supervision is being challenged by scientific and technological development in the last few decades. The digital era has introduced e-supervision to facilitate teaching, learning, research and supervisory activities.

Mardah (2009) describes e-supervision as a web-based application and a natural complement to the use of distance learning technologies which enables a supervisor to perform supervisory duties at a geographical distant location. Similarly, Hanadi (2009) opines that e-supervision aims to give the supervisors (Lecturers) accessibility, continuous and open support to their supervisees (students) which will reduce their stress. Albar (2012) states that e-supervision offers a way of overseeing the supervisee at geographically distant sites. It can also be considered as virtual supervision where supervisors are connected to the scattered supervisees virtually. Therefore, e-supervision can be regarded as a way of stimulating, directing, improving, refreshing, encouraging and overseeing students' research writing with the use of electronic devices in order for the supervisors and supervisees to be successful in the task.

Major component of any electronic learning system comprises of communication, online discussion, software and hardware sharing and networking. These can be achieved today via e-mail, Mobile Phone, Skype, Twitter, Face book, Whats App, IMO, Instagram, Viber, among others. Hence, the supervisors and their supervisees can use any of these components or platforms in course of research writing. Albar (2012) explains that e-supervision would require skills of effective communication and use of ICT.

2.4   Roles of a Supervisor in Students' Research Work

The supervisor plays significant roles in the students' research writing. The main function of a research supervisor is to assist, encourage, guide and support students throughout their academic research writing (Imperial College, 2014). Supervision of research work is an activity that facilitates students' development towards becoming independent and critical scholars in their respective fields of study (Pimmer, Chipps, Brysiewicz, Walters, Linxen, and Gröhbiel. Supervisors are expected to provide series of expertise in the supervision of their students' research work. The objective of research supervision can be likened to the facilitation of local capacity development (Pimmer, et al., Blaschke (2012) submits that heutagogy is the development of student capacity, competency and capability with the aim of preparing them to deal properly with the unforeseeable complexities of today's life. The roles of supervisor can be categorized as follows:

2.4.1 Source of Information. Research is a review of past or existing information to solve an identified problem. The supervisor as an expert and authority in his field of study is expected to possess knowledge on the students' area of study. Heis expected to give direction to the supervisees on how or where information relating to the student research topic can be found (Polonski, 2004). This relevant information can be in form of online literature from impact factor journal or books on the library shelf. As a matter of fact, supervisor can provide a link between supervisees and external source of information.

2.4.2 Instructor. Conduct research is a learning process. Students should be ready to learn during the course of their work. As an instructor, the supervisor could explain difficult material and direct student to read more material on the topic by providing articles or textbooks. If it is clear that a supervisee needs assistance, the supervisor will frequently work through the material with him. For instance, astudent may not understand how variables of topics should be related in a given way. This calls for the supervisor to frequently get in contact with students. Second, the

supervisor might facilitate learning by organizing formalized classes for students to teach them about aspects of the research process (Polonski, 2004).

2.4.3. Sounding Board. One of the most imperative roles of a supervisor is to act as a "sounding board," that is, someone whom student can resort to for ideas and guidance in the face of challenges (Polonski, 2004). Student may not have in-depth experience in research, whereas the supervisor will probably have this experience as an authority in his field of study. This will bring the students on track without losing sense of direction. This guiding role is important in a number of areas such as topic selection, approach to the research, and scope of the study among others.

2.4.4. Motivator. A supervisor serves as a motivator and keeps the students progressing through their research works. This is will propel students to be on track in course of executing research (Polonski, 2004). If student lost interest, the supervisor can stimulate their interest by ensuring that they understand the benefits, uniqueness of the research. The supervisor could advise the project student to prepare a research time table which would be regularly reviewed as the research study progresses.

2.4.5. Evaluator. Research writing is a learning activity that needs to be assessed. Mostly the supervisor is responsible, or partly responsible, for examining students' research if it achieves expected outcome and award grade (Polonski, 2004). In many cases, research works are also examined by other experts who were not involved in the process, i.e., independent examiners who may be within or external to the university.

3. Challenges to E-supervision in Nigerian Open and Distance Education

3.1. ICT Accessibility and Affordability. Lack of reliable internet service provider is a great challenge to electronic supervision in Nigeria. Also, many ODE students are either unemployed or under-employed. They could not afford facilities for e-learning and e-supervision.

3.2. Low Adoption Rate of Technology. Many institutions and individuals are conservatives in the adoption of technology. Olaniyi (2006), reports that companies and institutions are reluctant to invest in training staff. This has made technology to be poorly adopted and therefore posed a challenge toe-supervisory method.

3.3. Poor Computer Skills. Lack of requisite computer application skills by both the supervisor and supervisee could hinder electronic supervision. It has been reported by Kwofie and Henten (2011) that many students in developing countries have either not been introduced to computer or have a difficult time grasping the concepts and skills.

3.4. Supervisor's Work Load. It is a norm in the academic arena for a lecturer to meet up with the mandate delivery if they must remain relevant. These responsibilities are teaching, research and community service. Moreover, many of the lecturers are fulltime staff in their places of primary assignment. They took ODE as a part time job. Hence, the time set aside for project supervision is insufficient.

3.5. Unstable Electricity Supply: Fluctuating electricity supply threatens usability of some ICT tools and hinders successful implementation of e-supervision in Nigeria. Epileptic nature of power supply in Nigeria not only hinders e-supervisory relationships between lecturers and students but also damage some ICT facilities. This is probably the reason why Ezeani and Urama (2014) describe it as a huge dragon that cannot spite fire.

3.6.   Prospects of E-supervision in Nigeria

It is vital to enunciate what the educational stakeholders (government, lecturers, students, educational planners) in Nigeria stand to gain if E-supervision is taken seriously through open and distance educational system approach as follows:

1)   Supervision will be efficiently and effectively carried out by the students under the guidance of an ICT proficient supervisor.

2)   It is a means of actualization of ODE objectives. It will create an opportunity for admission seekers to be admitted into tertiary institutions in Nigeria as ICT facilities will make lecturers to attend to them at will.

3)   It will bridge the communication gap between supervisor and supervisee thereby reduces unnecessary delay and assault.

4)   It will encourage individualized instruction.

5)   This will also help to eliminate plagiarism from theses/ dissertations.

6)   Above all, it eliminates administrative bottleneck and excessive bureaucracy followed by supervisees before booking an appointment with their supervisors.

7)   E-supervision will offer lecturers golden opportunity for improvement in their research techniques, as innovations will come with the aid of e-learning.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

As noted by Mettiäinen (2015) information and communication technology creates new possibilities for supervision, but its introduction challenges the teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes. For these challenges to be surmounted, the following recommendations will be useful:

1. Government and private individuals should invest more in education through the provision of ICT facilities that will provide an enabling environment for e-learning and e-supervision (Anene, Imam, & Odumuh, 2014).

2. Government and ODE administrators should employ more and qualified lecturers with ICT skills and proficiency in to the educational institutions. This will reduce the workload on the supervisor and therefore give time for the supervisees.

3. Collaborative efforts should be intensified among higher education institution administrators to identify areas in the curricular where e-teaching and e-learning could be employed to both effect and promote e-supervision.

4. Compulsory and regular ICT training for all lecturers and students. This could be made a pre-requisite for lecturers' promotion and students' graduation from their various institutions.

5. Alternative means of power generation should be looked into such as power inverter, solar power among others. This will help in solving the problem of power epileptic. More so, the federal government is planning an independent power generation for all federal universities in Nigeria. This project should be extended to other tertiary institutions and ODE centres in Nigeria.

6. The current usage of social media should be explored by both supervisor and supervisee to facilitate research writing.

7. Government should make a provision for internet facilities for schools to avail them frequent use for academic activities. This could be achieved through Public and Private Partnerships.

References

Ajala, V. O. (2002).*Scholarly writing guide for researchers.* Ibadan: May Best Publishers

Albar, A. M. (2012). An Electronic Supervision System Architecture in Education. *European Journal of Business and Management, 4*(8), 140-148. doi:PD

Anene, J. N., Imam, H., & Odumuh, T. (2014). Problem and Prospect E-learning in Nigerian Universities. *International Journal of Technology and Inclusive Education, 3*(2). Retrieved November 20, 2016

Awodiji, O. A., Famaye, E. O., & Afolabi, R. A. (2015). Instructional supervision in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects. *Al-hikmah Journal of Education, 2*(1), 46-53.

Blaschke, L. M. (2012). Heutagogy and lifelong learning: A review of heutagogical practice and self-determined learning. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning, 13*(1), 57-71.

Ezeani, A., & Urama, M. S. (2014). Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and the Nation's industrial development. *The clute international academic conference,*, 425-431.

Fagbamiye, E. O. (2000). The organisation and administration of distance education. In J.O. Fadipe & E.E. Oluchukwu (Eds).*Educational Planning and administration in Nigeria in the 21st century*, Chapter 27, pp 337-343. A Publication of the National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration. Ondo, Nigeria.

Fasasi, Y. A. (2004) Open and Distance learning: a strategy for the development of human resources in Nigeria. In E. O. Fagbamiye, J.B. Babalola, M. Fabunmi & A. O. Ayeni (Eds). *Management of primary and secondary education in Nigeria*. Pp193-201 Ibadan NAEAP.

Fasasi, Y. A. &Alabi, S.A. (2015). Information and communication technology: A tool for enhancing supervisory effectiveness in Nigerian educational institutions. *Journal of educational foundations 5(1),* 103-110. Published by Faculty of Education, University of Jos. Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013).*National policy on education*. Lagos: NERDC

Hanadi, O. M. (2009, 11 22). *ResearchGate.* Retrieved 10 22, 2016, from https://www.researchgate.net: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277304704

Hase, S., & Kenyon, C. (2000). From Andragoy to Hentagy. *Ultibase Article, 5*(3), 1-10

Imperial-College, I. (2014, July 2). *Research-Degree-Supervisor.* Retrieved 11 26, 2016, from https://www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/administration-and-support-services/registry/qa/public/good-practice/roles-and-responsibilities/Research-Degree-Supervisor.pdf

Jayeola-Omoyeni, M. S. (2000). Managing tutors and learners in distance education. In J.O. Fadipe & E.E. Oluchukwu (Eds). Educational Planning and administration in Nigeria in the 21st century, Chapter 28, pp 344-394. A Publication of the National *Institute for Educational Planning and Administration*. Ondo, Nigeria.

Kulbir, S. S. (2013) Methodology of research in education. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited.

Kwofie, B., & Henten, A. (2011). The advantages and challenges of e-learning implementation: The story of a developing nation. *3rd World Conference on Education Sciences, Bahcesehir University.* Istabul, Turkey. Retrieved November 20, 2016, from vbn.aau.dk

Mardah, H. O. (2009). An e-supervision system in education environment. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277304704

Mettiäinen, S. (2015). Electronic assessment and feedback tool in Supervision of nursing students during clinical training. *The Electronic Journal of e-Learning, 13*(1), 42-56. Retrieved November 20, 2016, from www.ejel.org

National Open University of Nigeria(2015).*Accredited programmes of the university.* www.nou.edu.ng

National Teachers Institute (2015). ntinigeria.org

Nworgu, B. G. (2006). *Educational research: Basic issues and methodology.* Ibadan: WisdomPublishers Limited.

Ogunsaju, S. (2006). *School management and supervision.* Ile-Ife: Clean Publisher.

Olaniyi, S. S. (2006). E-learning technology: The Nigeria experience. *Shape the change*, (pp. 1-11). Munich, Germany.

Pimmer, C., Chipps, J., Brysiewicz, P., Walters, F., Linxen, S., & Gröhbiel, U. (2016, September). Supervision on Social Media: Use and Perception of Facebook as a Research Education Tool in Disadvantaged AreasInternational Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning, 17*(5), 30-42. doi:html

Polonski, M. J. (2004, 6 3). *The Role of Supervisor-research.* Retrieved 11 26, 2016, from https://www.researchgate.net.

Universal Basic Education Commission (2004).*The compulsory, free universal basic education act and other related matters.* Abuja: UBEC