LEARNERS' SUPPORT SERVICES IN SINGLE AND DUAL-MODES DISTANCE LEARNING INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

BY

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ABSTRACT

Learners' support service is a critical component of an effective distance learning environment that focuses on provision of learning aids and assistance in facilitating delivery of content and skills development for the adult learners. Previous studies on learners' support services in distance learning institutions were foreign with dearth of comparison between the single mode (institution with one mode of instructional delivery) and dual mode (institution with two modes of instructional delivery) distance institutions. This study was, therefore, carried out to assess and compare the provision of learners' support services (Counselling Services - CS, ICT Provisions - ICTP, Library Services - LS, Study-skill Development - SsD, Tutorial Classes - TC, information flow, Academic Advisory Unit -AAU and Academic Progress Report -APR) in both single and dual mode distance learning institutions in Southwestern Nigeria using Keegan's criteria.

Inclusive Student Services Process Theory provided the framework, while the survey design of ex-post-facto was adopted. The Distance Learning Centre University of Ibadan was purposively selected as a dual-mode learning institute based on her year of establishment, while the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) was enlisted as a single mode institution. Four faculties (Education, Social Sciences, Arts and Science) common to the two universities were purposively selected. Proportionate to size and stratified sampling techniques were used to select 1576 students from the two institutions (UI- 617 and NOUN- 959). Instruments used were Learners' Support Services Typology (r=0.88), Availability (r=0.80), Quality (r=0.87), Accessibility (r=0.80), Affordability (r=0.88), Usability (r=0.79), Supportive (r=0.82) scales and Learners' Support Services Constrain Questionnaire (r=0.73). Four sessions each of key informant interviews and focus group discussions were held with management and personnel staff respectively. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and t-test at 0.05 level of significance, while qualitative data were content analysed.

Participants' age was 28.4±6.8 years, while majority (66.6%) was single and male (53.3%). Learner support services purposes were information flow (UI-39.9%, NOUN-60.7%);AAU (UI-39.7%, NOUN-60.3%); APR (UI-39.7%, NOUN-60.3%);SsD/TC(UI-39.4%, NOUN-60.6%);LS (UI-39.2%, NOUN-60.8%); ICTP (UI-42.4%, NOUN-57.6%) and CS (UI-36.0%, NOUN-64.0%). There were significant mean differences in learners' support services between the two institutions based on availability (t=2.78, df=1461; NOUN- 17.47, UI- 12.44), quality (t=11.15, df=1461; NOUN-20.41, UI- 14.80), accessibility (t=11.19, df=1461; NOUN- 16.52, UI- 11.89), usability (t=11.79, df=1461; NOUN- 16.49, UI- 11.91), affordability (t=10.16, df=1461; NOUN- 19.34, UI- 11.20), and supportiveness (t=11.73, df=1461; NOUN- 19.48, UI-14.01).Difficulties in accessing learning materials, poor bandwidth and poor reception signal of UI Diamond FM and NOUN radios dominated the complaints. Also, lack of ICT materials, poor staff-students relationship, insufficient staff advisors and inadequate high-tech electronic gadgets hindered the provisions and use of the services in the two institutions.

Regardless of the difficulties and challenges in their provisions and usage, the learners' support services were more prominent in the National Open University of Nigeria (the single mode) than in the Distance Learning Centre, University of Ibadan (the dual-mode) using Keegan's yardsticks. Therefore, the provisions of these services should be strengthened in the two institutions, particularly the University of Ibadan.

Keywords: Distance learning institution, Learning facilities in distance education, Institution support services for students

Word count: 498

CERTIFICATION

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

NOUN - National Open University of Nigeria

ODL - Open and Distance Learning

SSS - Student Support Services

NUC - National Universities Commission

ICT - Information and Communication Technology

DLC, UI - Distance Learning Centre , University of Ibadan

NTI - National Teachers Institute

LSSs - Learner or Student Support Services

SLMs - Student Learning Materials

QA - Quality Assurance

DE- Distance Education

BOU - Bangladesh Open University

APOU - Andhra Pradesh Open University

IDI - In-Depth Informant Interview

KII - Key Informant Interview

FGD- Focus Group Discussion

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background to the study

In the modern world, knowledge and learningare rapidly becoming central to human productivity, with a view to ensuring that individuals are equipped with requisite competences to function effectively in the society. Thus, access to educational opportunities is universally being promoted through Open and Distance Learning (ODL), (Ojokheta, 2010). This form of educational delivery is often considered as a strategic medium to make education readily available to the diverse group of students, in order to provide a sustainable means of democratising educational opportunities to different categories of people across the globe (Manzoor, 2012). According to Sharma (2002), ODL has experienced unprecedented revolution in the recent years due to its capabilities to provide educational delivery system that is flexible and user-friendly.Within ODL system, students enjoy freedom to acquire knowledge at their own convenience, without being restricted to the four walls of the classroom. The fundamental objective of this mode of education is to improve access to higher education, due to the pressure on the conventional means of teaching and learning to satisfy the needs and aspiration of the general populace in the area of formal education.

Thus, ODL has materialised to a sustainable alternative to the conventional means of education, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria and other countries in Sub-Sahara Africa. One distinguishing feature of ODL is that learners are quasi-permanently detached from the tutors in terms of time and space. In other words, the dissemination of instructional content in this system of education is basically carried out by someone, who is isolated from the students in terms of distance and space.This implies that flow of information from the tutor to students largelyoccurs through the use of electronic and text materials. It is instructive to note that open and distance learning could be mainly delivered in two modes and these are- single and dual modes of instruction. The single mode basically involves distance learning approach   that   relies   largely   on   online   instructional   delivery,

without conventional mode of teaching, Edu, Sule and Nsor, (2016). This mode of teaching is being operated in Nigeria by the National Open University of Nigeria.

Dual mode system is a two-mode educational system consisting of campus-based teaching and distance form of learning commonly practice at the higher level of education to take education to the doorsteps of the majority of people in the society. The idea originated from University of London that offer external degree programme to some categories of students. Unlike the ODL system that focuses only on distance learning program offered by most Open Universities, dual mode system coexists in the same institution. There are no separate departments or academic faculties managing the distance learning programme as well as the campus-based teaching (Smith and Kelly, 1987). In other words, the dual mode has to do with operating as both conventional and ODL institutions to ensure flexibility of distance education (Edu, Sule and Nsor, (2016). This is the mode of ODL operated by many conventional universities in Nigeria, including University of Ibadan.In the two modes of ODL, learners, as a result of their partial separation from their tutors and the institution, encounter the following challenges: the negative impact of isolation, drastic reduction in peer-peer interaction among students, lack of closeness with the activities of the study centre, inadequate academic support among others factors (Fozdar, Kumar and Kannan, 2006). These challenges affect the teaching-learning process in the open and distance education system.

To minimise the possible effects of these factors on their learning, learners are usually provided with various categories of support servicesby stakeholders in ODL system of education.This is done with a view to cushioning the effect of isolation from their tutors and the institution as well as to motivate them to continue their learning.Teachers have unique functions of stimulating and motivating learners in the instructional process, however, these tutors are not usually physically available in this system of education in different regions of the globe. Thus, experts in the field of education are concerned about the possible effect of this separation between learners and the tutors in the instructional process. With the increasing interest in ODL among different categories of people in the society as a complementary platform to the conventional system of education, educators had continued to advocate for the need to incorporate relevant services and supports that could easily bridge this gap that exists in instructional process. Therefore, learners support services (LSSs) had been touted as

connecting factors that could bridge the instructional gap in the ODL system of education.

It is noteworthy that the configuration of ODL usually increases the rate of frustration among the participants in the process of instructional delivery. This is due to the fact that many students might not be able to cope with the increasing challenges of isolation among the instructional elements in the system. This configuration is a radical departure from the existing system of education in the society. In this wise, it is imperative for educational stakeholders to cater for extra needs of students that may arise due to the structure of instructional delivery process. Thus, interventions are usually provided to stabilise learners in the system and reduce the level of frustration due to sudden change in the structure of instructional process.

The basic function of LSS is to create an enablement for effective interaction among different elements in the instructional process. The primary elements in learning space like tutors, students and learning materials, need to engage in seamless interaction and collaboration for effective teaching and learning processes. This becomes more quite important in ODL form of education where these instructional elements are usually temporally and spatially separated from one another. These learners support services, to some extent, determine the workability and functionality of ODL system across the globe.Therefore, the realization of the objectives ofODL is largely a function of the quantum and quality of support services provided to the learners in instructional system. Hruthka (2001) states that excellence in ODL system of education transcends mere course delivery process. A structured academic and students' support system is generally requiredto ensure effectiveexchange of information in the instructional process. There should be seamless flow of information within the learning space and this could be facilitated by adequate provision of LSSs to cater for the increasing needs of the participants at all times. Undoubtedly, these interventions provide veritable platforms to disseminate quality education to distance learning students, regardless of age and status in the society (Powar, Pandaand Bhalla ,2000).

These support services are strategic components of ODL to ensure that no vacuum is created as a result of separation between learners and tutors. The existence of any instructional gap between ODL students and tutors would increase the level of frustration in the system and this could negatively affect retention rateand their performance at the end of instruction. Apparently, the separation between learners and

tutors in the system could contribute to the rate of drop-outs in the system and this would reduce the rate of accessibility to functional education among the people of the society. Rumble (1992) affirms that the attractiveness of prospective candidates into distance learning programme is largely a function of support services provided by the distance learning institutions to assist the learners to achieve success in their educational pursuits. In other words, provision of functional and user-friendly intervention to support distance learners could go a long way in increasing the level of enrolment in the system. This would make education to be highly accessible and flexible to address the needs and aspirations of different categories of people in the community and the world at large. This makes ODL form of instructional delivery to be workable and practicable to cater for the peculiar needs of the young and old across different regions of the globe.

The most successful students in distance learning mode are the one who are able to utilise the support services provided by the institution to achieve their learning goals. For distance learners to become active participants in the instructional process, quality and appropriate LSS needs to be made available at their doorsteps. These students should also have the capabilities and required information to put the educational interventions into proper use for effective realisation of the objectives of ODL in the educational system of a country. It is only when students are able to access these services that teaching-learning process becomes less-cumbersome to navigate. This is why Rumbleand Rumble and Keegan (1982) advocates constant assessment of learners support services in line with global best practices. It is expected that learners support services provide a veritable platform for effective integration of distance learners into the ODL system of education across all levels. These support services should not be implemented haphazardly, as they are meant to perform specific functions in the system. Thus, LSSs need to meet some acceptable criteria to ensure quality and effective learning at this level of education.

Keegan contends that true assessment of learner support services in distance education must be premised on seven criteria: availability, quality, accessibility, affordability, usability, reliability and supportive dimension. Availability refers to sufficient provision of various categories of support services. Harasim, Hiltz, Teles and Turoff (1997) submit that availability of learners' support services in distance education must essentially be structured towards counselling services, ICT services, library services, study/tutorial guide services, information flow services, academic

advising services and academic progress report services. Apparently, availability is an important criterion that cuts across other critical services in the system. Some crucial interventions like ICT services, counselling services, library and information services should be made available in the first instance, before learners can make effective use of learning supports to facilitate classroom instruction. Therefore, stakeholders in education are required to ensure adequate availability of LSSs in the system, with a view to engendering seamless exchange of ideas and information within the learning space.

The LSS must not only be available but must also be of good quality in terms of relevance, functionality, and applicability in helping the learners to achieve their learning goals. Schrum, (2002) argued that a qualitative support services for distance learning students "must include personal counselling, career choice counselling, pre-admission counselling, study skills counselling and course material reading counselling". Similarly, he concludes that "due to increase in Internet use in distance education, learners' methods of acquiring information are changing. Therefore, distance learning students must be well tutored on how to use information and communication technology to source for information on learning purposes from the internet".

In essence, the quality of LSSs across different regions of the world remains sacrosanct to ensure that participants in the programme get the form of education that would make them functional members of the community. The interventions required for the programme are meant to serve specific purposes to make learning becomes meaningful and effective to the students and the community at large. Thus, these support services should be of good quality at all times. Provision of quality services would engender effective flow of information across the system and this would translate into functional education for all the participants. By ensuring quality LSSs, distance learners would be afforded the opportunity to get the right form of instructional content that is obtainable in the conventional system of education. Apparently, stakeholders in education need to prioritise the issue of quality to progressively monitor teaching and learning across the system. This results to effective service and instructional delivery of ODL in the education system.

Support services must also be accessible to the students in this system of education. In other words, learners must have timely access to these services whenever and wherever. This implies that the services must exist in practice rather than on

paper. It should be emphasised that availability does not necessarily translate to accessibility. Accessibility implies that learners are able to use the available materials with little or no restrictions. To achieve this, distance learners need to be well-equipped with requisite information and competences to access diverse learning resources to facilitate classroom activities. Students need adequate information on how to access services like library services, ICT resources, counselling services and other crucial interventions that are required to make learning meaningful and reduce the rate of frustration in the system. Accessibility to resources and services should also be timely to entrench trust in the system. This makes learning support services rightly available to meet the immediate and future needs of the learners. Writing on the accessibility oflearners' support services, Rumble and Keegan (1982) wrote that "learners must have unfettered access to support services in order for them to achieve their learning goals". He affirmed that:

> A situation where learners support services are available but not accessible to learners does not augur well for distance education practice. When counselling services, are provided, for example, they must be managed by qualified counsellors who must be accessible to the learners and must always be there and willing to attend to the learners in the practical sense of it.

The provision of LSSs must also be affordable in terms of cost procurement. This implies that the cost of procuring the services and learning resources should be within the reach of an average learner in the system. It is noteworthy that this system of education is made up of citizens from diverse backgrounds and their individual differences should be taken into consideration when considering provision of any learning intervention to facilitate instructional activities. The participants should be charged moderately to use the support services in the system. This would ensure that indigent students are not unjustly denied the opportunity of getting formal education anytime, anywhere.Thus, affordability is a crucial criterion that could expand educational access to every part of the world and this reduces the level of illiteracy among people of the society. According to Grabe and Grabe(2001):

> Since technology is used as a source of information for assimilation of knowledge by learners studying through the distance education mode, they must be able to procure such communication technology with little or minimal financial difficulty. The provision of such

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technology will become irrelevant, if learners cannot afford the tools to enhance their learning.

The essence of the provision of learners' support services is for the learners to be able to utilise such services to enhance their learning. Krishnan (2012) submits that "it is an observable phenomenon that, across the world, some distance learning institutions provide learner support services which are not effectively utilised by distance learners due to lack of information, orientation, and sensitisation on how to utilise these services for learning". Therefore, every distance learning institution must not only make available these support services but must also go a step further to provide detailed information, knowledge, and orientation to the learners on how to effectively and efficiently utilise these services for the achievement of their learning goals. If this is not well instituted, then, the whole purpose of the support servicescould be defeated.

Besides, support services provided for the learners must be truly supportive in nature. This is measured by the usability and reliability of the services to enhance learning. If a support service is provided and the learners find it difficult to access, it simply means it is not reliable. Sometimes, distance learning institutions put in place some support services without considering how the services can better be utilised by the learners to enhance their learning. The essence of providing support services is to help the learners achieve and improve their learning goals.

To help learners achieve their learning goals, scholars have identified various types of support services that should be provided to ensure seamless instructional delivery.Harasim, Hiltz, Teles and Turoff (1997) summarise these support services to include: counselling services, ICT services, library services, study/tutorial guide services, information flow services, academic advising services, and academic progress report services. One of the most important support services that should be provided by distance learning institution for distance learners is counselling services. Due to the fact that these learners are quasi physically, psychologically, and spatially separated from their tutors and the learning institution in time and space, they usually requirecounselling services to guide them throughout their learning programme. Such counselling services include: career choice counselling, pre-admission or pre-entry counselling, study skills counselling, post-admission counselling, learning achievement counselling and career development counselling.

Another important learners support services has to do with the provision of technological resources to facilitate students' learning process. This simply refers to as the provision of technological services to enhance instructional processes in distance learning institutions. Open and distance learning, in contemporary perception, has been described as a platform where learners and teacher could easily interact through the use of technology instead of face-to-face interaction in a physical classroom setting (Schrum 2002). The most significant influence of technology on the operations of ODL has been the recognition of ICT as a veritable medium to enhance the delivery of course contentsacross all areas of specialisation (Arsham, 2002). According to Lister, Danchak, Scalzo, Jennings and Wilson, (1999), the most successful learner in distance learning mode, is one who will spend approximately 80% on self-paced online-web materials and the remaining 20% in interactive sessions with the instructor and other learners. This implies that technology propels learning activities in ODL system and utmost priority needs to be given to the use of ICTs in online instructional delivery system.

Therefore, the knowledge and competence of ICTs by the distance learner is highly essential to achieve their learning goals. This makes it imperative for distance learning institutions to provide students with fundamental skills for extraction of educational information from the web. Learners need to be provided with skills identification of web browsers, identification of the educational search engines to use, how to structure and locate educational information needed from the search engines, how to recognise PDF and non-PDF file/document, how to convert PDF files to word document, how to copy and paste information without committing plagiarism, and how to appropriately acknowledge or reference cited works.

ICT support service has overwhelming influence on other learners support services in ODL system like library services, tutorial services among others. This makes ICT supports to be strategic in online education.

Another component of learners' support services is library service. Library services support refers to support services provided to distance learning students to have direct access to materials contained in general and research collections, in order to enhance the learning goals of the learners. These include: printed and electronic-based study materials, mimeographs, technical reports, research journals among others.

Distance learners also need academic advice and study guide support services, since they are partially separated in time and space from their tutors and the learning group. Students, therefore, need to be guided on how to read and understand the content of the learning materials.Distance learners also need information on where to read, when to read (considering the fact they are normally pre-occupied with many competing demands), how to write and submit assignments, how to access learning materials for further reading, how to strategise for effective learning, how to engage in online interaction with their tutors and staff of the institutions, and how to answer examination questions and obtain good grades, among others.

In the same vein, another support service requires by students in ODL to achievelearning goals is information flow service. Learners naturally want to have information constantly and continuously disseminated to them on different concepts. The types of information required include: information on course registration, orientation period, how to collect study materials, assignment submission time, face-to-face contact period, and examination period and administration. Therefore, distance learning institution needs information centre/Help-desk which should provide 24/7operation attending and answering calls and enquiries from distance learners on any issue concerning their study.

Provision of learners support service to distance learners also includes academic progress report. Learners in this mode of education will always desire to regularly receive progress reports on how they are progressing in their academic programme. When institutions continuously make academic progress reports available, it affords distance learners the opportunity to identify their strengths and weaknesses in teaching-learning process and adjust appropriately. Non provision of these academic progress reports can easily de-motivate learners, which may subsequently results in their withdrawal from the programme. This has been found to beone of the major reasons for high attrition rate in ODL.Lastly, tutor-learner interaction procedure is equally important as support service for the distance learners. Learners need to be equipped with the knowledge of how to interact with their tutors in terms of courtesies, language, choice/usage words, among others.

In recognition of the invaluable roles of students' support services in the two modes of open and distance learning programme, it becomes imperative for constant assessment and re-assessment of the provision of these support services in order to determine their effectiveness. It should be mentioned that different models and criteria

had been used by scholars across the globe to examine and measure learners' support services in ODL. The aforementioned criteria had been used to measure successful implementation of learners' support services in single and dual modes of ODL in different parts of the world. However, the process of assessing learners' support services in Nigerian educational system has become herculean task, due to non-adoption of the core criteria that could be used to explain these services within the context of Nigerian educational system.Thus, it is imperative to examine these criteria within the two modes of ODL in Nigeria tertiary education structure. This would provide a framework through which educational stakeholders could provide workable and culturally relevant learners' support services within the context Nigerian ODL system. Apparently, the two modes of ODL provide diverse qualities of learners' support services in instructional system and it is imperative that these services are assessed based on acceptable criteria, within the context of Nigerian distance learning education.

This study, therefore, was carried out to assess the provision of learners' support services in a single and a dual mode distance learning institution in Nigeria using Rumble and Keegan (1982) 's seven criteria which include: availability, quality, accessibility, affordability, usability, reliability, and supportive dimension. The single-mode institution chosen for the study is the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) while the dual mode is Distance Learning Centre, (DLC) of University of Ibadan.

1.2   Statement of the Problem

Learners' support services had been considered as the backbone of distance education practice worldwide either in single or dual mode system. A single mode ODL system focuses mainly on distance learning programme while dual mode system involves two approaches of educational systems consisting off-campus-based teaching and distance learning commonly practice in higher education. These two modes operate across many institutions in Nigeria. Due to the peculiar characteristics of single and dual modes of ODL, a diverse range of learners' support services are required for different distance learning institutions across the world.

Previous studies had concentrated on the provision of learners support services to enhance teaching-learning process in ODL system of education. It is evident in literature that these services are strategic to the smooth implementation of the two modes of ODL programmes in different institutions.

However, the dichotomy that exists between the two modes of ODL necessitates the need for educational stakeholders to go beyond general provision of learners support services for distance learners, especially in Nigerian higher education system. There is need for a comprehensive analysis of the peculiar characteristics of learners' support services for the two modes of ODL in Nigeria.In other to achieve this, acceptable criteria are required to measure the quantum and quality of learners' support services in the two modes of ODL system of education.Literature had shown that there is a paucity of research in the area of adopting core criteria to identify and assess peculiar learners' support services provided by each of these modes of ODL. These criteria would provide a framework for comparison, with a view to ascertaining the mode of ODL that substantially complies with world best practices in the provision of learners' support services for different categories of distance learners in Nigeria.

This study was, therefore, carried out to assess the provision of learner support services in both single and dual mode distance learning institutions in Nigeria based on Keegan's criteria.

1.3 Research Questions

Seven research questions were raised to guide this study. They were:

1. What are the types of learners support services available in NOUN and UI DLC?

1. Which of the two distance learning institutions provides quality learners support services to the learners?

2. Which of the two distance learning institutions provides learners support services that are easily accessed by the learners?

3. Which of the two distance learning institutions provides learners support services that are affordable to the learners?

4. What is the extent of usability of the learners support services by the learners from the two institutions?

5. What is the reliability level of learners support services provided by the two institutions?

6. Are the learners support services provided by the two institutions truly supportive of the learning goals?

7. What are challenges confronting NOUN and UI DLC in the provision of learners support services.

1.4   Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study include, to:

i. find out the types of learners support services available in NOUN and UI DLC;

ii. ascertain which of the two distance learning institutions provides quality support services to the learners;

iii. investigate which of the two distance learning institutions provides learners' support services that are easily accessed by the learners;

iv. find out which of the two distance learning institutions provides learners support services that are affordable to the learners;

v. examine the extent of usability of the learners support services by the learners from the two institutions;

vi. ascertain the reliability level of the learners support services provided by the two institutions and

vii. find out if the learners support services provided by the two institutions are truly

supportive of the learning goals of the learners.

1.5. Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in the study at 0.05 level of significance:

$H0_1$: There is no significant difference in availability of learners support services in NOUN and UI DLC.

$H0_2$: There is no significant difference in quality of learners support services in NOUN

and UI DLC.

$H0_3$: There is no significant difference in affordability of learners support services provided by NOUN and UI DLC.

$H0_4$: There is no significant difference in accessibility tolearners support services provided by NOUN   and UI DLC.

$H0_5$: There is no significant difference in usability of learners support services provided by NOUN   and UI DLC.

$H0_6$: There is no significant difference in learners support services provided by NOUN   and UI DLC as truly supportive of students' learning goals

1.6. Significance of the Study

This study is significant in many respects, especially to all the stakeholders in open and distance learning. The stakeholders are the policy makers, administrators of distance education programmes, distance learners,study centres managers, course designers and developers, tutorial assistants and personnel of learners support services

unit. The study provides these stakeholders with basic knowledge of the quality of learners' support services provided by the two modes of ODL in Nigerian higher education system.

To the policy makers, the knowledge of learners' support services would afford them the opportunity to develop policy document that would specify the support service system which every distance education institution must put in place to enhance acceptability and sustainability of non-conventional educational delivery like distance education.To the administrators of distance education programmes, the knowledge of learners' support services providesdetailed information of the academic and administrative needs of distance learners and support service system that ought to be put in place to assist, enhance, and improve their learning performance.

To the distance learning students,findings from this study afford them the opportunity to have in-depth knowledge of the support services that every distance education provider or institution ought to provide for them to achieve their learning goals. Besides, this knowledge affords them the opportunity to constantly assess and evaluate the availability, quality, and adequacy of learning interventions that are made available by the institution.

In the same vein, this study provides relevant information to course designers and developers on the learning needs and support services desired by the distance learners.This serves as a guide on how to design and develop learner friendly self-directed study or course materials, pre- and post-test questions, and assignment profile and guidelines. This is useful to the staff who work in the department oflearners support services in ODL institutions. With the knowledge of learners support services, the staff would be equipped with the skills on effective and accommodative staff-learner relation, interaction, communication, counselling, and meaningful discussion.

Also, the study provides necessary information to the study centres managers as they are equipped with sufficient knowledge on the learning supports that should be extended to the students in this system of education. Lastly, the managers are equipped with the knowledge of various communication channels, which enable distance learners to interact with academic counsellors and the learning group. The tutorial assistants, in the study centres are also provided with the knowledge of support services that should be made available to distance learners before, during, and after the face-to-face contact period.

1.7. Scope of the Study

This study assessed the provision of learner support services in both single and dual mode distance learning institutions in south-western Nigeria based on Keegan's criteria. The two institutions that participated in the study are University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre (UI DLC) and National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). The UI DLC was selected as dual mode institution based on its history as one of the earliest dual mode distance learning institutions in Nigeria with significant high number of distance learning students while NOUN is the only single-mode distance learning institution in the country. Though there are many criteria that could be used to assess learners' support services in distance learning, the study was based on Keegan's criteria. This is due to the fact that the parameters can be easily adapted to suit the educational needs of distance learners in the country. The seven criteria used to assess learners support services in Nigeria distance learning environment are: availability, quality, accessibility, affordability, usability, reliability and supportive dimension.

1.8   Operational Definition of Terms

The terms used are defined within the context of this study to avoid misinterpretation:

Learners Support Services- These are support services provided to UI DLC and NOUN distance learners to cushion the effect of their isolation from their tutors, the institution, and the learning content and assist them to ease any difficulty they might encounter in their learning. These services include: pre and academic counselling support, ICT support, library support, academic advice/study support guide, information flow support, academic progress report support, and tutor-learner interaction procedure support. These are assessed with seven criteria.

Single-Mode Distance Learning –Thisrefers to an autonomous or independent distance learning system operated by the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN).

Dual-Mode Distance Learning - This refersto distance learning system of analready established conventional university. It is integrated within the conventional university operated by Distance Learning Centre of University of Ibadan.

Counselling Support Services- These refer to series of advice given to NOUN and UI DLC students by trained personnel to guide them in their choice of courses, the likely difficulties they might encounter in their learning, among others. These services include pre-entry counselling, post-admission counselling, learning achievement counselling, career and development counselling.

ICT Support Services- These services refers to supports given to NOUN AND UI DLC learners on how to use ICT to complement their learning especially on the nature of internet and its elements, how to search for educational information on the web, how to use the search engines, how to download learning materials from the web, how to source for learning material for further reading, among others.

Library Support Services- These refer to support services provided to NOUN and UI DLC learners to have direct access to materials contained in general and research collections as well as to resources referred to in reading lists.

Academic advice and Study Guide Support Services- These refer to pieces of information provided for NOUN and UI DLC students on how to study effectively and efficiently in order to achieve success in their learning.

Information flow support services- These involve all forms   of information NOUN and UI DLC studentsrequire which include: information on course registration, on orientation period, on how to collect study materials, on assignment submission time, face-to-face contact period, and on examination period and administration. **Academic progress report services-** Theseinclude all forms of services that intimate NOUN and UI DLC learners with progress reports on how they are faring in their academic programme.

Tutor-Learners Interaction Procedures- This is the type of support service given to NOUN and UI DLC students on how to interact with their tutors. This includes the use of language, the choice of words, the use of words, the appropriate courtesies to the tutors, among others.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, relevant literature on key concepts of the study were comprehensively reviewed starting with the concept of open and distance learning in particular and distance education in general.

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2.1   Conceptual Review

 2.1.1   Open and Distance Learning: Concept and Importance

There are different perspectives to the definition of Open and Distance Learning(ODL) in literature and many scholars had attempted the definition based on their areas of specialisation, geographical regions and experience distance education systems, (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright and Zvacek, 2006). These controversies continue among different education systems (Simonson et al., 2006). In the light of this, many scholars had attributed diverse definitions to ODL ranging from correspondence education, home study to external study, where learner support is usually made available at the minimal level (Holmberg, 1995: Bunker, 2003; Peters, 2000). This is well encapsulated in the words of Keegan (1996) that distance education indicates a quasi-permanent separation that exists between the tutor and students in theteaching-learning process. It also incorporatesa process through which an educational institutiontake drastic decisions, planning and implementlearning process that ensures adequate provision of learner support services at all times. ODL simply involves the process of allowing distance learners to overcome the challenges that distance learning could pose to different categories of students in the learning environment.

ODL had been defined by many scholars from different perspectives but the core mandates of this system reflect in all the definitions in literature. Some of the earliest definitions of distance education include Dohmen, (1967) who believes that ODL is an organised type of self-study, in which learnerenjoysadequate counselling intervention andunrestricted access to learning materials. The core mandates of ODL remain democratisation of learning, improved access to education and flexibility of instruction at every stage of education. Under this system of education, the responsibilities of securing and supervising students' learning are systematically carried out by a team of tutors and other professionals to ensure that learning goals are achieved at the end of the programme. The capabilities of media allow these professionals in the instructional system to monitor students' learning from any part of the country, without being restricted by the barriers of time and distance. In 1973, however,Moore, gave his own view on ODL asakind of teaching approach where teaching activities are conducted in a separate environment from learning tasks.In

other words, learners and tutor are separated from instructional activities and the only means of communication and interaction are through print media and electronic resources usually provided by the internet. It also revolves round all-encompassing utilisation of technical media especially for the purpose of reproducing high quality instructional resources in distance learning. He concludes that this process would ensure the system is able to reach many students seamlessly across different parts of the globe. ODL involves a diverse form of study, which is not placed within continuous immediate teaching and supervision of tutors in instructional space, but nevertheless benefit from the planning, implementation and guidance of a tutorial organisation.

In essence, ODL is a system of education that provides and expands learning opportunities to the majority of the people in the community to reduce the level of illiteracy and its possible impact is on the functionality of citizens in the society(Omoh, 2012). Formal education provides the citizens with requisite knowledge and skills to improve their level of functionality in the community and therefore, every citizen would struggle to acquire it, regardless of socio-economic background. However, due to diverse nature of humans and peculiar societal challenges, not every member of the society can have access to this formal education at the same time. Many indigent students might find it difficult to proceed to acquire higher education due to inherent socio-economic challenges within the structure of the society. Also, some cultural and religious practices could prevent youngsters to acquire formal education at the right time and age. Thus, there is a need to create a platform that would cater for these vulnerable members of the society, if a country intends to ensure educational inclusion for citizens across all strata of the society.

Therefore, ODL has consistently been touted as a veritable system that could be used to complement the conventional mode of education to widen access to educational opportunities across different regions of the world, especially in sub-Sahara Africa (Omoh, 2012). This system of instructional delivery provides a sustainable platform to expand formal education beyond the four walls of classrooms. This allows governments and other stakeholders to cater for the educational aspirations of the disadvantaged and vulnerable members of the community. In other words, ODL allows the majority of the populace to enjoy the possibilities offered by formal education to contribute to national growth and development in all areas of human endeavours. With the increasing quest for formal education and limited resources to

widen educational access to capture different categories of people in the society, ODL remains the viable alternative to unlock educational opportunities and equip citizens with functional skills to contribute to the development of their immediate communities and the world at large (Jegede, 2009).It is, therefore, important for governments at all levels to prioritise this system of education by providing appropriate instructional resources that would strengthen the capabilities of distance learning institutions to deliver on the mandate of democratising learning and ensuring flexibility in educational process. This would allow ODL to effectively complement the conventional mode of learning and thus, reducing the rate of illiteracy in the society.

Hulsmann (1997)attempted to define ODL from perspectives of characteristics of such education system. He acknowledged four strategic features of distance education as:

i. isolation between tutor and the students with respectto time or space, or both time and space as the case may be in single or dual mode of ODL
ii. there must be presence of an educational institution to anchor the programme
iii. the use of technological and media resources which involve print and online courseware, radio and television broadcasts
iv. Lastly, there should be provision for a two-way communication channels. This mode communication allows for effective exchange of ideas and information through electronic media and other platforms.

Nakpodia (2010) examined the need for ODL in Nigeria and observed that this system of education provides a sustainable framework to widen educational access to capture the adults and youngsters in the society. It had been well established that the universal demand for formal education at different levels, increasing quest for the acquisition of skills and competences and the inability of the conventional higher education system to satisfy the unending demandfor formal education were the major indices that triggered the emergence of the ODL system across the world (Krishnan 2012).Krishnan also asserts that the emergence of knowledge and information economies, in which the ability of physical capital isbeing enhanced with power of knowledge capital, has necessitated the need to produce technically qualified people in all aspects of human endeavours. This had completely changed the process of teaching and learning into one that envisages learning beyond the four walls of classrooms. All these factors had resulted into increase acceptance of ODL system of education across different regions of the world.

The phenomenal growth in distance education, starting from the 70's, was both qualitative and quantitative. Rumble and Keegan (1982) wrote that the incremental growth in the distance education opportunities can be traced to: the development of new communication technology for example e-mail, internet website facilities, fax, telex, among others, a growing advancement in the use of printed media resources; improved design of instructional materials; and improved provision of support services for students in this system of education. There are four reasons why ODL has continued to witness phenomena growth in the education system and these are: the need to upgrade qualifications, the convenience of distance study as opposed to part-time, campus based study, the changing status of women in our society, and the respect accorded distance education. Similarly, Hall (1987) also wrote that the increased revolution in telecommunication paved way for the acceptance and growth of distance education. He submitted that; "the increase revolution in telecommunication has the capabilities to widen access to instructional content and make learning more flexible and meaningful. Knowledge can be carried into the most isolated and into basic social institutions and situations".

Phipps, Wellman, and Merisotos, (1998) summarised the growth and relevance of ODL education under four factors: the emergence of life-long learning which goes on beyond school–age education; the effort to make education more learner-centred, the increasing justification for instructions to be largely self-regulated, have focus and impactful where the appropriate level of teacher mediation is employed; the desire to provide access to higher education irrespective of where a student lives since learning does not have to take place in the classroom; and the advancement of technology-based learning environment which describes the use of computer and internet-based resources to interact, communicate and share information within the instructional system.

Recent definitions of distance education are not significantly different from the earliest ones. For example, Peratton, Robinson and Creed (2001) define distance education as a system of education, which provides a platform for a teacher to conduct teaching from a place that is separated in time and distance from the learners. In the same vein, Adebayo (2007a) asserts that ODL isa mode of education in which learning activities transcend the conventional school system and instructional tasks are carried out without physical contact between teachers and students. According to UNESCO (2002), ODL has been considered as a rapidly growing component of education

system in different parts of the world. Different education systems are increasingly taking advantage of the capabilities of ODL to expand the reach and scope of educational opportunities among the people in the society. The citizens now have a rare opportunity to learn and become fully educated from the comfort of their homes and workplaces. ODL unlocks the potentials in education system as different categories of people now have access to formal education anytime, anywhere. This propels the literacy level of different countries across the globe as many people in the society can access educational opportunities to become productive members of the society. Apparently, this system of education has become a veritable platform to expand educational opportunities to different categories of people in the society.

It had been observed that access to educational opportunities could be greatly improved with the integration of ODL in the system of education, in order to cater for the educational needs and social commitments of the people in the society. These possibilities offered by this system of education had been substantially improved due to the advancement in technological innovations, especiallythe capabilities provided by the Internet-based resources. The advent of World Wide Web has helped, in no small measure, in the exchange of ideas and information across different communities of the world. These internet-based technologies have continued to expand access to education by removing the constraints of time and distance, thereby providing flexible instructional opportunities to a diverse group of people. According to Kaufman, Watkins and Guerra (2000), ODL refers to the systematical delivery of engaging learning opportunities to the learners without restriction of space separating the learning institutions from the learners.

The Federal Ministry of Education (2002) affirms that ODL is any form of learning in which the institution provides an enabling environment for learners to exercise choices over any aspects of learning. The agency also defines distance learning as a process ofeducation which involves a substantial part of the teaching being conducted by a professional that is usually separated in distance and time from the students. Alaezi (2005) refers to ODL as an instructional delivery pattern or approach that gives individuals the opportunities to be part of instructional process without any restriction in terms of time, distance, age and previous educational qualification, tribe, state of origin and other educational barriers. Distance education emphasises increase access and democratisation of education for those who are not able to be involved in conventional means of instruction due to marginalisation and

long distance from educational facilities. Distance education is a pattern of education by which the teacher is taken literally to the students within the comforts of their homes or workplaces. It is an instructional process in whichthe physical separation between teachers and students is oftenconnected by modern innovations in form ofinformation and communications technologies (ICTs).

On the other hand, open learning indicatesthe policies, practices and procedures that allow entry to learning space with no or minimum restrictions in terms ofage,time and gender and with emphasis on previous learning experience (Glen, 2005). Generally, in this system of education, courses are mostly incorporated with learning materials which can be delivered through: teaching texts, study guides, course guides, television broadcasts or videotapes, radio broadcasts or audiotapes, laboratory materials, online information, CD-ROMS, textbooks and other formats. In the recent time and with the advancement in ICT across different regions of the world, ODL system of education has been significantly upgraded into media-based instructional space, which incorporatesthe use of e-learning platforms, ubiquitous technologies, cloud computing, digital storytelling, simulation, gamification, and learning management systems have been mainstreamed into instructional delivery process at different levels of education(Morley, 2012).

It can, therefore, be deduced from these definitions that ODL allows individuals to acquire theneedededucational opportunities anytime and anywhere across the globe. It provides improved educational opportunities to many people across diverse situations and needs. It is important to note that the advancement in technological innovations has added impetus to the increasing growth of ODL in the education systems across the globe. Experts in the field of education, to some extent, had successfully leveraged the capabilities of technology to overcome temporal and spatial barriers in teaching-learning process. This has resulted to the widespread adoption of ODL as an alternative to the conventional system of education among different categories of people in the society. ODL system of education is experiencing phenomena growth across different educational systems due to the positive impact of ICT on dissemination of information and cross-fertilisation of ideas within the instructional space.

The improvement in technological innovations has indicated that educational access would continue to improve across different levels, with a view to ensuring that people in the society are able to enrol for formal education at any stage of their lives. It

is impossible to expect that the entire population would enrol in formal education at the same time, since there are many factors that could hinder access to education in the society. Thus, the adoption of technology and digital tools in ODL is strategic to ensure that education remains flexible and attainable for different categories of people across the globe. In this wise, governments at all levels can leverage the capabilities of ODL to improve the literacy rate in the society. This would ensure that many people in the society are well-equipped with skills and competences to contribute to the growth and development of the society. In other words, this system of education could improve the productivity of the countries across the world and therefore contributes immensely to the growth and development of global economy.

Due to the level of development in developing countries of the world, higher institutions are faced with challenges of inadequate resources to cope with the ever-increasing demand for formal education by the people of the region. Many countries in sub-Sahara Africa are finding it increasingly difficult to cater for educational needs of the citizens, due to limited resources in the system. Therefore, ODL has become a promising strategy to confront these educational challenges of widening access to formal education among the people (Ukpo, 2006). In the light of this, many African countries are taking advantage of this flexible mode of learning to expand educational access to the generality of people. This has contributed largely to the improvement in the rate of literacy in some developing countries of the world. It had observed that ODL remains one of the most affordable and cost-effective system of education across different regions of the world. This makes the system to be workable and readily applicable in many countries worldwide, irrespective of the level of development and literacy level. Thus, many countries in developing world can easily adopt this mode of instruction to unlock the potentials of the youth and other vulnerable members of the society. It should be mentioned that improvement in literacy level could practically address social vices within the community. When the youth and other categories of people in the society are positively engaged in formal education, it exposes them to the normal ways of life and reduces the level of their involvement in social vices.

Hence, governments at all levels need toinvest more on the provision of adequate learning resources to ensure that people in the society have access to user-friendly and cost-effective formal education through the adoption of ODL. This could be used as a tool to improve the level of literacy among the people. In the long run, ODL could be used to achieve a minimal level of crime rate in different climes across

the globe. This would contribute positively to the global peace and improved productivity among the people of the world

Importance of Open Distance Learning (ODL)

In recent time, ODL has been touted as a promising mode of learning in different parts of the world, as it allows democratisation of education for the benefits of the general populace. This is due to the fact that educational constraints in conventional mode of educationcan be easily surmounted with the systematic adoption of ODL. The importance of this system of education in improving access to formal education within the community cannot be over-emphasised. In different educational systems worldwide, governments at all levels are taking advantage of ODL to expand access to formal education and address the immediate and future needs of the people.This system engenders flexibility in instructional delivery process.This provides a veritable alternative for the vulnerable members of the society to access quality formal education that cannot be provided within the context of conventional system of education. Thus, it is imperative for stakeholders to ensure adequate access to quality ODL to complement the conventional mode of instructional delivery.

Commonwealth of Learning, COL (2003) identifies the following as the features that make ODL a strategic learning system in providing flexible instruction to learners:The capability to literally overcome the barrier of physical distance: ODL has the potentials to surmount the challenges of physical distance in instructional space, especially in reaching learners in remote locations. Thus, geographical location becomes no barrier to instruction as teachers residing in the cities can teach students in rural settings; Ability to solveissues related to timing or scheduling:ODL system of education makes it possible for students to appropriately manage their time and schedules by combining non-educational issues with educational activities at the same time. By this, individuals can seamlessly blend part-time job with school or family issues and community commitments; ODL helps in expanding the limited number of places available: This system of education expands learning space by combining conventional approach with online mode.Institutions that are involved in open and distance education programme would have capability to admit more students at a time; Taking care of low enrolment: This mode of learning could be used to accommodate disperse enrolment over a period of time; Ensuring judicious use of human resources:

With the increasing demand for qualified teachers due to high level of enrolment in many parts of the world, this system of education provides a platform to effectively utilise the available human resources in the system. This allows for the best use of available human resources to improve productivity and capture different categories of people in the society; Giving due considerations to diverse cultural, religious and political beliefs:ODL is capable of ensuring that people of different beliefs are given opportunities to participate in educational activities and decision-making process. It could, therefore, lead to effective participation of women and other maginalised groups in teaching-learning process.

These aforementioned features summarise the pivotal roles of ODL in education systems in different regions of the world. It is important to note that the global community is made up of different cultural and religious beliefs and people have diverse dispositions to the issues of education and skill acquisition. As a result of this, it is practically impossible for all the citizens to be part of the conventional system of education. This is due to the fact that the spaces available in conventional system of education are limited and resources therein cannot cater for the entire prospective students in the society. Thus, a learning platform like ODL remains a veritable alternative to expand educational access to the disadvantaged people in the community. This system ensures that the citizens can enjoy the right to education as specified by the fundamental human right act worldwide. In this wise, the system allows the society to unlock the hidden potentials of the populace to develop different aspects of human endeavours. These potentials will not be effectively utilised without an intervention like ODL in the educational systems.

In the same vein, ODL system affords educational stakeholders across the world to judiciously utilize the available human and material resources to expand access to education. The education system has limited resources to cater for the entire population and this cannot be effectively achieved within conventional system of education. ODL expands learning space to capture as many students as possible through the process of strengthening the conventional approach to learning with online mode, with a view to overcoming the restrictions set by the traditional mode of instruction. In essence, this system reduces educational costs by leveraging the capabilities of technology and other internet-based resources to expand access to education, especially to the vulnerable groups in the society. This indicates that ODL

is a cost-effective panacea to the problems of low enrolment and educational exclusion within the society.

Therefore, many developing and under-developed countries of the world could leverage the capability of ODL to extend learning opportunities beyond the four walls of the classroom. The level of development in most under-developed nations of the world cannot support the provision of adequate facilities to cater for the educational needs and aspirations of the entire citizens, especially in the formal education setting. Many people are struggling to access educational opportunities that are made available in the formal system of education in many of these countries. This had denied the vulnerable and disadvantaged group in the society, the opportunity to be part of the education system at different levels. Thus, this group of people would not be able to contribute to the development of the community and the world at large.

Apparently, there is a need for an alternative learning platform that caters for this category of people and other members of the community to acquire relevant education to be functional citizens of the society. It had been argued that ODL provides credible alternative to the conventional mode of education across the globe. Also, this system of education could be used to complement the effort of the conventional institutions at ensuring that people get unrestricted access to functional education in the society. In the light of this, this system of education plays pivotal role in ensuring that different categories of people in the community have access to functional and quality education that would allow them to contribute their quotas to the growth and development of the society and become global citizens.

2.1.2 General Features and Types of Open Distance Learning Institutions

TheODL has specific features that make it a unique system of education to cater for different categories of people in the society. These features include the ability to combine face-to-face interaction with online instruction, effective interaction of different instructional elements in the virtual environments and so on.

Keegan (1990) identified the basic characteristics of ODL as follows: The quasi-permanent separation betweentutor or teacher and students in the instructional process, whether in single mode or dual mode of ODL system. It should be noted that this is quite different from what is obtainable in the conventional mode of teaching; The impact of an educational institution that regulates planning and preparation of courseware for distance learners; The utilisation of technical media in respect of print resources, audio-visual materials and other internet-based facilities to bridge the gap

between teachers and students in the instructional process;The availability of dual-way communication process to engender adequate feedback and effective interaction between learners and the tutor; The absence of learninggroupto ensure that students are given opportunities to progress at their own pace. This does not preclude the existence of occasional meetingsin form of tutorials.

In the same vein, the system uses a non-contagious mode of teaching which emphasizes separation between institution and learners. This issue of isolation in instructional system is usually responsible for poor performance of students and low level of completion among the participants. Therefore, it is imperative for the providers of ODL to prioritiseguidance and counselling services anytime, anywhere. These services would provide necessary assistance to the participants as regards the operation of the system. The system is configured in such a way that learners would require adequate information to effectively participate in learning activities. Thus, counselling services should be made available to give information to the students with respect to their status, rules and regulation as well as educational requirements to be able to successfully navigate the instructional process.

Similarly, the Commonwealth of Learning, (COL, 1999) identified the following as the major characteristics of distance education and learning: Separation of teacher from students in respect to distance and time; Accreditation of learning by institutions; Some certified institutions are saddled with the responsibility providing open and distance learning to the general populace.This is with a view to ensuring that quality education could be taken to the doorsteps of individuals who could not be part of conventional mode of teaching in the society; Utilisation of mixed-media course materials which could be in form of printed materials, radio, and television broadcasts, audio-visual materials and computer-related technologies for effective teaching-learning process; Dual-way communication channel which facilitates interaction betweentutor and learners. This ensures adequate feedback on the instructional content and materials provided for learning; availability of possible face-to-face interaction through tutorials, learner–learner interaction and practice sessions.

Types of Distance Education Institutions

There are two major kinds of open and distance learning systems that offer education through open and distance learning mode. They are popularly categorised as single mode institution and dual mode institution depending on their mode of establishment and the nature of functions they perform in the education system of any country.

Single mode institutions make all their courses available to the students using distance education methods. In other words, single mode relies solely on the dissemination of information and interaction between learners and tutor through online method. Physical contact between learners and tutor occurs only at a minimal level during instructional process. Dual mode institutions make courses available to students using both face-to-face mode and distance education approach. This mode combines the conventional mode of teaching with distance education to allow for some level of flexibility in teaching-learning process.

Single mode institutions

These are distance learning institutions established to provide learning opportunities based on distance approach, but learners can also learn in optional face-to-face technique. This implies that single mode of ODL are basically set-up to provide distance education to the general populace in the society. The single mode of distance learning has been generally considered to be a veritable channel to democratise teaching and learning activities in different parts of the world. In other words, this approach to instructional delivery, as it were, improves access to formal education by different categories of people in the society. It is configured in such a way that physical interaction among different elements in the instructional system is reduced to the barest minimum. The absence or reduction in physical interaction necessitates the need to use multi-media resources to exchange ideas and information between learners and their tutors. This is made possible with the advancement in technological innovations and the advent of internet resources, especially the World Wide Web. It is instructive to note that the capabilities offered by ICTs had provided a reliable platform for effective online interaction and flow of information across the globe. This has made the world a global village through which different categories of people can freely interact and share useful information on critical issues that affect their personal lives and the general society.

Thus, the single mode of ODL leveraged the capabilities of internet-based resources to seamlessly exchange ideas and useful information between tutor and the learners. The multi-media online resources afford tutor the opportunity to convey instructional content to the learners without physical interaction. Hence, the advancement in technological innovations had made single mode ODL to flourish across different educational systems in the world. The National Open University of Nigeria is a good example of single mode ODL in Nigeria. The institution is basically

saddled with the responsibility of providing open and distance learning to different categories of people in the society. This is with a view to democratising education and improving access to educational opportunities to all the prospective students in the country.

Dual mode institutions

These are primarily conventional educational institutions offering education through traditional classroom based methods as well as imparting education in some programmes through distance methods. Basically,the institutions impart education in distance mode through print material. In other words, the dual mode incorporates the combination of conventional mode of instruction and distance approach of learning. This is usually done to expand access to education to different categories of people in the society. It is important to note the conventional mode of teaching exclude some categories of people in the society to effectively participate in teaching-learning process. Also, the single mode ODL has limited resources to cater for the ever-increasing number of people seeking admission into various higher institutions at the same time. The increasing demand for formal education across the globe necessitates the need to expand access to education to satisfy the educational needs and aspirations of the people in the society. In these wise, educational stakeholders are expected to provide adequate resources to diversify access to learning opportunities to ensure that a significant number of people become functional members of the society.

The society is made up of people of diverse background and the conventional mode of instructional delivery cannot cater for the entire populace. Due to the diverse nature of individuals in the society, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the conventional mode of teaching and learning to effectivelycater for the educational needs and aspirations of the society. Some vulnerable members of the community might be inadvertently excluded from the traditional mode of instruction in the education system. The orphans, children from broken homes andother indigent youngsters in the society might not have the opportunity to be part of formal education system in the early stage of life, especially in under-developed and developing countries of the world.

Thus, some traditional institutions, in an attempt to democratise learning and ensureeducational inclusion, incorporate distance learning into their mode of instructional delivery. This is with a view to expanding educational access to different groups of people in the society. The dual mode of distance learning system provides a

veritable platform for conventional approach to learning and distance education to exist within the same learning environment. This gives scholars the basis to examine the effectiveness of these learning approaches on the educational systems of different countries across the globe. Thus, learning institutions that are involved in this mode of ODL are expected to be equipped with adequate facilities to cater for the needs and aspirations of different categories of students in the system. The conventional universities like Andhra University and Osmania University which are offering some of their academic programmes through their schools/centres of Distance Education fall under this category.

2.1.3 Models of Open and Distance Learning Systems

In an attempt to provide a suitable framework for effective distance learning across the world, higher institutions are increasingly adapting learning models to properly situate the programme within the context of educational system obtainable in different countries. Otto (2010) explainsdifferent learning models that could adapted for effective distance education in different regions of the world. These models are useful frameworks to guide the establishment and operations of open and distance education across different educational systems worldwide. It is important to note that the peculiar characteristics of different educational systems and the countries level of development need to be put into consideration, in order to select a relevant and workable model for a particular group of people in the society.These models are discussed as follows:

The Examination Preparation model

This type of model generally seems to be non-famous among scholars. However, it provides a framework for a university which specialises in holding examinations and conferring degrees on students without conducting any major form of teaching. The students are largely expected to be self-regulated learners and the responsibility of teaching falls directly on them. In other words, the model provides opportunity for learners in the instructional space to teach themselves at a specific time. This model was institutionalised in the operations of the University of London, when the school was established in the mid-19th Century. The system was developed to cater for people who could not afford the educational expenses of the Oxford or Cambridge University in the United Kingdom.

The Correspondence Education Model

The model is generally considered as the oldest and most widely used in ODLsystem of education worldwide. The system systematically combines examination preparation

model and conventional approach by presenting information to the students through written text. The main medium of instructional delivery is through print materials, which involves the use of written text and recommended textbooks. Although it is the oldest form of ODL system across the world, it is still being practice in the modern time with modifications and adjustments due to the influence of technological innovations and the changing needs of the society. It also involves coursework in form of assignments through a regular and adhoc correspondence between the school and the students.

The model had been largely adjudged to be flexible and cost-effective to administer by the schools involved. Due to its heavy reliance on the print materials, the model requires a moderate amount of capital to establish and implement. This is why the model is still being practice in many developing countries in Sub-Sahara Africa.This model was the first mode of distance learning ever practiced in Nigeria before independence. A significant number of the early scholars in the country obtained their degrees through correspondence education model, especially before the establishment of the University College Ibadan in 1948. In the recent time, many countries in developed countries of the world now leverage the capabilities of multi-media resources to engender seamless information flow in the open and distance system of education.A good example of learning institution that has adapted this type of model is the University of South Africa. The university usually presents the instructional content to the students by using print texts as the medium of communication.

The Multiple Mass Media Model

This is another important model in the history of ODL system of education. It emerged in the 1970s to capture students beyond the school premises. The main feature of this model of ODL is the combination of traditional ODL format and incorporation of radio and television as strategic media elements to disseminate information to the students across a geographical region. It is also complemented with text materials to facilitate acquisition of knowledge by different categories of learners in the system (Otto (2010). The model primarily emphasises the use of different media resources to facilitate teaching-learning process in the system. Literally, it combines many other models to enhance the operations of different learning centres and expand educational access to different strata of the society. It is instructive to note that learners are entering the learning space with different learning styles and diverse backgrounds,

thus, the multiple mass media model provides a meaningful platform to cater for different categories of students in the instructional system. This gives students the opportunity to learn from different media resources in the instructional space(Robison and Huett, 2012). This could, therefore, translate to active engagement in the instructional content and improved performance at the end of the instruction. The model could also increase retention rate and reduce the level of drop-out from the system, since learners are provided with diverse learning opportunities to learn from variety of learning materials in the system.

This model emphasises the power of multi-media resources through the use of ICT in expanding access to education to different categories of people in the community.The use of presentation and authoring tools now makes instructional content to be relevant and connected to real-life situation. This makes the use of multiple mass media to become more relevant in instructional process. Thus, technology would allow learning institutions to present instructional content in different formats that could address the diverse needs of the students in the classroom. This reduces the rate of abstractness in the subject matter, as students would be able to connect classroom activities with different phenomena within the community.

It is also important to note that learners now live in media-saturated environment as they communicate and interact with peers and family using technological devices. This makes the model quite appropriate for this generation of learners, who rely mostly on technological devices to execute both instructional and non-instructional tasks. Therefore, utilising multi-media resources could be a veritable platform to engage them in classroom activities at all levels of education. Using this model, distance learners would be able to effectively relate with the subject matter being presented by the tutors. This could sustain their interest in the instructional activities and improve participation in learning tasks.In the final analysis, technological advancement has strengthened the use of multi-media resources in teaching-learning process and could attract more prospective participants into the system. This increases the rate of enrolment in the system and therefore expands access to educational opportunities within different strata of the society. Thus, the vulnerable and disadvantaged in the community would be able to access educational opportunities within the society. In essence, this model emphasizes the pivotal role of technological innovations in facilitating instructional delivery process, especially at the higher level of education.

The Group Distance Education Model

This model explores the capability of media in disseminating information to the learners. It involves the use of radio and television to impart knowledge from the tutor (who is usually a professor or a senior lecturer in a discipline) to the distance learners. This is quite similar to the multi-media model of instructional delivery. When the lecturer gives out information through radio and television, a group of distance learning students would receive the lecture, discuss the content in group and execute any assignment therein. This model also emphasises the capabilities of technology to expand access to educational opportunities within the society. Students would receive the information from the tutor in groups and execute the learning tasks in the lecture. This is used to overcome the challenges of distance and time and it affords learning institution the opportunity to capture many prospective students across the society.

It is instructive to note that group distance education model stresses the strategic importance of collaboration and teamwork in the instructional system. In most cases, ODL focuses on individual-based learning and developing a self-regulated learner within the system. However, this model encourages collaborative and cooperative learning as obtainable in the traditional mode of teaching. In the process, students develop the ability to freely interact within the group and share opinions and ideas with the peers. This propels cross-fertilisation of ideas and could improve students' performance in a particular subject. It had been noted that when learners interact in groups, they would be able to reason together and take collective decisions on different issues. This encourages deep learning and critical thinking among members of the group. This model requires no special text materials and it is prominent in Asia countries like China, Japan, and Korea.

The Autonomous Learner Model

This model gives opportunity to develop independent learning among students in the programme. In this model, learners are required to shoulder the responsibility of organizing their learning as well as drawing the curriculum themselves.Students are expected to generate instructional objectives and select appropriate strategies and instructional media to be used to achieve these objectives.This model precludes the conventional mode of teaching by the lecturer. However, the professors only function as facilitators and moderators who would have to meet students on regular basis through interviews. The primary aim of this model is to develop the participants in the instructional process to become self-regulated learners and be able to learn at their

own pace. In this wise, students would become co-constructors of knowledge in the teaching-learning process. Students in the system would get learning materials in form of text materials and other learning resources to acquire relevant knowledge in a particular subject area. This learning process is advocated by the constructivism theory of learning.It should be noted that learning materials to be used in this model should be concise and self-explanatory, as learners are isolated from other elements in the instructional process. So, it is imperative that tutors are adequately trained on the skills and competences to develop self-regulated learning content that would allow learners to learn at their own pace.

In the same vein, the instructional content should be relevant to the needs and aspirations of the participants. Relevant instructional content would stimulate students' interest to give attention to the details of the classroom activities. The content of the materials is expected to be connected to real-life situation, such that students would be able to understand the concepts and use the experience gained in the process to solve their personal problems and confront the ever-increasing challenges of the modern world. This ensures that learners are equipped with knowledge and skills to function effectively in the society and become competent global citizens. Thus, this model is still in use in many regions of the world, as it allows students to understand the concepts and relate the ideas to the happenings within the environment. This model affords the stakeholders to properly address social and educational needs of the participants and therefore reduces the rate of drop-out in the system. Also, the model gives room for progressive monitoring of students' learning within instructional system. This allows tutors and other officials in the system to properly identify the challenges that are being confronted by distance learners during teaching and learning process. Thus, stakeholders in ODL would be furnished with necessary information to assist learners at the point of their needs. This ensures that learners are not unnecessarily frustrated out of the system. By this, students would begin to have confidence in the system as they are able to freely interact with their peers and exchange ideas within the learning space. This could increase the rate of enrolment in the programme and expand educational opportunities to the majority of people in the society.

The Network - Based Model

This is an emerging mode of open and distance learning which leverages the power of internet-based innovations for instructional delivery. It allows for students and lecturer

to interact in a digitalised learning space. Here, thestudents can access any lecture from any part of the world through mobile phones and other mobile devices. The advancement in technological innovations across the globe hasgiven impetus to emergence of network-based model of ODL and this is at the threshold of becoming a sustainable medium for information exchange and cross-fertilisation of ideas in the instructional system(Morley, 2012).

The internet-based resources had been used in this model to open up instructional spaceand allow seamless interaction among the basic elements in the teaching-learning process. Using these resources, learners have the capabilities to connect and interact with their tutors, regardless of the barriers posed by time and distance in instructional space. In the same vein, tutors would be able to impart required knowledge and progressively monitor the learning process. In other words, the network-based model provides a sustainable platform for feedback from the students anytime, anywhere. This could assist educational stakeholders in decision-making process to improve educational services and provide appropriate learners support services to the students. This could improve the rate of enrolment as students would be attracted to the programme by the flexibility of the teaching-learning atmosphere. So, this is the future of open and distance education across different regions of the world.

It is important to note that advancement in technological innovations had affected different operations in all areas of human endeavours. Education system is also being affected by technological revolution across the globe.The instructional delivery process can be facilitated with the systematic integration of technological tools to make learning connected to real-life situation. Different areas of education process could be enhanced, when tutors can leverage the capabilities of internet-based resources to expand access to learning opportunities within the system. The capabilities of internet-based resources had created a viable platform for learners to access diverse learning resources to solve their educational, personal and societal needs.Thus, the internet-based resources had affected the operations of all the models of ODL in the history of formal education across the world. This network-based model has affected the multiple media model by providing a veritable platform for the exchange of different media resources between tutor and the students. Also, this model gives educational stakeholders the opportunity to search for different materials online and these resources could be used to enhance instructional delivery process.

2.1.4. Distance Education Practice in Nigeria

The history ofdistance education (then called correspondence education) in Nigeria can be traced to the period of the colonialists as an integral part of western education structure.Due to the absence of university in Nigeria, the citizens who were willing to acquire western education but had no financial capability to travel overseas took immediate advantage of correspondence education without leaving the shores of the country. This movement continued until 1948 when University College was established in Ibadan. This mode of learning became a veritable alternative for Nigerians to get educated in standard universities outside the country (Omolewa, 1982).

For the first time by the year 1887, some Nigeriansdecided to acquire higher education and enrolled for the examination of University of London as external students studying through correspondence. It should be noted that no established institution was available in the country then to prepare them for the examination, so, they all prepared for the papers by themselves. As a result of this, these Nigerians did not perform well in the examinations in the first attempt. However,the trend changed dramatically by the first decade of the twentieth century, when many Nigerians registered for the examinations and passed to be enrolled for university education in London university. These notable Nigerians later graduated in flying colours in various degrees of London University as external students. Some individuals and British organisations likeuniversity correspondence college, Wolsey Hall, and Rapid Result Colleges provided these Nigerians with relevant materials and assistance to be successful in the examinations. Among the early Nigerian scholars who benefited from this programme were EyoIta, Davies, H.O.,AlvanIkoku and many other prominent educational elites.As at 1948 when University College in Ibadan was founded, many Nigerians continued to patronise the British correspondence colleges which eventually assisted in building the careers of the early educated elites in different disciplines.

The country's educational system continued to witness progress in terms of the provision of distance education to the vast majority of the population. Along this line, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria became the first institution in the history of Nigeria educational system to offer distance education system by organising a special training programme tagged "The correspondence and teachers' in-services programme (TISEP)". The University of Lagos in 1974 established what was called the Distance Learning Institute (DLI). This was then referred to as Correspondence Open Studies

Unit (COSU). The main aim of setting-up this unit was to produce university graduates in some strategic disciplines where the country was experiencing a shortfall.It was discovered that Nigeria needed professionals in some areas of specialisation to boost the manpower in the workforce and improve productivity in the economy. Thus, this centre was charged with the responsibility of bridging the gap in the production of workforce in different areas of specialisation.

National Teachers Institute (NTI) was the first autonomous distance education institution in the country andwas set-up in 1976. This institution was charged with the responsibility of providing distance education to some categories of people in the society. National Open University was first established in 1980 but the federal government later put its operations on hold in 1984. During that same time, the Distance Learning Centre (DLC) then called the (Centre for External studies) was established at the University of Ibadan in 1984. Along the line, the federal government restored the operations of the National Open University, which was re-incarnated in form of University of Abuja on January 1, 1988. This university was established to operate dual mode learning institution and was charged with the responsibilities of offering conventional and distance learning programmes to different categories of people across the country.

2.1.5. Concept of Learners' Support Services

Open and distance learning is a form of education that allows learners to access instructional content from the comfort of their homes and workplaces, without being restricted by temporal and spatial obstacles. This system of education allows learning institutions and tutors to be situated in different geographical locations across the globe. Thus, distance learners can access instructional content from anywhere through the use of internet-based resources and other ICT tools. Apparently, ODL requires the provision of relevant facilities and supporting services that could effectively bridge the instructional gap between tutor and the learners. The successful operation of ODL relies largely on the provision of learners' support services by the stakeholders in open and distance education programme in different institutions of learning (Hardman and Dunlap, 2003). Learner support can simply be defined as the resources that could make learning easier and convenient in form of instructional resources, teaching and tutoring programmes, non-academic components, administrative processes, guidance and counselling supports among other necessary aids to engender effective instructional activities(Brindley, Walti and Zawacki-Richter 2004; Thorpe (2001)

asserts that learnerssupport services are the components of ODL system of education, which provide additional aids for effective delivery of course content to different categories of learners.

These interventions had been generally categorised into three classes which include: academic, personal and administrative supports (Tait, 2000; Thorpe, 2001). In the words of Krishnan (2012), these learning supports are basically referred to as the combination of diverse resources and services that are made available to ensure that learning becomes meaningful and interesting to the learners. Also, Thorpe (2002) defines these services as all theessential activities that could positively respond to the immediate need of the learners whether during teaching-learning process or after the instructional activities. In other words, it is a kind of intervention that takes care of the socio-economic, political and educational needs of the participants throughout the course of the programme. The service could also assist learners in finding solutions to their instructional challenges before learning session.Thus, this support service is considered as a veritable interface between the students and learning institution (Krishnan 2012). In recent time, the provision of learners' support services by ODL institutions has generated more attention among educational stakeholders, as many scholars had advocated for the need to ensure availability of these services to ensure realisation of the objectives of open and distance learning across the world (Tait and Mills, 2003). The most prominent characteristic of ODL is the separation in respect of physical and temporal distance between the teacher and students. This isolation necessitates the need for extra services that could enable students overcome any likely difficulties that could be encountered in the absence of teachers for face-to-face interaction.In this wise, student support incorporates the process of identifying the learning needs of each student and the ability to respond appropriately.Learner support service indicates a support system that focuses on the process of enhancing and improving learning generally and instructional delivery system in particular. This involves a diverse range of skills and competencesthat assist learners from admission stage to the point of graduation (McLoughlin, 2002).

The provision ofeffective learner support services (LSS) is now rapidly gaining momentum as a critical element of any meaningful open and distance learning system in different parts of the world. Scholars across the globe are consistently advocating for the need to boost the effectiveness and efficiency of ODL by ensuring that learners have unrestricted access to basic services that could aid their learning and enhance

their performance in the learning space. Tait (1995) indicates that, there is an increasing interest in the provision of learners' support services by scholars and educational stakeholders even in periods of financial challenges and budgets constraints. In other words, the quantum and quality of learners' support servicesare critical to the success of any mode of ODL. In a similar vein, Chander, (1998); Venkaiah, (1998) define the concept of learners' support services as any assistance or resources that are made available to the learners to complement student's learning materials. Thus, these services include:counselling services, provision of organisational resources, library facilities, tele conferencing, online interaction through LMS, provision of feedback to the learners at the appropriate time, valuable suggestions on issues that could facilitate learning and provision of up-to-date information on learning structure from admission stage to graduation. Generally, the fundamental objectives of learners' support services include:

i. provision of adequate information that learners would need to participate effectively in ODL;

ii. motivation of distance learners to take active part in the use of available learning resources; stimulate distance learning students to properly understand learning content and instructional tasks;

iii. provision ofcounselling services to guide students on career choices and the use of learning resources;

iv. creation of conducive learning atmosphere that could facilitate interaction and deep learning among students, the faculty and distance learning administrators.

In this instance, Sim, Atan and Idrus (2005) affirm that learners' support services can be broadly categorized into two areas which are; academic and non-academic supports. Academic supports are the kind of services that are related to supporting learners with challenges in acquiring knowledge, skills and competences.These services involve all activities that are directed towards ensuring that all students enrolled in ODL programmes are provided with the required abilities to understand the instructional content and classroom activities. This intervention enhances development of learning skills, understanding of instructional content and value system in the instructional setting. In other words, academic supports are made available simply to engender deep and active learning among different categories of distance learners.

It is instructive to note that the advancement in technological innovation and internet facilities has propelled rapid provision of these support services by ODL institutions in different parts of the world. ICT is rapidly expanding flexibility and access to instruction and this has helped in ensuring that leaning activities in ODL system become easier and relevant to the learners. The second type of learners support services is non-academic support. Non-academic support has to do with organisational aspects of the instructional setting. These services are not directly under teaching and learning but could facilitate instructional delivery system. They are the kind of services that are needed to make teaching and learning more meaningful and effective. Non-academic supports include: counselling service, orientation programme, course registration, course schedules among other critical services that could complement instructional activities.

Tait (2000) asserts that students' support services are the learning materials whichrange from provision of information to students' inquiries about admission and courses available to the type of learning supports that are provided to facilitate instruction as students progress through learning. Thus, this learning intervention refers to the principles and procedures that are meant tomeetdiverse learningneeds of the learners at every point of contact between students and institutions (Thorpe, 2002). The author contends that support systems or services serve as agents of instruction that have the capability to understand the language of the student, interpret learning materials and clarify the procedures of complex bureaucratic structures. Thorpe (2002) asserts that students require adequate guidance on selection of courses, study approaches and how to access learning materials.

In essence, the primary goal of providing these services is to cater for changes in learning configuration that could hinder effective teaching-learning process in the ODL system of education. When the right quality of support services are made available in the system, it gives opportunity for the learners to easily and seamlessly key into the operations of the institutions from the point of entry through the period of graduation. This implies that LSS provides the solid foundation for the new intakes to properly understand the configuration of the system and be able to access available learning resources that are provided therein.

Justification for the Provision of Learners Support Services to Distance Learners
One of the distinguishing features of distance learning is that those who study through this mode engage in self-directed learning, where the responsibility for learning lies

primarily with the learner. However, self-directed learning is not an easy mode of learning. This is why most distance learners, as self-directed learners, encounter many difficulties in their learning. Similarly, researchers have confirmed that most distance learners are adults who may have been away from formal education for a number of years and may have forgotten some of their learning skills (Akintayo, 1994). These individuals had been separated from the formal school system for a long period of time due to psychological, economic and socio-cultural factors. Many of them had entered into the labour force with lot of commitments from the family and society at large.Thus, making them function effectively in a formal education setting becomes herculean. The new environment is quite different from what they experienced at the point of exit from formal education.

This often means that they are approaching the course with a certain level of anxiety and lack of confidence. Corroborating this view, Aderinoye (1992) similarly affirms that a good number of distance learners are adults with professional and social responsibilities and may have limited formal education or are a long time away from formal education. This implies that these categories of people have other social responsibilities in the society, apart from their participation in open and distance education. Many of them are working class people and married men and women in the society, thus, they require an instructional system that provides adequate support for effective learning at all times. In essence, learning or studying in adult life is a difficult process. Thorpe (1987) listed four reasons why this is so:Studying in adult life is always a difficult process with pains and disappointment;The task of reading often raises the humdrum problem of becoming bored very quickly and inspires the intensely felt attraction towards making a cup of tea, tidying the shelves, watching a television programme or whatever after only a couple of paragraphs of reading;Learning a text is a process of coming to understand it, with sheer memory of the content, an incidental accompaniment; andA lot may be at stake for adult students whose studies in effect set them apart from the interest and aspirations of friends or withdraw from their family.

Parker, (2003), while explaining the problems faced by distance learners in their study, contends that:

> The problems that are associated with isolation, separation, apprehension and inability to effectively control the pace of work are fundamental challenges

confronting distance learners in the distance education system. They tend to have lost (or sometimes never have acquired) the skills of studying. They may, therefore, spend hours reading every word of a book which only needs to be scanned. They may attempt laborious verbatim recording where sketchy notes would be more appropriate.

Writing on the disadvantage of distance learners studying alone, Ojokheta (2010), wrote:

By reasons of being denied the psychological security of face-to-face contact with his tutors or (at least the possibility of consulting with humans when needed), the distance learner is at a great disadvantage vis-à-vis the internal students. The difficulty of this method of learning creates anxiety on the distance learners to succeed which invariably leads to some study problems.

Thorpe (1987) put it succinctly that "a student who is desperately anxious to succeed can be extremely deflated by early study problems or poor performance and can drop out as a result of this". This anxiousness sometimes leads to nervousness probably due to lack of sensitive reading, which the distance learners suffer as an independent learner. All these reasons were made by Wedemeyer, as far back as 1977, to warn that "not every students will be able to succeed by correspondence/distance instruction since this is not an easy method of learning."

Due to the inherent instructional challenges confronting distance learners within instructional process, it becomes important for institutions operating ODL to put in place learners' support services that take into consideration the impulses, emotions, interests, needs, desires, and purposes of learners. Such support services will help facilitate emotional interaction between the learners and the tutors which will help enhance enthusiasm and excitement of the learners to learn. They can also improve learning outcome since learners are encouraged to seek both academic and administrative assistance to ensure they achieve success in their learning. These interventions can equally cushion the effect of isolation which the learners suffer as a result of their partial separation from their tutors.

When distance learning tutors display the virtue of caring and become passionate, thoughtful and tactful in their teaching, when they show that they are fair

and respectful, when they engage in authentic discussions on relationship development with the learners, when they value the engagement of the learners in the learning process than the curriculum plans and materials, effect of the partial isolation between the learners and tutors will be minimised. Therefore, the provision of learners' support services will assist distance learners to overcome, to a great extent, the learning difficulties that could be encountered in their learning as well as the psychological disadvantage they suffer as a result of their isolation from their tutors, learning colleagues, and distance education institution. As a result of this, the participants would begin to develop confidence in the mode of instruction that is a radical departure from the conventional technique. These learning supports had been found to stimulate students' sense of belonging and level of engagement in instructional content. Basically, the provision of appropriate LSS could positively influence the perception of students, especially the new intakes, that this system of education has the capabilities to address the diverse needs and aspirations of the participants.

In conclusion, it is noteworthy that provision of LSS and instructional delivery process in ODL are inextricably linked and the success of ODL operations is usually measured by the availability and quality of learners support in the system (Alias, 2005). The planning and delivery of distance education depend largely on the provision of appropriate LSSs to satisfy the diverse needs of the participants, who have variety of commitments within the society. This learning intervention provides distance learners with the required information and competence to effectively navigate the uncommon terrain of ODL. Therefore, students would have confidence in the system and this would boost their sense of belonging in the instructional process. When used appropriately, LSS has the capacity to improve the rate of students' enrolment in the system (Usun, 2004). When students get adequate information on the available resources and services in the system, it could improve the retention rate among distance learners.

Importance of Learners' Support Services

Learners' support service is an integral part of open and distance learning education, as it is directed towards engendering effective learning for all categories of learners in the system. These services contribute immensely to the realisation of the objectives of ODL in different regions of the world. LSS serves as a nexus between learners and service providers in instructional space. The degree at which students would be able to fully understand instructional content and the potentials of learning resources depends

largely on the structures that are put in place to ensure availability of learners support interventions to complement learning activities. It also depends on the quality of these interventions that learning institutions put in place to ensure that learners are able to access learning resources to enhance performance and competence. The support services recognise the learning challenges of the students andproffer lasting solutions within the context of the available resources and institutions infrastructural capabilities. In this wise, LSS symbolises a viable channel, through which learners understand the potentials of educational resources available in instructional space and experience a sustainable interaction with tutors and institution.The learning interventions are, therefore, important to the realisation of learning goals and functionality in the society.

Apparently, these services are strategic components of ODL, in order to engender sustainability, flexibility, accessibility and democratisation of education across different countries of the world.Adequate provision of learners support services would stimulate the ability of distance learners and prepare them to cope with the ever-increasing challenges of self-regulated learning. This could improve student retention and problem solving skills, with a view to producing individuals who would be functional members of the community and contribute to the general development of the society.In the words of Simpson (2000),there exists a strong nexus between LSS and student's learning especially in open and distance education system. These two components are closely interrelated and to some extent, one is a function of the other. The pattern of instruction in ODL system of education necessitates the need to provide relevant support services to students at the entry point, as they would require professional counsellingto make appropriate choices and understand the mode of communication in the instructional setting. Tait (2000) believes that there are three basic functions of learners' support services in open and distance education worldwide and these are:

i. cognitive function which entailsprovision of supports through course materials and learning facilities to ensure that absence of physical teacher does not, in any way, hinder learning process by all categories of students in the system;

ii. affective function incorporates the process ofproviding an enabling environment which stimulates deep learning and enhances self-regulated learning; and

iii. systemic function which emphasises the need to create administrative processes that positively respond to the immediate needs of all students. This allows distance learners get the best out of teaching-learning process in ODL.

Collectively, learners' support services should be able to perform these functions to stimulate active engagement in learning process and ensure that all students are given equal platforms to operate. When the learning interventions are able to equip learners with requisite skills and competences, it would go a long way in measuring the rate of success of students in the programme. Thus, stakeholders in ODL would be able to take critical decisions on how to improve the quality of education in the system.Tait (2003) asserts that the fundamental aim of student support services in ODL is to provide a veritable platform to assist students to be active participants in the process of teaching and learning. This system of learning is characterised by the need to support learners to develop self-confidence in their abilities to participate in instructional process and explore learning opportunities that are made available by learning institutions. In essence, the intervention that is provided by the support services is usually directed at making learning more meaningful, by ensuring that distance learners are actively engaged in instructional process and other learning activities that are incorporated in the system.

These support services symbolise the quality of education that could be derived from any distance education programme across the globe. It is expected that learning institutions that made learners support services available to the students would be able to provide meaningful education for the participants. On the other hand, the absence of LSS in instructional system implies that learners would be confronted with myriad of challenges in their attempt to acquire formal education.In the light of this, ODL system of education is expected to be structured to incorporate essential learning services to cater for the diverse needs of the participants. This will ensure that learning is extended to cover majority of the disadvantaged members of the community. Thus, access to higher education can be positively influenced with adequate provision of learners' support services by the learning institutions. The resultant effect is the improved rate of enrolment in the programme and reduction in the level of drop-out.Kumar, Jamatia, Aggarwaland Kannan (2011) indicate that the provision of relevant support servicesencourages sustainability and reduces the rate of drop-out in the system. It should be noted that students tend to forgo the ODL programme, if they are frustrated due to inadequate information on necessary steps and choice to make at

a particular time. Thus, students would be encouraged to complete their degrees, if they have adequate information at their disposal on the learning resources and patterns of instruction in the institutions. Simpson (2002) also states that LSSs are critical element in any mode of ODL system.

Learners support service is, therefore, an extra learning package that emphasises the pivotal roles of learning materials and information in ensuring that learners are able to easily navigate through instructional process from admission stage to the period of graduation. Learners support is a means through which students are equipped with relevant knowledge and skill to utilise educational resources made available by the institution to help them in realising their learning goals at different levels of education. Sewart (1993) affirms that learners' supports are form of intermediaries which have the capabilities to interact directly with the distance learners and solve their instructional needs.In other words, LSS serves as an interface between learning institutions and their students. The reputation of learning institutions could easily be assessed with the kind of learners' support services provided to facilitate teaching and learning activities. These serve as first point of contact, when students intend to take decision concerning enrolment and admission into the institutions. Thus, the services are strategic to acquaint prospective students with adequate knowledge about the operations and requirements to participate in the programme.

It should be mentioned that investment in the provision of learners support services would translate into improved quality of service to the distance learners within the system. Learning institutions that invest adequately on the provision of appropriate support system would be able to raise students that would possess relevant skills to function effectively in the 21st Century society. In essence, the availability of appropriate support system would propel critical thinking and deep learning in teaching-learning process and this would ensure that distance students have the capability to relate instructional content to the real-life situation. There is a possibility that separation between learners and tutor in learning space could make learning to become abstract and uninteresting. This is due to the fact that learners might not have the opportunity to be properly engaged with the instructional content as a result of isolation that exists within the instructional setting. However, adequate provision of learners' support services could demystify instructional content and make learning connected to real-life situation (Simpson, 2002). Students in ODL system of education have the capabilities to explore relevant learning materials that would stimulate deep

learning and reduce the level of abstractness associated with a particular concept. These services afford learners the opportunity to access different learning resources to cater for their needs and be able to contribute immensely to the growth and development of the entire society. Apparently, it is imperative to equip distance learning institutions with appropriate facilities and personnel to provide learners' support services to different categories of students in the learning space.

Since distance learners are entering the system from diverse backgrounds within the society, it important that stakeholders are able to monitor their learning progress, with a view to adjusting appropriately to needs and aspiration of the participants. This would ensure sustainability in the programme and would also reduce the rate of drop-out among the students. However, it would be practically impossible to progressively monitor students' activities without adequate LSS in the system (Tait, 2000). Learners support programmes like academic advising services and counselling intervention are therefore strategic to the full realization core mandates of ODL across the globe. LSS provides educational stakeholders with relevant data and information on how students are coping with the new system of instructional delivery that is at variance with what is obtainable in the conventional mode of learning. This would allow learning institutions to adjust their policies and programmes to suit the needs and aspiration of distance learners at all times. Thus, provision of these critical services assist stakeholders in decision-making process and ensure that the interests and expectations of the participants are well taken care of. It should be mentioned that society is a dynamic entity and the needs and aspirations of the inhabitants change with time. These essential services would allow institutions to respond timely to changing needs of the participants in the programme.

These are the educational benefits that are derivable from the systematic integration of LSS into the structure and configuration of ODL across the world. It should be mentioned that learners would be encouraged to complete their programmes, if their performance improve over time. Poor academic performance could lead to high rate of drop-out as students could be frustrated out of the system. Adequate provision of LSS could lead to sustainable participation of students in instructional activities. When learners have access to relevant and appropriate supports in their educational pursuits, there is a possibility that they would be able to understand the terrain of this instructional system and give attention to details of instruction (Tait, 2000). This could, in the long run, improve the academic performance of distance learners in

instructional contents. Interventions like information flow services, academic advising, library services and ICT support would expose the participants to diverse learning resources that had been made available by the institution to enhance instructional delivery process. This allows distance learners to have access to quality educational materials that give detail information on the instructional content (Mehran and Mahdi2010).These services could therefore improve the performance of students in different subject areas. This explains the inseparable relationship between provision of LSS and students' performance in instructional content at different stages of distance education. Therefore, provision of appropriate LSS could engender effective learning, which could result in improved academic achievement among the students. This would propel stability and sustainability in the system as students would be able to monitor learning process and identify the required learning resources that could be used to facilitate their understanding of the subject matter.

Therefore, governments at all levels and other stakeholders need to give utmost priority to the issues of LSSs as these interventions have direct impact on the perception and performance of distance learners in any subject area. In order to ensure effective service delivery at this stage, the personnel involved in the provision of these services need to be properly trained on the need to be friendly and approachable to the students at all times. The personnel need to develop passion to provide necessary assistance for different categories of students in the programme. Also, there should be adequate provision for human and material resources to ensure that these interventions are readily available within the reach of students anytime, anywhere.

2.1.6. Components of Learners Support Services

The components of learners' support services have been widely discussed in literature by many scholars. Gunasekera (2014) contends that learners' support services should be incorporated with viable components that couldstimulate learners for self-studying, discourage the rate of drop-out, improve the retention rate of students,provide unrestricted access to variety of instructional resources that could stimulate learning and proffering solutions to administrative challenges in the instructional setting. Sekyi (2013) listed the components of LSS to include: tutorial sessions that include face-to-face interaction, lessons schedules, assistance by tutors in competing major instructional tasks, provision of learning resources, reference materials, assessment of learners based on learning objectives, well-coordinated counselling support services,

orientation for new intakes and administrative support services.Specifically, the following are the components of LSS:

2.1.6. a. Information Flow Support Services

In the view of Welch and Reed (2005), administrative support in ODL emphasises the need to provide requisite learning resources to facilitate learning and ensure that distance students get the best out of the system. Information flow support services incorporate administrative assistancethat includes information on admission requirement, procedure for registration, examination and timetables, provision of academic progress report,tutorial schedules among other services(COL, 2003). In essence, students who intend to join the system should be able to have unrestricted access to information concerning:What is required of a prospective student, including time commitment and how to manage their time effectively to get the best out of the learning pattern of open and distance education; Requirements for admission into the programme, which could be facilitated by access to up-to-date information on the school website. This would allow prospective distance learners make appropriate choices on why, how and when to begin the programme; The nature of the programme and how to combine the course with other social commitments; The issue of attendance and how to schedule other activities to ensure completion; The cost implication of the programme and any other additional costs, which could be in form of excursion, field trip, travelling within and outside the city; The mode of getting feedback from the system through external examiner reports, interaction with the student representation system and information from the tutors or institution. This enables learners to progressively monitor their learning and make necessary adjustments at a particular time.

Learners' support services should be able to provide these information flow services, with a view to allowing distance learners understand ODL pattern of instruction and benefit maximally from the programme. When these information flow services are made available, it helps students to make appropriate choices concerning their participation in instructional activities and also understand when and how to access relevant resources to facilitate learning.

One important component of information flow services in ODL system of education is the orientation programme for the fresh students, who are just coming into the programme from different backgrounds and beliefs. Basically, orientation for the new intakes in any citadel of learning provides a platform for the first official physical

contact between the new set of learners and the structure of the new institution. In other words, it is a programme organised for the fresh students to acquaint them with the existing structures, rules, regulations, procedures and general conduct regarding their studentship in the institution from the time entry to graduation period. Mullendore and Banahan, (2005) describes orientation as an event organised for the new intakes, where students are notified of certain traits, principles and characters to be developed for them to be fully acclimatised with series of operations in their new learning setting. It is usually conducted at the entry point to allow fresh students easily adapt to the new learning environment. It should be noted that the pattern of instruction in open and distance learning system is mostly different from what is obtainable in the conventional mode of learning, where majority of these students are migrating from or had their last encounter with formal education. Thus, it is imperative to provide them with an event that would explicitly explain the process and procedure of learning in the new environment. This determines, to some extent, their ability to function effectively in the ODL system of education.

Most orientation programmes afford students the rare opportunity to physically interact with the officials in the institution concerning issues on financial aid, tutorial schedules and access to professional counselling services during their study. Nsiah (2011) affirms that distance learners in ODL system of education become familiar with existing patterns of instructional delivery and develop confidence in the system when given the opportunity to physically interact with the personnel of the institution in form orientation programme. At this point, students would be made to understand the imperative of technology, especially internet-based resources, in facilitating interaction among students, centre personnel and available learning resources. Thus, students would understand the pivotal role of technology as a medium of instruction in open and distance education.

The difference in the modes of operations in the conventional and ODL format could pose huge instructional challenges to distance learners, either at the point of entry or during the programme. This could lead to frustration and drop-out among the participants at different stages of learning. However, institutions could leverage the capabilities provided by information flow services to mitigate these instructional challenges. Information flow service allows students to seek help and clarification on how to access learning resources and navigate through the instructional process. The desk officers and other personnel should be ready to provide necessary information to

the students to allow them get the best out of the system. When students get necessary information on the operations and procedures of the ODL, they would be able to plan their time to cater for personal and educational commitments. Therefore, information service would equip students with the knowledge of the system and how to combine societal commitments with educational requirements. This would attract many young and other categories of people in the society to the system. This increased level of participation would reduce the illiteracy rate in the society and improve productivity. In the long run, the educational system would be a viable platform to reduce the involvement of the youth in crime-related activities. This would ensure that a good number of these youngsters become productive members of the community and contribute to the growth and development of the society.

2.1.6 b Academic Advising Support Services

Another component of learners support services is the kind of activities made available to monitor students' learning process in the programme. This is simply referred to as academic advising support service. Academic advising service is a continuous interactive process which involves distance learning personnel, student and the institution. The primary goal is to render necessary assistance to students, especially in the area of development and accomplishment of meaningful educational plans that would be useful to them now and in the future. Academic advising is a kind of support that emphasises the need to provide professionalcounselling to students, with a view to assisting themto achieve their previously stated academic goals (Meyer and Xu Yu, 2005). In many ODL institutions across the world, academic advisors are charged with the responsibility to provide academic-related services to the students, anytime, anywhere. In this instance, the academic advisor in the institution offers assistance in the process of evaluating students learning and advises students in the selection of coursework and accessing learning resources. This advisor performs dual functions. In the first instance, academic advisor is in the best position to generate relevant data concerning students' learning activities for the institution to help in decision-making process. Also, this individual gives necessary advice to the students on different issues and this allows both institution and students to monitor academic progress of the participants across all levels.

It should be noted that distance learners are entering into the system with a diversebackgrounds and learning goals, hence, it is imperativeto provide appropriate services that would assist them in ensuring full realisation of these previously stated

goals. This would determine their level of success in the programme and equip them with requisite skills and competences to function effectively in the modern society. Academic advising service provides a veritable platform for distance learners to adjust to the new environment and schedule their plans and commitments on social, economic and educational issues. Thus, students would be able to develop a workable plan of action to combine educational activities and social commitments in the society. This gives them assurance that their educational pursuits would not distort socio-political engagements and other personal services. In the long run, provision of appropriate academic advising services would increase the level of enrolment and reduce the rate of drop-out in the system. With this development, the system would be able to capture different categories of people in the society and improve level of access to formal education worldwide.This would go a long way in ensuring that the main objectives of ODL are realized within the education system. Advisors need to be properly trained to acquire skills on how to connectdistance learners with the available leaning opportunities and resources to strengthen active interaction among all the elements in the instructional system (Deary, Watson and Hogston 2003; Steele, Lauder,Caperchione and Anastasi, 2005).

A successful academic advisor shows concern for the issues confronted by each advisee and proffers workable solutions to make learning more interesting to the learners (Dillon and Fischer, 2000; Smith and Allen, 2006). Academic advising is a component that is responsible for creating and maintaining an academic environment that works towards educational excellence among students in the ODL system. The Academic advisor supports students' academic achievement through student advocacy, organizing tutorials, providing a friendly customer service as well as campus and community referrals to impact positively on the community. This person works closely with all departments andfaculties to create a learning atmospherethat is devoid of rancour and academic distortion.

According to Ojokheta (2012), standards for academic and Learners support services can be assured through provision of appropriate curriculum and instruction services.Under these services, the educational stakeholders need to ensure that relationship between curriculum and instruction is well identified and an enabling environment is created for effective teaching-learning process. The following actions need to be taken to assist students on issues that relate to curriculum and instruction: The personnel in the faculty are saddled with the responsibility to perform oversight

over series of activities in the progamme to ensure that the quality of instruction is maintained. Policies and procedures should be diligently executed to reflect the vision of flexibility, accessibility and standard; The institution should make sure that learning materials, coursework and the entire instructional content are up-to-date and conform with the current realities of the modern world. This would result to improved productivity and development of the society as a whole; The institution should create a learning atmosphere that engenders appropriate and effective use technological resources to facilitate full realization of the objectives of open and distance learning in the education system.This would afford learners the opportunity to understand the strategic importance of technology in instructional delivery process. In the long run, the system would be able to produce graduates, who are equipped with requisite skills and competences to confront the ever-increasing challenges of the 21st Century; Appropriate training should be provided for the personnel so as to render friendly services that conform with international best practices. This would encourage distance learners to fully participate in academic activities and reduce the rate of drop-out in the system; The institution provides relevant and appropriate learning resources that could be used to facilitate distance education and encourage active participation of all stakeholders in the process; The programmes should ensure timely interaction among students, learning materials and faculty members.This could be institutionalised through appropriate use of technology in instructional delivery process; Lastly, distance learning institution needs to design instructional content in such a way that that caters for individuals with learning disabilities and people with special needs. This would reflect educational inclusion for all categories of people in the society and make distance learning to be responsive to the needs and aspirations of the entire populace.

In the light of this, this service remains a crucial component of LSS across different institutions worldwide. This service provides learners with the opportunity to understand the requirements of the programme and how to achieve academic excellence in the system.

2.1.6. c. Academic Progress Report Services

This is another critical service that should be made available to ensure effective ODL operations at the higher level of education. It should be noted that learners' assessment remains an important factor in determining the success or otherwise of an educational programme. In open and distance education, academic progress report helps tutors and other stakeholders to progressively monitor students' learning in instructional process.

Learning institutions across developed countries of the world use technology-based platforms to assess distance learners wherever they may be located. Technological innovations had provided opportunities for tutor to assess learners from anywhere, regardless of spatial or temporal barriers in the instructional system. Tutors can get adequate feedback from the learners with the use of online chart forum and other online platforms. This allows tutors and learning institutions to assess students and evaluate success rate in the ODL system of education. However, in most developing countries of the world, teachers still assess learners by converging at various study centres at the specified time for physical interaction (COL, 2003). Institutions are therefore required to provide necessary technological resources that would simplify assessment of students anytime, anywhere.

Lentell (2003) argues that the process of cautious reading of student assignments and tasks provides a strong basis for effective teaching and learning. The ability of the system to meticulously examine students work gives room for active engagement in the instructional content. It is believed that, if students understand that the teacher gives undivided attention to coursework and assignments, they would develop a sense of responsibility to do the right thing at the right time. This is one of the core academic progress reports that teachers need to render to engender active engagement of students in instructional content. When learners realise they are being monitored by the teacher, they pay attention to the details of the instructional content and this could improve their performance in the course.Thus, all human and material resources should be galvanised to ensure appropriate assessment procedures in the instructional process. This assessment needs to be based on appropriate framework to ensure sustainability and credibility of the entire process.

It is instructive to note that assessment focuses on the procedure that elicits results and it is considered a strategic component of teaching and learning activities at different levels of education. In essence, an effective assessment procedure is one thatis considered as being fair, reliable and accurate in all respects. Assessment of students in distance learning should be based on standard procedure that is reliable and accurate. This would maintain the sanctity of the results emanating from such process. These results provide the basis for any decision-making process in the system. Thus, it is expected that assessment remains flexible, easy to score, and interpret and gives relevant information to the teacher on the academic progress of students in the instructional process. This process affords teacher the opportunity to understand

misconceptions in the instruction and seeks way to provide services that could enhance students' academic performance. There are many ways through which distance learning institutions assess their students and these include: assignments on the instructional content that had been covered or the next topic, practice examinations usually at the end of the semester and coursework on the current instructional content. It should be noted that practice examinations are assessment procedures that are usually done to examine students in practical related disciplines. This is mostly carried out before the final examinations and in some instances, scores from practice examinations are added to the final exam grade of the students.

This point to the fact that assessment remains a vital component of any education programme, especially distance learning system. Without proper assessment of students, it becomes practically impossible to monitor the progress of learningin the instructional process. Therefore, both human and material resources should be made available by distance learning institutions to promote fair, credible and accurate assessment in the instructional system. According to De Plooy(2007), assessment in distance education can be carried out in three forms and these are subjective assessment, objective assessment and interactive assessment.

Subjective assessment is a type of assessment procedure which may require more than one way of answering or sometimes have more than one correct answer. This form of assessment allows learners to explore their thinking abilities to give likely answers to the questions. It is a good approach to develop critical thinking skills in students and allow them to explore likely opportunities for appropriate answers. Teacher gives open ended questions to allow students express their opinions on the topic and come up with most appropriate answer. The main criticism of this approach is that the right answer is usually at the discretion of the teacher. In other words, the responsibility of what the right answer should be relies solely on the teacher. This makes the procedure subject to bias on the part of the teacher. The students have no idea of what the answer to the question would be. This implies that there is no acceptable standard framework to measure students' responses and assess their answers accordingly.

On the other hand, objective assessments are structured in such a way that allows for the inclusion of possible answers to the questions. In this kind of assessment, students have the opportunity to identify correct answer from the options provided at the end of each question. The aim of objective assessment is to allow

students express their opinion about a particular educational issue or topic in the classroom. This form of assessment gives learners free hands to operate within the learning space by giving them the opportunity to select from different options after a particular question.

Lastly, interactive assessment is a technology-mediated assessment procedure and it is designed with high level flexibility and adaptability. In this kind of assessment, tutors would be able to monitor the achievement of learning goals of learnersafter the test. This allows for seamless interaction among different elements in the learning space. This is mostly in form of computer-based testing and it is generally used in open and distance education due to geographical separation between students and the educational institution. This technology-based assessment allows seamless interaction between students and their institution. This signifies the pivotal role of technology in ODL across different regions of the world. Interactive assessment had been touted as a positive response to the issue of temporaland distance separation between learners and tutors in instructional delivery process. Distance learners have the opportunity to access examinations anywhere, anytime, without being restricted with the barriers of time and distance.

Whatever form of assessment a learning institution intends to adopt, it is pertinent to note that technology could allow for seamless assessment process within the learning space, regardless of the challenges posed by distance and time. Across different climes, technology has been used to assess distance students and evaluate learning process, especially in developed countries of the world where there are adequate facilities to facilitate the system. This entrenches flexibility in learning process and assists stakeholders in decision-making process. It is therefore important for governments at all levels to provide distance learning institutions with appropriate facilities and adequate funding to democratise learning and enhance access to educational opportunities.

2.1.6.d Study/Tutorials Guide Services

These services are important in distance learning programmes to ensure academic excellence within the system. This type of support provides necessary assistance to students in developing cognitive and intellectual competences to function effectively in open and distance learning environment (Simpson, 2000). These may include printed modules, multimedia academic materials, tutorials and other facilities which help students to gather knowledge and skills within the instructional space. Despite the

fact that distance learners enjoy high degree of autonomyand flexibility in teaching-learning process, they are particularly prone to the challenges that have to do with applicability of the knowledge gained during the programme (Panagiotis, 2010). The separation between the students and teacher makes it difficult to measure the rate at which these students apply the knowledge and skills gained during teaching and learning activities to solve personal and societal problems. Thus, making students to realise the relevance of the instructional content and apply same to solve problems that confront the society requires extra efforts and services from the tutors and institution as a whole.

Tutors are, therefore, charged with the responsibility to create positive connection with the learners in instructional process, with a view to assisting them surmount personal and societal challenges. In essence, the tutor needs to perform the role of a counsellor to facilitate the realisation of students' learning goals within the shortest possible time (Panagiotis, 2010). To effectively perform these functions, the tutor is expected to promptly inform students of the specific objectives of the course or the programme, progressively monitor students' learning, create enabling environment for students to ask questions or make enquiries that would help them understand the purpose of their participation in distance education (COL, 2003).Specifically, a learner-centred tutorial service is required at every point in instructional process. These tutorial services are designed to entrench effective interaction among learners, tutors and learning resources. It should be noted that these students are coming into the system with diverse needs and backgrounds, creating an avenue for interaction and exchange of ideas becomes strategic for sustainability and reduction in the rate of drop-out in the system. Open and distance education is designed to capture as many people as possible, who are unable to benefit from the conventional system of education worldwide. Unless students are assisted with tutorial contact services by the tutor to provide diverse learning experiences to different categories of learners, it becomes herculean to realise the goals of open and distance education in any country of the world.

One of the viable channels to enhance interaction among different elements in instructional system and provideresponsive tutorial contact services to different categories of distance learners is through face-to-face contact and this is usually referred to as face-to-face interaction in tutorial system. Face-to-face tutorials are designed to afford students and tutors, the opportunity to interact on critical issues that

could hinder effective teaching and learning in ODL. These services are made available in instructional setting to enable students meet tutors at the convenient time, who respond to their queries or questions, by offering detailed explanation on different concepts in the learning materials (COL, 2003).It is instructive to note that learners are normally provided with learning materials to study on their own and there could be some difficult concepts in the instructional content that they might not properly understand. Thus, face-to-face interaction provides students with that rare opportunity to interact with tutor and ask questions on difficult concepts in the text. Thorpe (1990) affirms that tutorial sessions are particularly conducted by a specific tutor, who has the knowledge and capability to provide detailed clarifications on difficult areas in thecourse materials provided to distance learners. Such services are strategic to the success of students in the instructional process, since they provide a veritable platform for these learners and their tutor to interact physically to improve realisation of their learning goals.

In Nigeria, face-to-face interactions are specifically designed to allow tutor reinforce learning tasks that had been executed by individual students.This practically reduces the effects of separation between learners and tutor in the system. It also encourages interaction and collaboration as students would be able to share experiences and exchange ideas on important instructional issues. This reduces the burden of isolation that is directly placed on the students by the way open and distance education is configured.

2.1.6 e Library Students Support Services

Another essential support that should be made available within ODL system is library service. It had been argued that functional library service is the backbone of effective teaching-learning process in any institutions across the world. Despite the fact that students in conventional institutions have unrestricted access to teachers and learning resources, they require the support and service provided by library and its resources. In the open and distance education, the pattern of instruction necessitates the need for students to be provided with adequate library services to complement teaching and learning activities. The separation between learners and tutors could be well taken care of, if ODL institutions provide students with access of diverse library resources and necessary supports by the staff.

In open and distance education, library services are usually considered as strategic components in learner support structureas libraries are designed to provide necessary learning resources to distance learners anytime, anywhere (Tait 2000; Sell 1980). Library facilitiesare important to the realisation of students' learning goals in open and distance learning environment. Library service affords students the opportunity to select appropriate materials to be used to complement instructional activities. As the number of courses for distance learners continues to rise, librarians have been finding ways to extend traditional support enjoyed by on-campus students to the distance learning and online environment (Kinnie 2006).

Library services in ODL should incorporate an effective platform that allows students to access information online, with the use of internet facilities from any part of the world.The barrier in traditional library system can easily be overcome with online library services. This makes online library system quite appropriate to address the needs and aspirations of various categories of distance learners. Online library adds flexibility and accessibility to the traditional library setting. Therefore, provision of effective library services plays critical roles in ensuring that learners are afforded the opportunity to access learning materials from the comfort of their houses and workplaces.It had been argued that libraries in universities and colleges are strategic in creating a complete social and learning environment that could equip distance learners with requisite skills and competences to function effectively in 21st Century society. Stephens, Unwin and Bolton (1997)affirm that it would be difficult to control and measure learning activities without adequate provision of library services by the stakeholders in open and distance education. Thus, distance learners need to have unrestricted accessto different online learning materials through effective library services.

It had been argued that even ifstudents in open and distance learning are provided with self-study materials to learn individually, it is imperative that library services are provided to expose them to the unlimited learning resources on the internet. In other words, provision of library services would allow distance learners to learn beyond learning material provided by the tutor. This exposes them to the perspectives of scholars on different issues and concepts. Unwind (1994) reports that students in ODL system would prefer to be part of an authentic learning experience like students in the conventional system of education and provision of library services

could afford educational stakeholders the opportunity to achieve this kind of learning goal.

Libraries frequently play a special role in distance education. According to Beer (2000)

> Library is the students' most likely source of "additional" learning resources- that is, books and materials other than those provided by the teaching institutions. However, the time and expertise of library staff is limited and may not be very helpful for the specific needs of distance learner. Distance learning institutions can make libraries more valuable resource centres for their students by forming explicit partnerships and providing the kinds of materials needed. For example, some open universities provide selected libraries with "book boxes" containing multiple copies of the materials needed for specific courses, as well as reference lists of other materials that may be relevant.

Library services are therefore strategic component of the learners' support services across ODL institutions in different parts of the world. Library services provide genuine platform for the authentication of instructional content by the learners. The separation between learners and tutor might pose a challenge to students' quest to confirm the instructional content incorporated in the learning materials or classroom lectures. However, access to library services could afford learners the opportunity to verify and authenticate the content of instruction. This encourages authentic and deep learning that would make distance learners active participants in societal development.

It should be mentioned that technology has pervaded every area of education process to ensure that learners derive maximum benefits from instructional process at all levels. This technological revolution also affects the library system in higher institutions of learning. The effect of this technology revolution becomes more pronounced in the ODL system of education due to the distance between tutor and learners across different geographical regions of the world. The advancement in technological innovations, especially the internet, has facilitated library service delivery process in open and distance education. Students from different regions can now have unrestricted access to online learning resources through e-library. The advent of worldwide webhad democratised access to diverse learning resources from library and other internet-related facilities. Thus, technology had given the desired

impetus to the access to various library resources worldwide. The limitations that were associated with the traditional library operations had been successfully overcome with the advent of e-library to facilitate teaching-learning process in open and distance education.

Distance learners can now access learning resources from the comfort of their homes and workplaces. This had been made possible with the capabilities provided by internet-based resources through technological innovations. Online library makes learning resources readily available to distance learners and this has largely solved the problemof isolation among instructional elements in the learning space. In essence, provision of library services is a crucial component of effective distance learning programme across the globe. Learning institutions need to provide high level accessibility to the library resources to engender deep learning among the students. These library services should also be of high quality, such that distance learners could access world-class instructional content that could prepare them for the challenges of the digital age. In other words, quality library services are essential parameters to measure the success of ODL in addressing the educational needs of the citizens.

2.1.6.f. ICT Support Services

This should form an important component of any successful ODL across the world as technology has pervaded every aspect of human endeavours. It had been observed that ODL is increasingly gaining momentum across different educational systems and the use of ICT has become imperative to ensure that participants are well prepared to function effective in modern society. It would be practically impossible to bridge the instructional gap in ODL system of education without leveraging the capabilities of technological resources to interact with different components in the system. From the perspective of many educational technologists, distance education is inextricablylinked with technology, as no effective teaching-learning process can take place in ODL system in the absence of ICT (Garrison and Baynton, 1997). ICT provides a veritable platform for effective interaction between learners and tutor regardless of distance and time. Distance education uses technology, especially internet-based resources, to mediate the necessary two-way communication in instructional process. These internet-based resources are veritable tools to exchange ideas and disseminate information in the instructional setting, especially when learners are geographically separated from their tutor and learning resources. The web 2.0 technologies engender active interaction and cross-fertilisation of ideas in teaching-learning process at all

levels of education. This makes internet-based resources to be relevant and effective in ODL system of education, where learners' diverse needs could be addressed from any part of the world.

It should be mentioned that for ODL to effectively bridge temporal and distance barriers,there is a strong need to systematically integrate ICT resources to disseminate instructional content and engender effective interaction among relevant stakeholders in the instructional system(Bukaliya and Dzimano, 2011). The advancement in internet-based resources has made interaction in instructional system becomes flexible, easier, seamless and more efficient. This is what UNESCO (2002) refers to as 'third generation distance education'. In this wise, technology has provided a veritable platform for a seamless interaction between learners and tutors. With the use of technology, students can get real-time responses or feedback to their questions and take appropriate decisions concerning their learning. Thus, technology has made tutor to easily overcome temporal and distance obstacles in teaching-learning environments.ICT resources are now providing unrestricted access to learning resources from different parts of the world. Students can now listen to and participate in any lecture from any countries of the world. In essence, technology has provided opportunity to overcome the hindrances posed by the traditional process of instructional delivery system.The use of ICT allows learners to access variety of learning resources from different parts of the world within the comfort of their homes and workplaces. Therefore, many learning goals that were not achievable in the past can now be easily realised with the capabilities of technology-based instructional resources in the open and distance form of education.

It is important to note that the operations of other learners' support services could be enhanced with systematic integration of technological tools and other internet-based resources. For instance, library services could be greatly enhanced with the use of technology to expand access to different learning resources from any part of the world. Distance learners can now have access to learning materials from the comfort of their homes and offices with the help of internet and internet-related resources. In this wise, the introduction of technological intervention in ODL could help widen access to educational opportunities within the community. This provides institutions of learning with the capabilities to capture many prospective distance learners in the system and therefore, play the required complementary roles in

ensuring that conventional mode of learning is not overwhelmed with increasing demand for formal education among different categories of people in the society.

2.1.6.g. Guidance/Counselling Support Services

The concepts of guidance and counselling services are strategic important components of any ODL worldwide as learners in the system are being confronted with diverse personal and educational challenges that could hinder their performance and participation in the programme. These services play pivotal roles in decision-making process by all the elements in education system. In the context of ODL,counsellingcan be defined as any form of advice or support provided by the professional to students, with a view to ensuring that they are able to make satisfactory progress in the programme (Mapfumo, 2001). These services afford distance learners the opportunity to take reasonable decisions regarding choice of courses and educational careers.

Guidance and counselling are usually designed to address critical issues that affectdistance students by providing appropriate information for decision-making process. Guidance/counselling for distance learners therefore usually targets the academic, social, personal aspects among others. Guidance and counsellingare critical components of open and distance education as it helps in the process of identifying likely barriers to learning at different levels, equipping learners with requisite skills and competence to surmount these educational challenges, helping them in adjusting their daily schedules between education and work and giving students the opportunity to make important educational choices at a particular time. According to Robinson (1991) guidance and counselling programmes can be categorised into three and these are:Services that have to do with learning difficulties and techniques of study in distance education environment. Due to the unique pattern of communication and interaction among critical elements in instructional process, it is natural that learners could be confronted with some challenges in their learning. This might include difficulties that have to do understanding the instructional content and how to appropriately utilise learning time and resources. These challenges require guidance and counselling intervention to provide adequate information and educational advice to distance learners at the point of needs. This would ensure sustainability in the system and also reduce the rate of drop-out among different categories of students. This makes guidance and counselling intervention a strategic component of open and distance education worldwide; Challenge resulting from students' inability to interact with the institution or tutor: Due to the configuration of open and distance education,

students could face some challenges relating to the process of interaction with the tutor and learning materials. Distance students are separated from the tutor and learning resources like library, laboratory and other learning structures. Thus, this isolation could prevent them from effectively utilising these resources to facilitate teaching-learning process. Students do not also have direct access to the services of professional counsellors in the instructional setting.

This problem of isolation necessitates the need for guidance and counselling interventions to be provided at different levels of the programme. This helps students to largely overcome the learning challenges in instructional system; Personal challenges confronting students: This has to do with issues that affect personal decisions of students before enrolling for the programme, during the course of study or in the process of graduation. Distance learners face different challenges as they come from diverse backgrounds across the community. It is instructive to note that a significant number of these students are working class people in the society. These groups of students could be confronted with the issues of adjustments between personal commitments and school work. They need to strike a balance between socio-political commitments and learning activities. Also, students in dual mode learning environment could need assistance regarding the process of combining face-to-face learning with online interaction. These instructional issues necessitate the need for effective guidance and counselling services to equip distance learners with requisite skills and competences to make choices that are appropriate to their peculiar learning requirements. Raphael, (2006) asserts that in distance learning education, counsellors are expected to possess the following abilities to effectively discharge their responsibilities: flexibility,enthusiasm,sympathy, knowledge of the organisation, and ability to identify learners' problems and learning needs.

Counselling Techniques in Open and Distance Learning

Counselling remains a strategic learning intervention usually provided to ensure that students are duly assisted to overcome diverse challenges that could hinder their participation in the programme. The participants are entering the system from different backgrounds and learning styles and therefore, need special assistance to allow proper understanding of the configuration of the programme. Thus, counselling supports are mostly made available to ensure that learners get adequate information on the requirements and expectations in the programme. Kangai, Rupandeand Rugonye (2011) explained that the following counselling techniques in Open Distance Learning

vary based on the spatial distance between the counsellor and the client, as well as the kind of technology adopted as a medium of communication in the process of counselling. These techniques may include:

Face-to-face Counselling

It had been discovered that physical counsellingis a common form of counselling in many countries of the world. It is quite imperative in the dual mode of ODL as students combine face-to-face learning with online interaction. However, this counselling technique is usually executed with huge financial cost in terms of human and material resources to be made available. It is important to note that this service might not be available to the entire students, due to the temporal and distance barriers. One approach to overcome this challenge is through the adoption of group counselling. This gives room for interaction and collaboration, as students would be able to share opinions and exchange ideas.

Telephone counselling (one-to-one, teleconferencing, answer phones)

- One-to-one telephone counselling allows separation between counsellor and the student. It takes care of the distance thatseparatescounsellor from the learner and the basic means of communication is usually through fixed-line phone. This was the form of counselling in the earliest period of telephone revolution before the introduction of mobile phones into the communication process.The fixed telephone lines can also be used for group discussion in form of teleconferencing among the members of the class.This is quite appropriate in single mode ODL, as the system heavily relies on web-based interaction between students and tutors.

- Another technique in counselling is teleconferencing. This involves the use of a particular telephone line to link many students at a time for interaction.

Counselling through Computer and Internet

This involves the use of ICT resources to disseminate counselling services to the students. With the advancements in technology across the globe, internet resources, especially, World Wide Web had provided a veritable platform for effective interaction between counsellor and the students. The use of internet for counselling requires access to ICT equipment like computer, internet resources and so on. This technique could involve the use of e-mail to exchange information between the counsellor and ODL participants. However, the use of computers and the Internet is still considered to be at the infant stage in developing countries of the world due to

limited infrastructure facilities and high costs of access to internet-based resources(Kangai and Bukalia, 2010). Regardless of the level of development of any country, this technique of counselling remains one of the best approaches to counselling services in ODL worldwide.

The advancement in technological innovations has made it possible to seamlessly counsel many students at the same time, especially through the use of mobile phones and other portable digital devices. Many students now rely mainly on the capabilities of mobile devices to execute different tasks within and outside classroom setting. These mobile devices make learning to become easily accessible and flexible for different categories of students, especially the young people in the society. Thus, the impact is also been felt in the counselling section of ODL, as counsellor now has the ability to engage learners across different geographical regions of the globe. Students could request for information on issue that have to do with their learning process and get real-time responses from the expert. This makes counselling services to be more effective, timely, accessible and realistic.

Counselling through Letters

Counselling can also be done by exchanging ideas and information through letters. This involves a process through which learners convey their queries and comments through letters to the counsellor. The counsellor would also respond to these questions through letters by following the same channels students used to send the message. It should be noted that this counselling technique can also be executed through short message service (SMS) on mobile phones between the counsellor and distance learners. Thus, counselling by letter or SMS is generally considered suitable for distance learning system of education across the world.

2.1.7. Keegan's Assessment Criteria

Keegan, (1982) had recommended seven criteria for a true assessment of the provision of learners support services which are discussed below:

2.1.7a Availability ofLearners Support Services

The   learners support services incorporate: counselling intervention, provision of learning materials, provision of tutorial services, giving adequate feedback on assignments and classwork, occasional face-to-face interaction, technology-related services, library services and administrative functions (Chua and Lam, 2007; Oosthuizen, Loedolff, and Hamman, 2010).Genoveva (2007) reports that the learning materials were not sufficiently available and most of these resources were outdated

and cannot be relevant to the present generation of students.Therefore, there is a need to ensure that up-to-date learners support services and materials are readily available to the learners, with a view to assisting them realise their potentials and achieve leaning goals. It is expected that learners' support services should be made available to distance learners to facilitate instructional delivery process and reduce the level of difficulty confronted by the students in open and distance learning system of education.

The provision of any support services would be meaningful, if they are readily available to a significant number of students in the system. In this wise, stakeholders in distance education should ensure that students are presented with appropriate learners support services, with a view to sustaining their participation in the programme. The issue of availability cuts across other important criteria in the system. In other words, critical interventions like counselling supports, ICT interventions, library services and other important components should be available to ensure that learners are able to take full advantage of the interventions to improve their learning at different levels. Thus, availability remains a strategic criterion to be considered when stakeholders are planning to provide LSS for the participants in the system.

There is a need to ensure that necessary human and material resources are made available before students can have the opportunity to access LSSs to facilitate instructional process. In some instance, students get to know about essential services to support learning on paper and institution homepages. Thus, distance learning institutions need to go beyond propaganda and ensure that these interventions are actually on ground to enhance the participation of distance learners in instructional activities. When these critical services are readily available within the structure of ODL, learning becomes more realistic to the students. This would improve the level of enrolment and completion rate in the programme. It is therefore important for learning institutions to make sure these facilities are readily available for the use of students to solve their immediate and future instructional problems.

2.1.7b Quality ofLearners Support Services

Learners' support services are critical components of any open and distance education across the world. Thus, different parameters had been identified by scholars to measure these supports in instructional system. The quality of learners support services is important to ensure that students in open and distance education get the best form of intervention that conforms with the best international practices. The provision

of these services can only be meaningful, if learners could be assisted to realise their previously stated learning goals. Simpson (2002) was of the opinion that provision of learners' support services is not beneficial to the system unless the quality of those interventions is appropriate to solve students' instructional challenges. The author concluded that only quality services have the capabilities to address students' problems in the instructional setting.In this wise, any ODL institution that is found wanting in the area of providing quality learners support services to the students is at the risk of hindering the success rate of learners in the system and scaling down the learners' progress in teaching and learning (Hardman and Dunlap, 2003; Chua and Lam, 2007).

The quality of service determines, to a large extent, the degree of benefits learners would derive from the system. If learners support services are of good quality, students would get the right form of instruction from the system. This could translate to improved performance of students in classroom activities. Aluko and Hendrikz (2012)assert that the success rate of students in ODL institutions is not only dependent on the quality of learning materials in instructional process, the focus has now shifted to the quality of learners' support service that is made available in the system. Apparently, distance learning institution that provides quality services would be well positioned to enhance students learning and entrench quality education in the system.

Thus, distance learning institutions worldwide are increasingly institutionalising the concept of quality into the provision of learners' support services, with a view to making sure that the participants are equipped with the right form of skills and abilities to function effectively in 21st Century society (Belawati and Zuhairi 2007). According to Ihejirika (2003) the University ofIbadan distance programme had a false start and was widely criticised within the institution for lack of confidence in the quality of distance learning, the quasi-permanent separation of the learners from the educators and the weak infrastructural base for delivery.Many scholars from different parts of the world hadadvocated for the need to ensure that learners' support services are of good quality to meet the needs of the students in the instructional setting, especially at the higher level of education (Belawati and Zuhairi 2007).

These are the pointers to the fact that quality learners' support services play pivotal roles in ensuring that students get the best form of education that equips them to become global citizens and contribute to the growth and development of the society. It is instructive to note that quality learners' support services provide a framework fora

sustainable learning progress in educational system. When distance learners are provided with quality support services in diverse areas of needs, it improves their rate of success in the programme. This could result to a reduction in the rate of drop-out in the system. The configuration of instruction in ODL makes the participants to be susceptible to some challenges like frustration and isolation within the instructional system. The lack of physical interaction, in most cases, leads to agitation and anxiety among different categories of learners in the system. The deficiency created by the separation between learners and tutor can be easily complemented with the provision of quality supports in critical areas of needs before, during and after instructions. Distance learners require quality support services that would technically bridge the gap among different elements in teaching-learning process.

In any case, quality learners' support service is an indispensable component of ODL, especially in the area of creating an enabling environment for the realisation of students' learning goals. When institutions recognise the strategic importance of quality in the provision of LSS, it would afford distance learners the opportunity to have access to the right form of materials that would prepare them for the ever-increasing challenges of the digital age. This would lead to sustainable level of enrolment and high retention rate in the system. In this wise, it is important for educational stakeholders to put necessary checks in place to entrench quality in the provision of LSS at different stages of ODL in the country. This would allow institutions to deliver on the core mandates of democratising learning and ensuring flexibility of instruction at this level of education.

2.1.7c Accessibility ofLearners Support Services

Another important criterion in learners' support services is accessibility. The principle guiding provision of support services to students requires that these interventions should really be accessible to learners anytime, anywhere. Learners' support services can only be meaningful, if students can easily access them to solve their instructional challenges within the system. Distance learners need to be allowed to access support services in terms of learning resources, counselling services and other critical services, from the comfort of their homes and workplaces.Learners should not be denied the opportunity to use these services to enhance their academic progress at any level of education. For instance, an enabling environment should be created for distance learners to access library and educational resources from anywhere, regardless of the barriers of time and space in instructional setting (Sacchanand, 2002). This process

engenders flexibility and efficiency in instructional delivery process. It allows learners to select appropriate learning materials that suit their learning styles. In this wise, accessibility to learners support services encourages democratisation of learning, as students would be afforded the opportunity to interact with human and material resources in the learning space.

The provision of appropriate LSS in the learning space only becomes meaningful when the participants in the programme have unrestricted access to the interventions at the points of need. This would help learners in making appropriate decisions on how to effectively utilise these resources to enhance learning at different stages of the programme.In the long run, high degree of accessibility would engender sustainability in the system, as students would be able to get the best out of the learning resources provided for instructional purposes. This could reduce the rate of drop-out in the system as students would be able to positively relate with the instructional content and learning support provided by the institution. This could result to improve performance of students in different subject areas across the system.

Therefore, it is important that distance learning institutions provide enablement that would encourage learners to utilise these interventions with minimum restrictions. It is understandable that some checks need to be put in place to forestall abuse or misuse by the participants. However, these restrictions should not constitute instructional bottleneck that would discourage access to appropriate LSSs in the system. Distance learners should be rightly guided on how to access relevant information and services that would help them to navigate the system and complete the programme on time. With this effort, the level of frustration in the programme would be minimised and students would develop confidence in the instructional process. This would encourage more people to participate in the programme and as such, the level of illiteracy in the society would be drastically reduced.

2.1.7d Affordability of**Learners' Support Services**

Learners' support services propel active engagement of students in instructional activities and there is a need to assist the participants in ODL system of education to secure unrestricted access to the interventions anytime, anywhere. However, one important factor that could hinder access to learners support services in distance education is affordability. Open and distance education relies on some critical facilities in the absence of physical teacher and this makes the system a bit expensive than the tradition/conventional mode of teaching. These facilities are indispensable and, most

time, come with cost. Basically, the institutions would not be able to bear the entire cost and such, transfer some of the financial burdens to the distance learners, who are the direct beneficiaries of the learning resources. In other words, the use of certain learning resources in the system has some cost implications and it is paramount that education stakeholders put this factor into consideration at the point of planning and implementing open and distance education across different countries of the world(UNESCO 2002, Hulsmann, 2000).

It is important to note that many vulnerable people in the society are unable to enrol in conventional system of education due to their inability to pay for the cost of acquiring quality higher education in different countries of the world. Therefore, ODL system of education needs to be largely affordable for the average citizens and vulnerable members of the public. Affordability indicates that LSSs are to be acquired with minimum cost that should be within the reach and ability of the participants. Considering the level of development and standard of living, especially in under-developed and developing countries of the world, educational services like LSSs should be highly subsidised to make it readily available and accessible to vast majority of people in the society. Distance learners can only access educational interventions that are within their reach in terms of cost and procurement. This implies that affordability is closely related to availability and accessibility to LSS at any stage of instructional process.

In conclusion, if these services and facilities on which ODL system of education relies are to be made accessible and available to the students, then, the issue of affordability needs to be prioritised in the instructional process. When the cost of learners support services is not within the capability of the students, they would find it difficult to access the facilities. This would negate the purpose for which these services were provided. High cost implication could have negative impact on the rate of success of students in the system. It is important to mention that the issue of affordability cuts across other criteria of LSS. Some strategic services like counselling services, library services, ICT supports and other critical interventions in ODL can easily be accessed, if only learners can afford the cost of these services to facilitate learning. Therefore, it becomes imperative for governments at all levels to ensure that access to quality LSSs is within the reach of the participants, with a view to ensure full realization of the objectives of ODL in the educational system across the globe.

2.1.7e Usability ofLearners Support Services

Usability of learners support service has to do the effectiveness and efficiency of the intervention to properly address the problems and needs of diverse students in the instructional setting. It is important to note that the services are expected to perform specific functions in the system by serving as an interface between students and learning resources. Support services in ODL system of education become usable, when students can leverage the capabilities of the intervention to achieve learning goals. The process of providing learners support requires timely and constructive feedback to determine the level of usability of the facilities by different categories of distance learners in the system (Hattie and Timperley 2007). Botha (2010) and Risenga, (2010) emphasise the strategic importance of viable support services to facilitate interaction among tutors, learners and ODL providers for instructional and socialisation purposes. Student support services are all about provision of appropriate assistance to satisfythe educational and social needs of the students. Thus, learners' support services are usable, if learners can easily use them to meet their needs in the instructional system (Choudhry, Gujjar, and Haffez ;2008).

2.1.7f Reliability of Learners Support Services

Scholars in open and distance education practices across the globe had stressed the strategic importance of learners' support services in ensuring that distance learners are equipped with requisite skills and capabilities to relate positively with the global community. It should be mentioned that the absence of physical teachers and separation between students and learning resources should not deplete the standard of education in this programme. Thus, experts had advocated for the need to consistently ensure that the participants in the ODL system of education are provided with learners' support services that would make learning more flexible and interesting regardless of educational obstacles like time and distance.

The level of success that could be recorded in open and distance education depends largely on the provision of adequate and appropriate support services that are made available to the students at the point of needs. In the same vein, Commonwealth of Learning (2001) concludes that there is a high possibility that ODL system might record an increasing number of failures, if distance learners are not supported with necessary services by their respective institutions. It is important to note that a significant number of these students are technically disadvantaged to be able to operate efficiently in the new learning atmosphere that relies primarily on the use of technological resources to interact and exchange ideas. Thus, these support systems

should be consistently reliable in terms of meeting the needs of the learners at all times. In other words, service providers in ODL system need to ensure the efficacy of these learning supports in addressing instructional needs and social commitments of the students. This would make learners' support services reliable in meeting different challenges confronted by the learners within the instructional space.

2.1.7g Learners Support Services as truly supportive of learning

The importance of learners support services in ODL system of education cannot be over-emphasised as distance learners are increasingly been confronted with myriad of challenges in teaching-learning process. This is due to pattern of instruction incorporated in the open and distance education across the world. Unarguably, distance learners are entering the system from diverse socio-cultural and educational backgrounds. Therefore, the system needs to be fortified with internal mechanisms that would ensure adequate provision of learning support services to different categories of students. These services provide a framework for effective integration of distance learners into the system at all levels.In the wordsof (Simpson, 2002), learners' support service remains a crucial component of instructional delivery, to ensure that learners get the best out ofdistance education system worldwide.

Thorpe(2004)affirms that adequate provision of learners' support services has direct impact on the effectiveness of teaching-learning process in terms of sustaining interest of the students in the programme and assisting them achieve their previously stated learning goals. It is, therefore, expected that these interventions should possess the capabilities to really address instructional and social needs of the students in the system. It would be tantamount to waste of human and material resources, if learners' support services provided by the institution cannot meet the diverse need of different categories of distance students. The ability to properly address the needs of the students makes an intervention truly supportive of learning in the educational system.

2.1.8   Learners Support Services in the Distance Learning Centre (DLC)
         Universityof Ibadan

The Student Support Service Unit is a client service-oriented unit of the Distance Learning Centre (DLC) University of Ibadan, established specifically to take care of the academic and administrative concerns of all registered and prospective students operating in the following categories:Advice, Information and Guidance;Academic;Administrative; andLearning Support.The Student Support Unit serves as a functional link between students and the various units of the centre as well

as the centre's participating Departments, with the sole purpose of providing solutions to the students' challenges and needs. The various units in students' support services are manned by qualified professionals with adequate and timely on-the-jobtraining to sharpen their relevance in the field of providing support services.

Services are mostly rendered via technology with the use of various platforms such as: voice call, SMS, e-mails and social networks like vibe; Facebook; WhatsApp; google+; and twitter. The centre has a corporate facebook page (www.facebook.com/u idlc) in addition to other Facebook pagesbeing administered by various participating departments. The UI DLC Facebook page is administered directly by the centre, while theothers are run by the centre and the students. Students areencouraged to join appropriate Facebook pages in order to benefit from various interactions. All administrative complaints are sent to thestudent support unit, where it is directed to appropriate officers and after resolution, the student support gets back to the student. Apart from administrative support, there is academic support that is provided by well-trained online tutors consisting of academic advisors and facilitators. These staffs give academic assistance to students in various courses through IT mediation.

Research had shown that students who take advantage of academic online support perform better than other students.Students are, therefore, encouraged to avail themselves of these services. Academic online tutors take students through their course ware in a pragmatic manner and conduct all continuous assessment online. Furthermore, students are advised to subscribe to DLC e-Library which affords them the opportunity to access academic materials from different locations. Details are available on the DLC website. In addition, there is a specialised unit, the Advice Information and Guidance (AIG) which gives some specialised advice and assistance to students (DLC UI Students Handbook, 2017). This implies that there are peculiar LSSs needed by dual mode distance learners to achieve their learning goals.

2.1.9   Learners Support Services in the National Open University of Nigeria

In an attempt to democratise learning and make education accessible to the general populace, the Federal Government of Nigeria established the National Open University of Nigeria in 1983. However, the operations of the institution was put on hold in 1984 but later resuscitatedin 2002 by the government of President Olusegun Obasanjo. The institution was saddled with the responsibility toensure adequate provision of functional, cost-effective, flexible learning environment for the general populace. It is expected that this form of education would add life-long value to

quality education for all who seek knowledge among the citizens and non-citizens of the country.In other to achieve the objectives of this establishment, the stakeholders systematically incorporatedlearnersupport service to the programme, with a view to ensuring that distance learners are able to get the right quality of education from the system.

This intervention is one of the unique features of the National Open University of Nigeria since the time the organisation was established. It is instructive to note that NOUN operates a single mode ODL system, which emphasises interaction among tutors, students and learning materials in online format.This pattern of instruction requires additional services to integrate distance learners into the system. This makes learner support service the backbone of teaching-learning process in NOUN.The main objective of learners'support services provided by NOUN is to enhance effective teaching-learning process in a distance mode of education through interactive activities and technically reduce the rate of drop-out in the system.

It should be noted that quality of interaction between learning institution and student determines the success of learners support service in ODL across the world.This is what distinguishes single mode operated by NOUN from dual mode in UI DLC. Tail (2000) affirms that at a strategic point in teaching-learning process, almost all distance learners would require some degree of services ranging from obtaining information on available learning opportunities, inquiring about learning resources to facilitate learning and learning requirements to graduate successfully from the system.

In National Open University of Nigeria, learners' support services are provided to facilitate teaching-learning process ranging fromorientation services, registration procedures, effective counselling services, guidance services, referral, academic facilitations, evaluation and feedback, monitoring of academic progress, seminars and accessibility to learning resources, either text or electronic.In NOUN, the most commonly used medium of instructional delivery is the learners' portal that is accessible through the internet.In some instances, occasional face-to-face interactions is often organised but this medium is usually optional for students(NOUN, 2006). Also, counselling services, teaching-learning process, print materials, e-mail and teleconferencing are channels of interaction in the institution.

Aims of Learner Support Services in NOUN

Learner Support Services in NOUN are specifically designed to assist learners to:

(a) Identify their specific needs for the programme and be able to adjust conflicting schedules between social commitments and educational demands;

(b) Individualise services to allow learners progress through instructional content at their own pace and overcome the challenges posed by system malfunctions;

(c) Come up with their own individual strategy for studying in this system of education;

(d) Surmount the challenges associated with learning difficulties;

(e) Surmount the challenges that relate to the issue of interacting with the peer and tutor and;

(f) Solve issues that are personal to the students but could affect their learning in a distance learning environment.

2.1.10 Review of Empirical studies

Research on learners support services in distance education had shown a varied dimension on issues and focus. For example, in his study entitled "learners' support services in open and distance education", Jaurena (2014) provides a comprehensive list of learner support services that distance education providers should provide for distance learners. However, this study didn't focus on learners' perception and satisfaction of such services in relation to learning achievement goals. In other words, the study did not focus on the quality of learners support services that should be made available for effective distance learning programme.

Manzoor (2012) did a comparative study of learners support services in three Open Universities in the India: Indira Gandhi Open University, BR Ambedkar Open University and Karnataka State Open University. Even though the study concentrated on student perception of the adequacy of such support services in the Universities, it did not look at gender differential perception. Besides, the study was carried out among single mode institutions and not a comparative study of single and dual mode institutions. This kind of gap had been filled by this study.

In a similar vein, Sharma (2002) examines the learners' support systems operative in the Directorate of Distance Education of Maharshi Dayanand University in India. The study's focus was essentially a panoramic view of learners' support systems in the University and not a critical assessment of the adequacy and functionality of the support system in term of helping the distance learners to achieve their learning goals.Reporting the findings of a study conducted to analyse the effect of mobile device intervention for Learners support services, kumar, Jamatia,

Aggarwaland Kannan (2011) developed a FRAME Model Perspective to gauge its use for enhancing teaching-learning process in distance education. The study was essentially on model development and not critical assessment of the quality and adequacy of Learners support services in distance education.In a study conducted by Amy(2000) to examine the kind of assistance and supports require by online learners in the instructional system, it was reported that undergraduate distance learners expressed their readiness to explore online learning resources if there are adequate information on the support services by the learning institutions. In other words, distance learners would find teaching-learning process more meaningful, if adequate provision is made for essential services that could allow them explore learning opportunities in the system. This indicates that appropriate support services add value to the instructional delivery process and provide learners with relevant information on available learning resources that could be utilized for effective realization of their learning goals. This implies that the objectives of creating distance learning institutions can be fully realized with the provision of relevant support services on different aspects of ODL in different countries of the world.

Aderinoye and Ojokheta (2004) conducted a study on the integrated use of audio cassettes for enhancing learners support services in Nigeria. Even though the study advocated the need for renewed vision in the provision of support services for learners studying through the distance, it does not extend its focus on how to use the audio-cassettes for the achievement of mastery and performance learning goals. The study only advocated the integration of audio-cassettes as support service to the learners.

It is instructive to note that some models of support services for students learning through the distance learning mode have focused on various dimensions of assisting learners through ways of communication process. They didn't extend their focus on the achievement of mastery and performance goals of learning in distance education. For example, Rothkofffs's model emphasised using Learners support services to help student start their learning programme, Ausubel's advance organisers model was designed to determine each student's previous knowledge and cognitive and to promote positive transfer to subsequent part of course, Egan's model for structural communication emphasised individually devised discussion moments and reverse assignment, Bruner's discovery learning model provided individually adapted help and stimulated discovery of knowledge, Roger's model for facilitation of learning

emphasised dialogue with each individual student and checking of 'open assignment', and Gagne's general teaching model advocated activating motivation, stimulating recall, providing learner guidance, and providing feedback.

Wagner (2001) carried out a research on online support services provided by distance learning institutions tertiary level of education. The study focused on the provision of academic advising services by examining the objectives and purposes of the services in the instructional system. The findings showed that colleges and universities vary in their development and provision of web based services to support distance learners to achieve their learning goals in the system, especially in terms of accessing academic support services to address instructional challenges.

The study by Jennifer and Jontlills (2005) concentrated on the provision of online learning support services to facilitate instruction in the open and distance mode of education. It was reported that the integration of online support services provides unprecedented opportunities to expand academic support services, especially for extramural students in the system. The findings from this study indicated that integrated skill services that specifically expose distance learners to learning resources that are related to their areas of specialisation are more effective and sustainable than generic study skills materials usually provided by some ODL institutions. In summary, the findings revealed that; online delivery system offers more sustainable learners support services to facilitate the realization of learning goal than the traditional mode of interaction in dualmode of distance learning.However, the study concluded that it is paramount for learning institutions to provide sustainable services rather than being providing temporary initiatives that cannot be fully integrated into the system.

In another empirical research, Georid and Ray (2005) focused on the provision of learners support services for E-Learning tutoring and assessment. Findings indicated that tutoring and assessment support services are central to the operations of open and distance learning system of education as they provide the basis for other interventions to facilitate instructional delivery. It was revealed that students value tutoring and assessment support services provided by ODL institutions to help them in the realization of their different learning goals. This emphasizes the roles of different support services that are usually made available to students in the open and distance learning institutions worldwide. Learners support services provide a strategic framework for students to lay solid foundation for instructional activities. In the context of open and distance education across the globe,learners support services

afford students the opportunity to discover their potentials in learning space and be able to actively utilize learning resources that are provided by learning institutions.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Inclusive Student Services Process Theory

One of the fundamental goals of distance education is equip to learners with requisite skills and competences to engage in higher order thinking that could stimulate deep learning among the participants (Garrison, 2000; Garrison and Arbaugh, 2007). Therefore, high level of academic attainment of distance learners is at the centre of any distance education institution across the globe. One theoretical framework that has been developed to guide learners support services in distance education is the Inclusive Student Services Process Theorypostulated by Floyd and Casey-Powell in 2004.

This theory is predicated on student development process model by Miller and Prince's (1976). The theory was developed to help students meet their needs by adequately planning for change before it occurs rather than reacting to the result of change in any organisation and to ensure that the entire academic community is fully involved in this collaborative effort to prepare learners for the future. The theory identifies five phases of any distance education programme as; learner intake, learner intervention, learner support, learner transition, and measurement of effectiveness. The theory emphasises that distance learners across all levels would need the strategic support learning interventions at each phase to allow them interact effectively with their tutor and learning materials. It is expected that the readiness of distance education institutions across the world to make these services available and meet the instructional needs of the students would determine the learners' success rate in the programme. According to this theory, the following support services must be provided for distance learners at each of the educational phases:

Learner Intake Phase: This theory hypothesises that strategic learners support services would be required by distance learners to function effectively in the new learning environment. It is expected that learners in distance learning environment could be confronted with some learning challenges, due to the pattern of instructional

delivery that is obtainable in the new system. Thus, there is a string need to make adequate provision for some essential services that could support them in understanding the learning space. Under this phase, the theory emphasises the provision of support services likeadmissions services, goal setting assistance, registration procedures**,** orientation service**,** requirement for assessment or assessment format, financial opportunities to support indigent students andhomepage support to expose new intakes to the operations in the system.

Learner Intervention Phase: This is another strategic phase in learners support service according to this theory. It emphasises that some support services are crucial to help learners overcome learning challenges in the open and distance learning of education system. In the context of this theory, these support services are expected to provide the required interventions to allow learners get the best out of the instructional system. The support services under the learner intervention phase includeinstruction services**,** faculty advising channel**,** help desk support**,** andstudents' success programmes. These services serve as crucial interventions to cater for the immediate social and educational needs of distance learners.In other words, these support services sustain the participation of the students till the period of graduation. It is expected that could be learning challenges during the course of the programme and the provision of these intervention would equip the learners with requisite skills and understanding to progress through the process of instruction. In the final analysis, the services under this learner intervention phase could help stakeholders in open and distance education to take critical decisions aimed at reducing the rate of drop-out in the system and sustain the interest of the participants at all levels.

Learner Support Phase: This phase focuses on the interventions that would be required support learners in teaching-learning process. It is important to note that distance learners need to be provided with the opportunity of monitoring their academic progress in the system. Thus, distance learning institutions need to provide a support base that provides relevant services to monitor student's academic progress in the system. Support services under this phase include: environmental management support**,** services that foster student's sense of belonging,counselling services, guidance services, instructional support, tutoring services, library services, and services for the physically challenged and academic advising support to different categories of learners in the instructional system.These supports would afford learners the opportunity to progressively monitor their learning and make necessary

adjustments to ensure the full realisation of learning goals. This keeps distance learners in the system from the admission stage to the point of graduation.

Learner Transition Phase: This is the fourth phase of the inclusive students' services process theory and it has to do with interventions that prepare for the life after the school system. It is important to note that learners support services are basically provided to equip distance learners with requisite skills and competence to function effectively in the global community. Learners support services are required to sustain learners through the system and make them better citizens of the society. Thus, there is a need to provide essential services that would prepare these categories of learners to function effectively in the society after their programmes in the open and distance institutions.The support services that should be provided for distance learners include: Goal re-assessment**,** transfer articulationandjob placement. These services are important to the realisation of learning goals and functionality of the students in the modern society.

Measurement Phase: The services under this phase are provided to examine the level of achievement of students, having gone through the instructional process. These services are crucial to the realization of the core mandates of open and distance learning across the world. The interventions provide a reliable framework to measure the rate of achievement in the system. This assists stakeholders in distance education in decision-making process and to provide enabling environment for the effective teaching-learning process in the system. The services that are required under this phase include**:** effectiveness of learning materials, students' retention rate and the level of persistence, the rate at which learners graduate from the system, and the rate of goal achievement by the learners.

In conclusion, the theory asserts thatlearners support services to be provided for distance learners should align with advancement in technological innovations, with a view to making teaching-learning process more flexible and result-oriented.In this view, the conventional services that relate to admissions, academic advising, counselling, and library services need to be reconfigured to incorporate technological innovations, in order to meet the increasing need of 21st Century students, who live in media-saturated environments(Floyd and Casey-Powell 2004).

This study was also guided by the framework on isolation and control in distance learning education by Badu-Nyarko (2010). The framework by Badu-Nyarko (2010)emphasises the strategic role of the tutor and learning institution in

assistingstudent's learning progress. He argued that distance learners should not be left to wander in isolation, as a result of the unique learning pattern associated with open and distance education across the world. Learners in this mode of learning need to be supported to effectively overcome their physical, psychological and emotional challenges in the teaching and learning process. Thus, he identified teaching-learning process that is predicated on communication and interaction.

Communication

In the opinion of Badu-Nyarko (2010), the level of assistance that distance learners would require from learning institution reduces with the amount of time already spent on the programme. In other words, fresh intakes would need more help to jump-start learning activities, since they are entering a new system of instructional delivery that is largely different from the conventional method. Therefore, these categories of students are expected to be provided with services that would lay solid foundation for them in the new mode of learning. In this wise, distance learning institutions should be well positioned to understand the needs and challenges of different categories of students in the system and devise modalities to cater for these diverse needs.

Interaction

Badu-Nyarko (2010) assertsthat there is a need for active interaction in distance learning instructional process. He noted that most common form of interaction in the instructional process is face-to-face interaction, where teacher directly interacts with the students in the instructional space. Badu-Nyarko (2010), further reiteratesthat stakeholders in open and distance education need to provide a robust interface that would stimulate real-time interaction among the basic elements in the instructional system. This implies that there is a need for a platform that would engender active interaction and feedback to the students and tutor. This would allow students to receive adequate responses to their questions on difficult areas in instructional content.

All these are pointers to the fact that the theory of inclusive student services process is relevant to this study, as it emphasised the strategic importance of learners support services in teaching and learning process. It should be noted that the five phases of supports identified in the theory all emphasised the need for the provision of learners support services that could facilitate learning and ensure flexibility of instruction in open and distance education across the world. This theory could, therefore, be used to explain provision of learners support services within the context of Nigerian open and distance education for different categories of distance learners.

Conceptual Model of Learners support Services in Adapted for the Study

The conceptual model adopted for this study is the one developed by Chaudhry, (2008). The model was found useful for this study because it is student centred and emphasizes the core criteria by Keegan. The model, in its adapted form, is presented below:
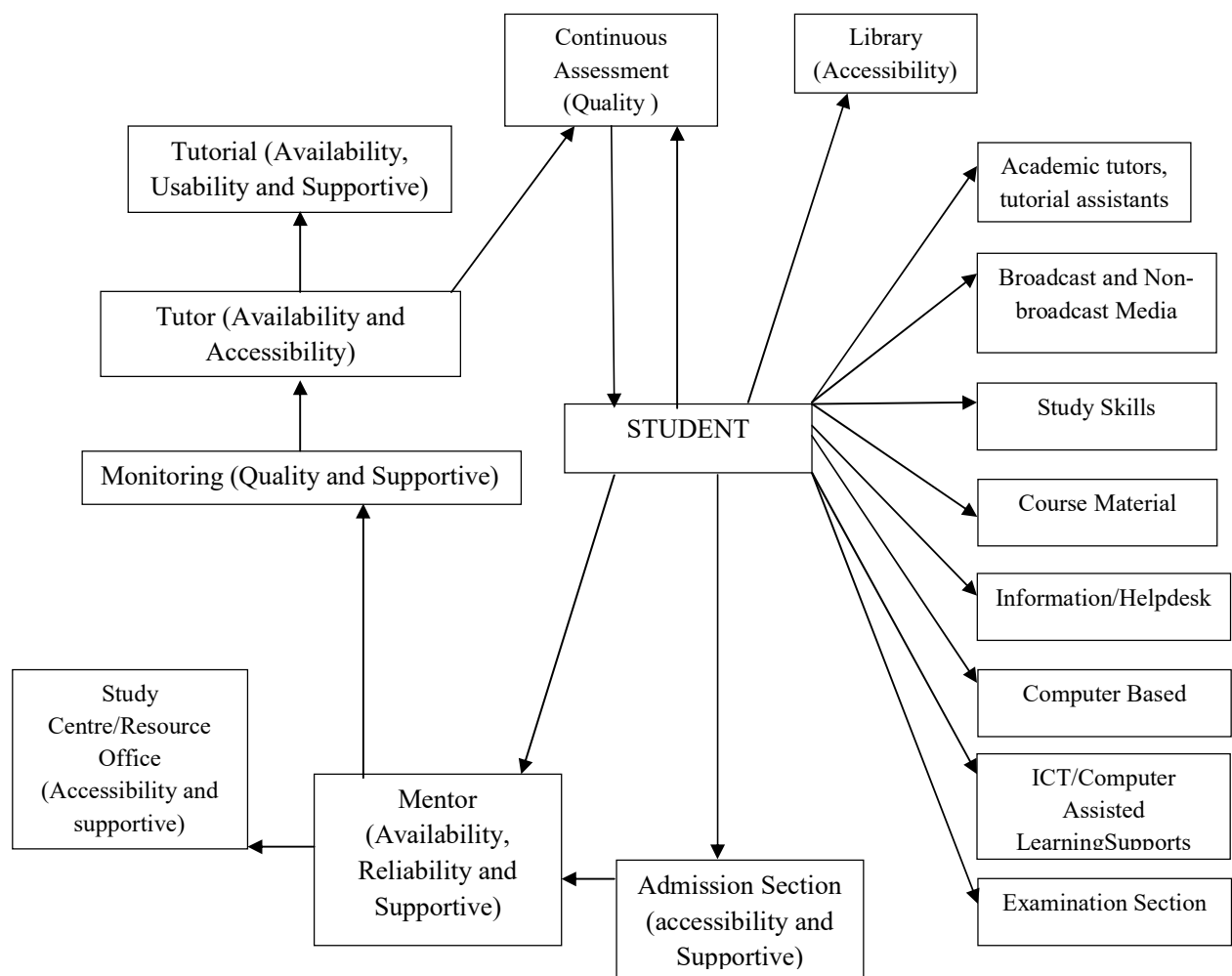
Fig 2.1: Adapted from Chaudhry(2008) Developing a Model for Learners support Services at AllamaIqbal Open University, Islamabad

Table 2.1: Adapting the model to Keegan's criteria on learners support services

Elements in the Model	Keegan's Criteria
Continuous Assessment	Quality, Reliability
Library	Quality, Affordability, Usability, Accessibility
Tutorial	Quality, Affordability, Reliability
Tutor	Availability, Accessibility, Truly supportive of learning
Monitoring	Truly supportive of learning, Quality
Study Centre	Accessibility, Availability, Truly supportive of learning
Mentor	Accessibility, Availability, Truly supportive of learning
Admission Section	Reliability, Accessibility, Availability
Examination Section	Reliability, Accessibility, Availability
ICT supports	Usability, Availability, Accessibility, Affordability, Quality and Truly supportive of learning
Help Desk	Usability, Availability, Accessibility, Quality and Truly supportive of learning
Course Materials	Usability, Availability, Accessibility, Affordability, Quality and Truly supportive of learning

This points to the fact that the model can be used to measure the level of learners support services to be provided by distance learning institutions, with a view to engendering active participation and interaction within the instructional process.

This model is distance learners centred. The components of the model show the various support services that the distance learners need. It is important to note that all the components of the model could be assessed by the Keegan's criteria. This makes the model to be appropriate to the study. When students enrol in a programme, they arelikely to get information about the system or options for study through advertisement in the media about programme. The student moves on to apply for admission in the admission section from where he or she gets the registration card. The schedule of broadcasts will be sent or mailed through the non-broadcast media. It is the function of the study centres to carry out academic, advisor and administrative functions in the instructional system. The tutors should be available, accessible, reliable and supportive of distance learners' quest for the realisation of learning goals. This implies that the tutors should meet these criteria in order to function effectively in the ODL system of education. Guidance and counselling facilities change according to the individual needs of the learners so as to enable them to cope with the rigours of being self-directed learners. Library and continuous assessment services should be made available in good quality, with a view to meeting the diverse needs of the learners in the instructional system.In general, these facilities and service need to be readily available, of good quality, accessible, affordable, usable, reliable and of high supportive dimension. When these services conform substantially with the criteria, distance education becomes more functional and developmental by providing quality services for the realisation of learning goals.

CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the methodology that was employed to carry out the study is described in terms of research design, population, sample and sampling technique, instrumentation, validity and reliability of the study and method of data analysis.

3.1. Research design

The research design adopted for the study was mixed method involving descriptive survey design of the *ex-post-facto* type and qualitative data. The descriptive survey generated quantitative data for the study. Also, focus group discussion and in-depth interview were held with distance learning students and officials respectively to produce qualitative data for the study.

3.2. Population of the Study

The population of this study comprised all distance learning students, management staff, and the personnel from the learners support services units of the two distance learning institutions selected for this study- Distance Learning Centre, University of Ibadan and the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN).

3.3. Sample size and sampling technique

The multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted for the selection of the respondents of the study especially the distance learning students.

First stage- In the first stage, stratified sampling technique was used to group each institution into faculties and departments. This allowed for the categorisation of distance learning institutions in the south-west into single and dual modes systems. At the end of the exercise, NOUN and UI DLC were selected for single and dual modes of distance learning respectively.

Second Stage- In the second stage, disproportionate stratified sampling technique was

used to select students across the two institutions. The sample size of each stratum in this technique does not have to be proportionate to the population size of the stratum. This means that two or more strata will have different sampling fractions. This sampling fraction is based on the entire population of each stratum.Thus, 10% from the total population from distance learning students from faculties in the Distance Learning Centre, U.I. Ibadan and 1% from the total population from National Open University of Nigeria, Lagostotalling1576 students for the study. 1% was adopted for NOUN based on the large number of learners in the institution.

Third stage- In the third stage, total enumeration sampling technique was used to select the management staff, the staff from the learners support services department, and the study centre managers. The reason for the adoption of total enumeration technique was due to the fewer number of respondents in these categories. According to Laerd (2012), total enumeration sampling is a type of purposive sampling technique where entire population with a particular set of characteristics (e.g., specific experience, knowledge, skills, exposure to an event, etc.) are examined for a particular study. Thus, all these professionals in the two institutions were purposively selected for the study.

Table 3.1: Sample Size of the DistanceLearning Students of DLC and NOUN

Distance Learning Centre, U.I. Ibadan	Population	10% Sample Selected
Faculty of Education		
Social Work	434	43
Guidance and Counselling	389	38
Library Archival and Information Studies	403	40
Faculty of Social Sciences		
Psychology	465	46
Economics	478	47
Political Science	2,523	252
Faculty of Arts		
English	234	23
Philosophy	211	21
Communication and Language Arts	445	44
Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry		
Agronomy	123	12
Agric. Economics	45	4
Agric. extension	55	5
Fishery	22	2
Crop protection and environment biology	45	4

Faculty of Science		
Statistics	365	36
Total	6,237	617
National Open University of Nigeria, Lagos	**Population**	**1% Sample Selected**
School of Education		
English Education	7,567	75
Business Education	5,671	56
Science Education	5539	55
School of Art and Social Sciences		
Peace and Conflict Resolution	14,096	140
Political Science	15,734	157
Christian Religious Knowledge	19,387	193
School of Agricultural Sciences		
Animal Science	567	56
Crop Science	578	57
School of Science and Technology		
Computer Science	8,421	84
Data Management	7,980	79
Information Technology	10,382	103
Total	95,922	959

Source: Records NOUN and DLC UI (2017)

3.4. Instrumentation

Assessment of Learners Support Services Questionnaire (ASSSQ)with eight sub-scales was developed to assess the quality of LSS provided by the two modes of distance learning institutions. The sub-scales include: learners support services typology scale, learners support services availability scale, learners support services quality scale, learners support services accessibility scale, learners support services affordability scale, learners support services usability scale, learners support services reliability scale and learners support services learning supportive scale.Section A of the instrument incorporates demographic characteristics of the respondentsincluding age, sex, marital status, faculty and course level.

3.4.1. Learners' Support Services Typology Scale (LSSTS)

This sub-scale contains items measuring types of learners support services provided by distance learning institutions in the country.It comprises 6 items measuring types of learners support services provided by NOUN and UI DLC to enable distance learners realise their learning goals. Four response options ranging from Strongly Agree(SA),Agree(A),Disagree(D) and Strongly Disagree(SD) were specified against each item and weighted as 4,3,2,1 respectively.

The instrument was face and content validated. In determining the face and

content validity of the instrument, experts were selected in the fields of open and distance learning and organisation and administration in the Department of Adult Education and Science and Technology Education. The corrections, criticisms and suggestions of these experts were incorporated to produce the final draft copy before it was subjected to pilot study. The reliability of the instrument was determined through a pilot study using the test methodby administering 20 copies of questionnaire to distance learning students, Director, Head and Staff of Student support service unit of the Distance Learning Centre, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State. The homogeneity of the instrument was determined by split half method, data obtained were divided into halves –odd and even numbers.The scores of the two halves was correlated by applying Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and this yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.88. This reveals that the internal consistency of the instrument is reliable.

3.4.2. Learners' Support Services Availability Scale

Items measuring level of availability of learners' support services provided by distance learning institutions were included in this sub-scale. The scale contains 6 items measuring level of availability of learner's support services provided by distance learning institutions. Three response options ranging from Highly Available(HA),Available (A) and Not Available(NA) were specified against each item and weighted as3,2,1 respectively.The instrument for data collection was face and content validated. In determining the faceand content validity of the instrument experts were selected in the fields of open and distance learning and organisation and administration in the Department of Adult Education and Science and Technology Education. The corrections, criticisms and pieces of advice of these experts were incorporated to produce the final draft copy before it was subjected to pilot study. The reliability of the instrument was determined through a pilot study using the test method by administering 20 copies of questionnaire to distance learning students, Director, Head and Staff of Student support service unit of the Distance Learning Centre, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State. PPMC yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.80. This reveals that the internal consistency of the instrument is reliable.

3.4.3. Learners' Support Services Quality Scale

The sub-scale contains 6 items measuring degree of quality of student's support services provided by distance learning institutions. Three response options ranging

from Perceived High Quality (PHQ), Perceived Medium Quality (PMQ) and Perceived Low Quality (PLQ) were specified against each item and weighted as 3,2,1 respectively.

The reliability of the instrument was determined through a pilot study using the test method by administering 20 copies of questionnaire to distance learning students, Director, Head and Staff of Student support service unit of the Distance Learning Centre, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State. The PPMC yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.87. This reveals that the internal consistency of the instrument is reliable

3.4.4. Learners' Support Services Accessibility Scale

The section contains items measuring level of accessibility of students' support services provided by ODL institutions. The scale contained 6 items measuring level of accessibility of students' support services provided by Distance learning institutions. Four response options ranging from Never Accessible (NA), Seldom(S),Often Accessible (OA) and Very Often (VO) were specified against each item and weighted as 4,3,2,1 respectively. The reliability of the instrument was determined through a pilot study using the test method by administering 20 copies of questionnaire to distance learning students, Director, Head and Staff of Student support service unit of the Distance Learning Centre, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State.The reliability coefficient of 0.80 was obtained through PPMC. This reveals that the internal consistency of the instrument is reliable

3.4.5. Learners' Support Services Affordability Scale

This sub-scaleincorporates 6 items measuring degrees of affordability of learner's support services provided by ODL institutions. Four response options ranging from Costly(CO),Cheap (CH), Relatively Cheap (RCH) and Made available by institution (MAODLI) were specified against each item and weighted as 4,3,2,1 respectively. The reliability of the instrument was determined through a pilot study using the test method by administering 20 copies of questionnaire to distance learning students, Director, Head and Staff of Student support service unit of the Distance Learning Centre, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State. After the adoption of split half method, PPMC yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.88. This reveals that the internal consistency of the instrument is reliable.

3.4.6. Learners' Support Services Usability Scale

Thiscomprises 13 items measuring degree of usability of learners' support services provided by distance learning institutions. Six response options were specified against each item and weighted as 6,5,4,3,2,1 respectively. The reliability of the instrument was determined through a pilot study using the test method by administering 20 copies of questionnaire to distance learning students, Director , Head and Staff of Student support service unit of the Distance Learning Centre, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State. Split half method was used and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and this yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.79. This reveals that the internal consistency of the instrument is reliable.

3.4.7. Learners' Support Services Reliability Scale

This sub-scale contains 10 items measuring reliability of learners support services provided by distance learning institutions. Four response options ranging from Strongly Agree(SA),Agree(A),Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree(SD) were specified against each item and weighted as 4,3,2,1 respectively. The reliability of the instrument was determined through a pilot study using the test method by administering 20 copies of questionnaire to distance learning students, Director, Head and Staff of Student support service unit of the Distance Learning Centre, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State. The homogeneity of the instrument was determined by split half method, data obtained were divided into halves –odd and even numbers. The scores of the two halves was correlated by applying Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and this yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.83. This reveals that the internal consistency of the instrument is reliable.

3.4.8. Learners' Support Services Learning Supportive Scale

This last sub-scale comprises 10 items measuring learners support services that are supportive of learning. Four response options ranging from Strongly Agree(SA),Agree(A),Disagree(D) and Strongly Disagree(SD) were specified against each item and weighted as 4,3,2,1 respectively. The reliability of the instrument was determined through a pilot study using the test method by administering 20 copies of questionnaire to distance learning students, Director, Head and Staff of Student support service unit of the Distance Learning Centre, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State. The PPMC yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.82. This reveals that the internal consistency of the instrument is reliable.

3.5. In-Depth Informant Interview (IDI):

In-Depth Informant Interview (IDI)wasused to generate qualitative data from the respondents. The IDI was made up of nine questions and conducted at the selected distance learning centres after the questionnaire has been administered. The interview date was scheduled about ten days in advance.Before starting each IDI session, the content of the interview guide was explained to participants individually. After confirming their acceptance to take part, the IDI process started. All discussions were tape-recorded, and the researcher also took notes. The IDI enabled the researcher to get diverse responses of respondents, which helped in finding out information on the learners' support services provided by the two distance learning institutions. The IDI sessions conducted with the aid of interview guide and tape recorder for proper documentation.

Table 3.2: Schedule of IDI Sessions that was conducted for the Study

Distance learning centres	Number of Participants	No of sessions
Distance learning centre ,UI		
Faculty of Education	2	2
Faculty of Social Sciences	2	
Faculty of Arts	3	2
Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry	2	2
Faculty of Science	3	2
National Open University of Nigeria		
School of Education	2	2
School of Art and Social Sciences	3	2
School of Agricultural Sciences	2	2
School for Science and Technology	2	2

3.6. Focus group discussion

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted to generate responses from distance learning students on the provision of learners support services by the ODL institutions. The sessions were attended by distance learning students of the selected inform UI DLC and NOUN. Each group was made up of six distance learning students.

Table 3.3: Schedule of FGD Sessions Conducted for the Study

Distance learning centres	Number of Participants in a group	No of sessions	Category
Distance learning centre,UI			
Faculty of Education	Six in a group	2	
Faculty of Social Sciences	Six	2	distance
Faculty of Arts	Six	2	learning
Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry	Six	2	students
Faculty of Science	Six	2	
National Open University of Nigeria	Six	2	
School of Education	Six	2	distance
School of Art and Social Sciences	Six	2	learning
School of Agricultural Sciences	Six	2	students
School for Science and Technology			

3.7. Key Informant Interview (KII):

The study utilized the Key Informant Interview (KII) to elicit information about the learners support services. From Directors of the two distance learning institutions, Head of unit of learners' support services and other staff of the learner support services unit. This was adopted to get information in an informal atmosphere.

Table 3.4: Schedule of KII Sessions Conducted for the Study

Distance learning centres	Number of Participants	No of sessions	Category
Distance learning centre, UI	1	2	Director ,Head of unit of Students' support services and other staff of the student support services department,/unit
National Open University of Nigeria	1	2	Director Head of unit of Students' support services and other staff of the student support services department,/unit

FGD, ID1 and KII Sub-Themes

The following issues were covered:

1) Views on the types of learners' support services provided for distance learning students in the NOUN and DLC University of Ibadan

2) Views on availability of learners' support services provided by in the NOUN and DLC University of Ibadan

3) Views on degree of quality of learners' support services provided by in the NOUN and DLC University of Ibadan

4) Views on level of accessibility of learners'' support services provided by in the NOUN and DLC University of Ibadan

5) Views on affordability of learners' support services by distance learning students in NOUN and DLC University of Ibadan

6) Views on extent of usability of learners' support services by the distance learning students in NOUN and DLC University of Ibadan

7) Views on reliability of learners' support services provided by in NOUN and DLC University of Ibadan

8) Views on learners'' support services provided by in NOUN and DLC University of Ibadan truly supportive of learning

9) Views on the challenges confronting distance learning students in terms of availability, accessibility, affordability and usability ofstudents' support services.

3.8. Methods of Data Analysis

The data collected in this study was analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts and simple percentages for the demographic data of respondents. Research Question 1 was analysed using frequency counts and percentages. The hypotheses were analysed using t-test analysis to determine the difference on the criteria identified by Keegan on learners' Support Services. The quantitative data was analysed at 0.05 level of significance. In the analysis of the qualitative data, issues with greater recurring themes was grouped together and analysed using the thematic content analysis procedure.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In this chapter, the analysis of data collected from the field is presented in tables followed by detailed explanation; with a view to arriving at logical conclusions on each of the research questions raised and the hypotheses tested in the study. The section contains two parts: The first section, section A, focuses on the demographic characteristics of the respondents while Section B focused on the presentation of the research question and hypotheses tested at 0.5 level of significance.

Section A: Demographic characteristics of distance learning students in two distance learning institutions

This section deals with the demographic characteristics of the respondents. There are five types of demographic information presented in tables with detailed explanation
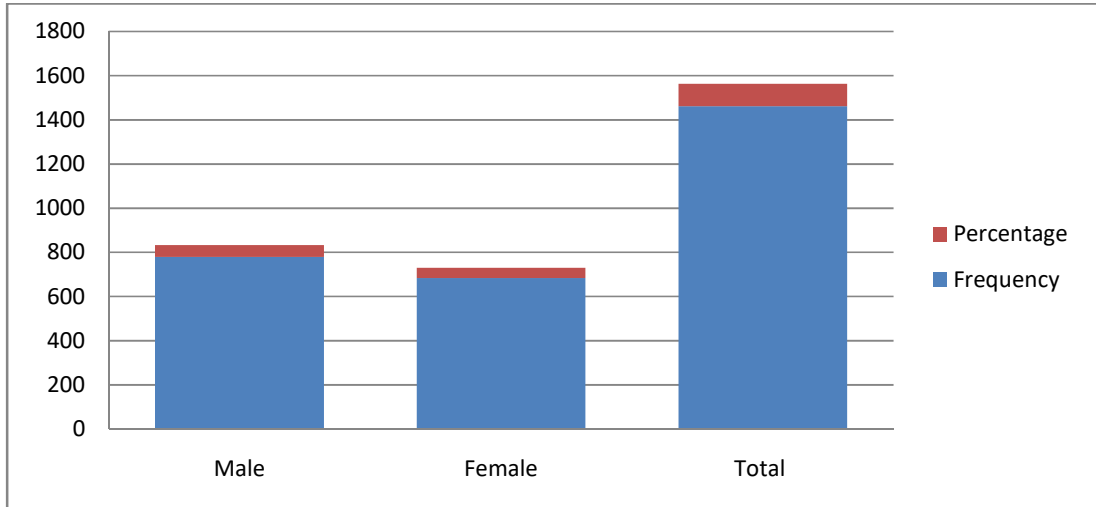
Fig. 4.1: Frequency distribution of the respondents by gender

Figure 4.1 showed that 53.3% of the respondents are males while 46.7% are females. . This implies that the study covers both genders in the two institutions, the single and dual modes distance learning institutions.

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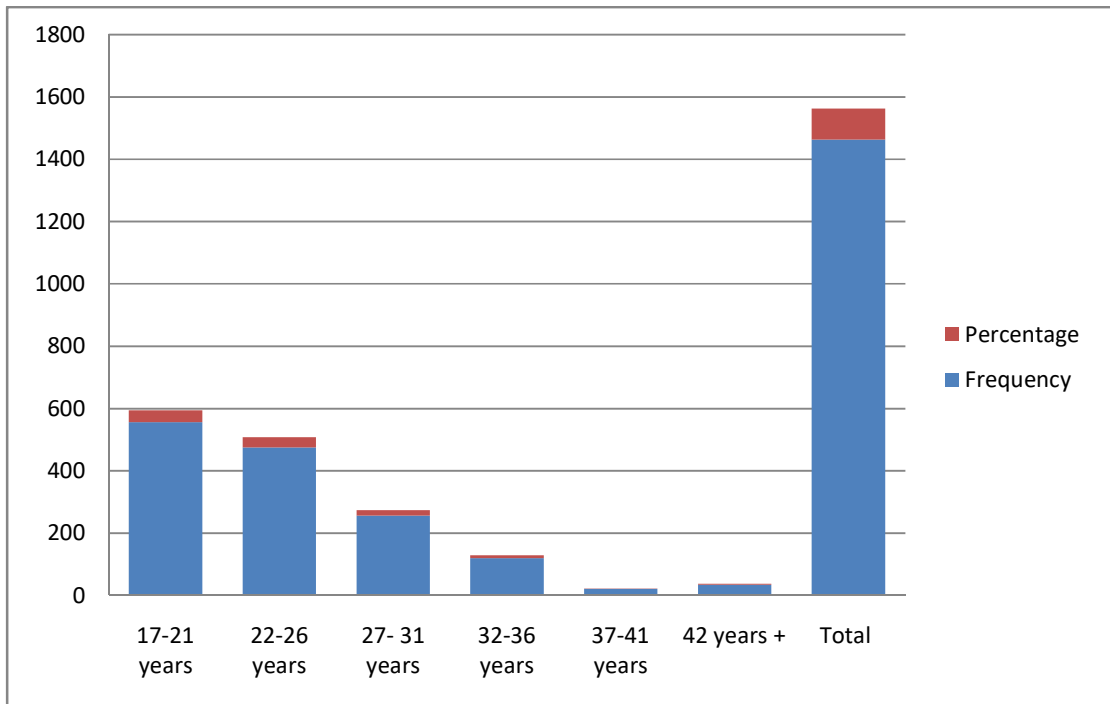
Fig. 4.2: Frequency distribution of the respondents by age

Figure 4.2 indicates that 38.0% of the respondents are ages 17-21 years, 32.5% 22-26 years, 17.5% 27-31 years, 8.2% 32-36 years, 1.4% 37- 41 years and 2.4% 42 years and above. This result shows that half of the respondents are young and adults who are

relatively in their prime and active ages but then all the respondents are above 17 years old and therefore could be considered as young and mature distance learners.

	Married	Single	Divorced	Total
■ Percentage	33	66.6	0.4	100
■ Frequency	483	974	6	1463
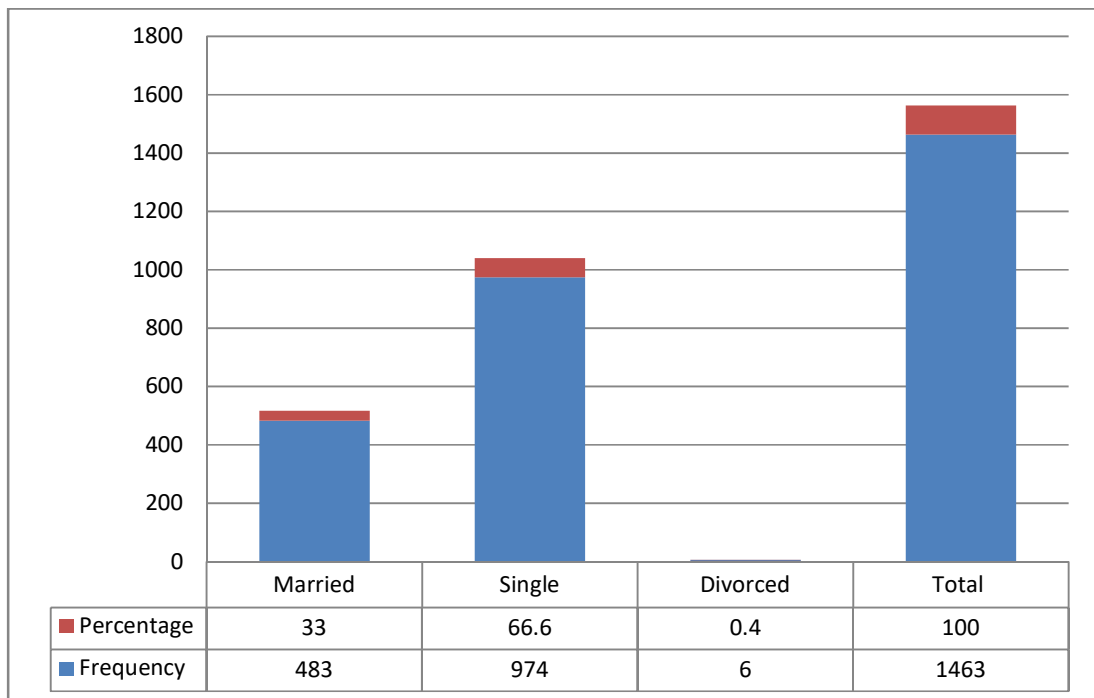
Fig. 4.3: Frequency distribution of the respondents by marital status

This reveals that 33.3% of the respondents are married, 66.6% are single while 0.4% are divorced. This indicates that opinions on student support services were captured from all types of marital statuses.
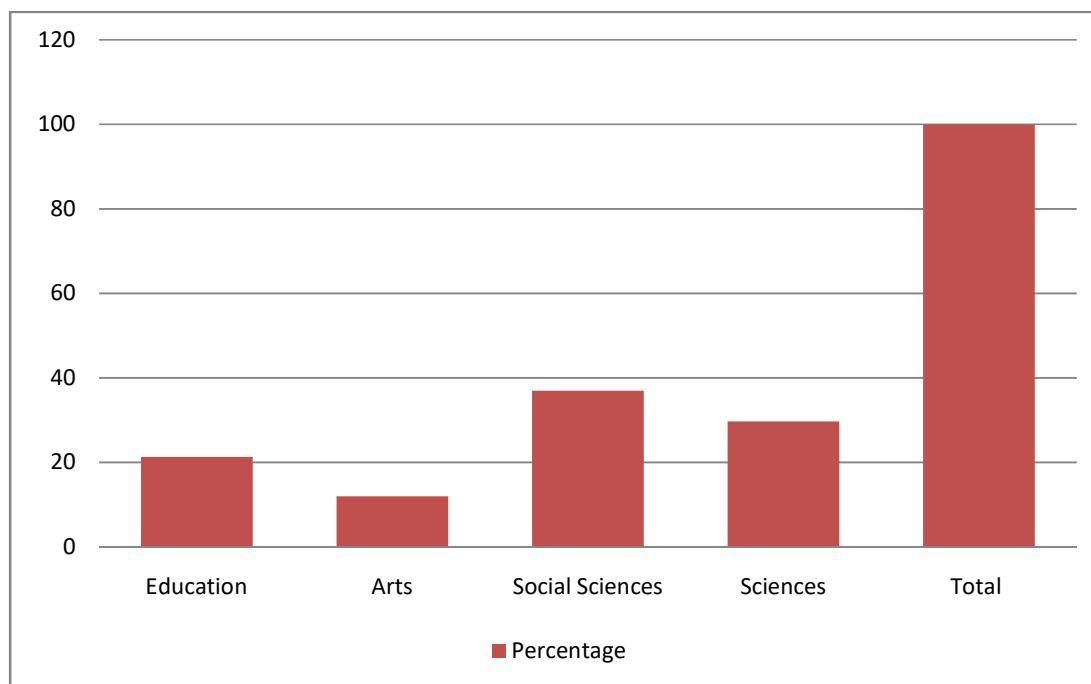
Fig. 4.4: Frequencydistribution of the respondents by faculty

This shows that 21.3% of the respondents are students from the Faculty of Education, 12.0% from the Faculty of Arts, 37.0% from the Faculty of Social Sciences and 29.7% from the Faculty of Sciences. The study reveals that five main faculties/schools common to both single and dual modes participated in the study.
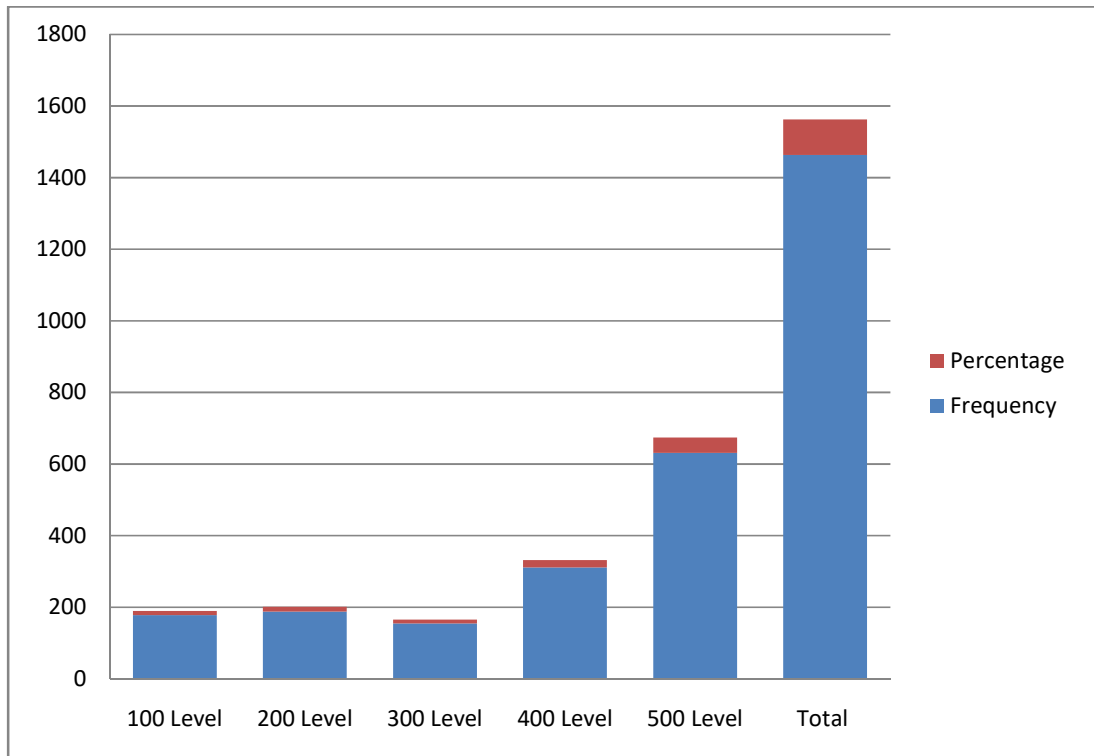
Fig. 4.5: Frequency distribution of the respondents by course level

Figure 4.5 shows that 12.2% of the respondents are in 100 level, 12.9% are 200 Level students, 10.6% are 300 Level students, 21.3% are 400 Level students and 43.1% are 500 Level students. Opinions cut across all categories of students regardless of cohort admitted and level.

Analysis of Research Question

Research Question 1 What are the types of learners support services that areavailable in NOUN and DLC?

Table 4.1: Learners' support services available inNOUN and UI DLC

S/N	Notable Variables of Learner Support Services	NOUN	UI	Total
1.	Information flow services	887 60.6%	576 39.3%	1463 100.0%
2.	Academic advising services	823 60.3%	541 39.7%	1364 100.0%
3.	Academic progress report services	843 60.3%	555 39.7%	1398 100.0%
4.	Study/tutorial guide services	861 60.6%	559 39.4%	1420 100.0%
5.	Library services	861 60.8%	555 39.2%	1416 100.0%
6	ICT Services	816 57.6%	600 42.4%	1416 100.0%
7	Counselling services	887 64.0%	500 36.0%	1387 100.0%
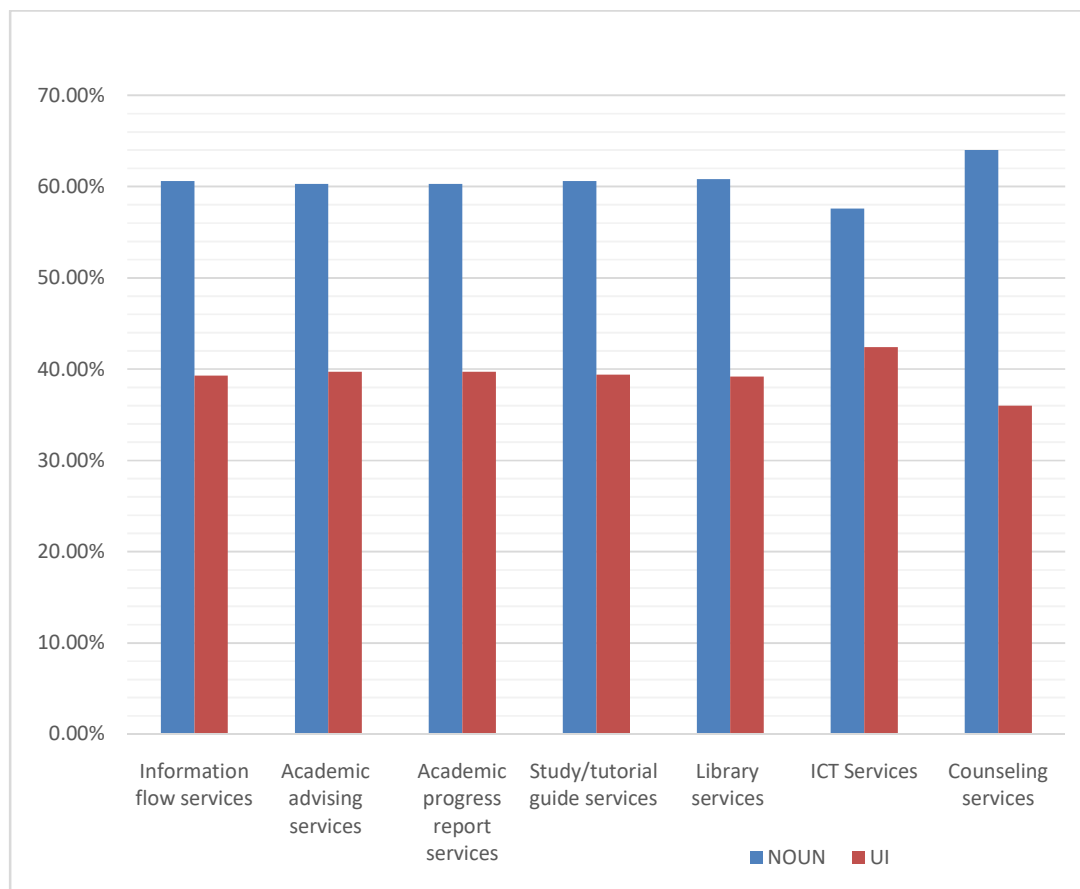
Fig 4.6: Learners' support services available inNOUN and UI DLC
Responses on the types of learner support services are as shown below:

On the types of learner support services in National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) and University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre (DLC), it was revealed that 60.6% respondents from NOUN agreed that information flow services is a type of learner support services that should be available for effective distance learning education while in DLC UI 39.3% respondents agreed.This shows that information flow services is very important for distance learning students particularly information regarding admission process.This implies that with adequate provision of information flow services, students would be afforded that opportunity of making critical decision regarding the mode of study and accessibility to diverse learning resources that are made available for meaningful learning in the instructional setting. Distance learners would be able to making decisions concerning the requirement for admission, eligibility status, mode of payment evaluation and feedback. Appropriate information about these issues are important to the new intakes to determine how and when to join the system. The implication is that that unavailability of these information flow

services would deny distance learning students the opportunity to make appropriate decision that shape the choice of a particular programme in the instructional process.

On academic advising services as a type of learners support services that should be available for effective distance learning programme,60.3% of the respondents from NOUN agreed and 39.7% from DLC UI also agreed. It implies that a significant number of the respondents from both NOUN and DLC UI are fully aware of such learner support service in facilitating their learning. However, it could be deduced that not all the students are aware of the availability of all the sub-variables of academic advising services particularly on enquiry on marking guide from facilitators, online assignment writing and how to answer examination questions. This could be attributed to the fact that not all distance learning students are aware of such services and also not all students are being offered such services. On the other hand, academic advising in terms of orientation for e-examination is considered important to acquaint the learners with computer based examination system which they might not be very familiar with and to reduce some form of anxiety associated with those who are having such examination for the first time.

From the findings, it could be observed that 60.3% respondents from NOUN agreed that academic progress report services need to be available in student support services units while 39.7% from UI DLC agreed. This could be due to the fact that students in open and distance programmes may have difficulties in submitting assignments and such services must be made available to them. It is a useful method of providing feedback to students for specific topics within a course unit. In both distance learning institutions counselling services exist which allows students to receive information on their programme from distance learning institution websites. It is also instructive to note that students from NOUN place high premium on the availability of these service than their counterparts in the other institution. This might be unconnected with the fact that students in single mode system of distance learning mostly operate in online environments and would prefer to be communicated through online platforms. They might also take full advantage of the one-on-one contact with providers of these services in offline mode.

On study/tutorial guide services,60.6% of distance learning students from NOUN agreed that these services are strategic to facilitate the realisation of learning goals and should therefore, be made available in all ODL institutions.   39.4% respondents from DLC UI also agreed that the services are available. Such type of

study/tutorial guide services provides them with information on how to study on their own It could be seen that the study/tutorial guide services is a type of student support services in both NOUN and DLC UI.

On library services, 60.8% respondents from NOUN agreed that these support services are available while 39.2% respondents from DLC UI agreed. This implies that both distance learning institutions have library services as type of learners support services for effective learning. This implies that both distance learning institutions provide 24-hour access to e-library and allocation of username/password to students to access the e-library. Moreover,Cox (2004) underscored that library services always played a major role in expanding distance learning programme in higher learning institutions. Just as library systems provide services to regular students; it is the task of the university libraries to equally make available equal services to distance learner.

On ICT services as a type of student support services that should be available, 57.6% respondents from NOUN agreed that information and communication technology services are availableand also 42.4% respondents from DLC UI were of the same view. This implies that ICT services are available to distance learners to aid learning and to also achieve their learning goals. It should be noted that all other support services rely largely on the use of technology to reach large number of students in real-time. Thus, ICT services are central to effective distance learning, whether in single or dual mode. According to the results on counselling services as a type of learner support services, 64.0% distance learning students from NOUN indicated that counsellingservices are readily available to support students while,36.0% respondents from DLC UI acknowledged the provision of such services at the study centre. This could be due to the fact that students from NOUN have access to counselling services online from anywhere, though students from UI DLC also indicated that the services are available to them to some extent. Such services may help learners overcome many learning challenges especially in terms of courses accessibility and how to submit or answer questions as it relates to their learning.This could be as a result of the establishment learner support services directorate/units at the two institutions. Both institutions also offer counselling services on face-to face course preparation,counselling for prospective students, online course preparation counselling, career counselling during programme, course material study counselling, online tutor-marked assignment (TMA) counselling, dedicated e-mail and online detailed   information   of   course   advisers/coordinators.   This   implies   that

counsellingservices are meant to take care of critical issues that affect learners who learn in isolation and to cushion the effect of distance in learning. Counsellingsupport services have tremendous impact on their status as students as the intervention focuses on the personal, occupational, social and academic issues that could affect learning.

The importance of counselling service perhaps may be associated with the fact that the learners are self-directed learners with high need for internal and external motivation to learn. Where the motivation seems to be low, the level of learning achievement drops,counselling services enable learners to identify their learning needs and to reflect on their competence and expectations as regard the personal and professional commitment to succeed.

The findings showthat there are different types of learners support services provided for distance learning students in the two distance learning institutions selected for this study. Although learners support services may differ from one institution to another, these services help students overcome isolation and become self-directed learners in the instructional space.As distance learning addresses the needs of specific target groups and eliminates the barriers to access and extends the geographical reach, every effort should be made by distance education institutions to ensure efficiency in access, learners support services, quality control and other vital auxiliary services. Almost all institutions offering distance education generally appreciate the crucial role that learner support plays in distance education programmes. Previous studies are also in line with the above findings such as survey conducted by Mireku-Gyimah, (1998) during the pre-implementation state of distance education for teachers of University of Education, Winneba (UEW) and University of Cape Coast (UCC) emphasised that provision of support services could encourage students' acceptance of distance education programme at the tertiary level.

The provision of Learners Support Services through well-equipped regional and district libraries, well stocked study centres and occasional contact constitute support services necessary for a distance education programme. Owusu-Mensah (1998) in his study of support services at Lawrentia University has noted that efficient library service with on-line computer access to the university library. Off Campus library services were extended to students living far away. Lucia (2005) in her study of support services at the University of Namibia found that students of the University placed much emphasis on students support services such as orientation, contact and communication with tutors and fellow students as well as face-to-face tutorials.

According to Molefi (2008), library services in distance learning are support systems that are usually made available by learning institutionsto enhance teaching and learning in a distance mode of education. This implies that distance learning students' needs modern technologies to be able to operate to meet the needs of distance learners. A range of activities have been identified as part of learner support which includes tutoring and teaching, counselling and advising and related services as well as other administrative services such as matters relating to admissions and registration (Brindley, 2004). The major issue for most institutions is how institutions ensure that these services reach the learners and support their learning. NOUN and University of Ibadan like other distance learning institutions have introduced internet based support systems.

Van Voorhis and Falkner (2004) posited that learners support services, in the form of orientation, registration, providing aid, advice, billing and collection of fees by the administrative system, form the backbone of higher education. They added that the administrative element of the support system is the first point of call for students when they register for their studies and also serve as the last point of contact. Sonnekus (2006) identified some of the administrative services offered at the main campus and the regional centres as web-based enrolment, sending study material by post, duplicating the services offered at the main campus for tutorials to students, call centre for academic and administrative issues; that helps with the interaction with the stakeholders with specific standardised services.

It can be summed up that the administrative/systemic service actually coordinates the other components of the learner support services to ensure that the purpose of learner support is achieved by ensuring that learners succeed and have an enduring experience in their learning most especially in an ODL environment. Quann and Associates, cited in Van Voorhis and Falkner (2004), pointed out that irrespective of the delivery mode, "the paramount goal of the register's office is to serve the students and faculty promptly, equitably and courteously". Oosthuizen, et al., (2010) identified the support from UNISA as: makingcounselling services and advice during the period of study provision of learning materials – making study materials in the form of prescribed text books, specifically designed modules, tutorial letters etc. at the start of the year/semester discussion /tutorial classes – this includes teaching on assignments by tutors support facilities – this includes support in the form of infrastructure at study centres and support by peer groups, and administrative support

– where administrative staff helps students to register and all other issues pertaining to their studies after registration.

The Directorate of Institution Support and Services (2011) list the support services it offers at the regional centres as: weekly (sometimes fortnightly) face-to-face tutorials opportunity to meet fellow learners who have similar academic challenges to grapple with counselling services study space computer laboratories, and peer study groups Any learner support facility provided by an ODL institution is important but the role of tuition and the tutor are seen as the most important aspect of learner support. Tiat's (2000) three-fold learner support functions: cognitive, affective and systemic which tutoring and the services the tutor provides fulfil. Findings from this study are in line with these past studies, which emphasised the strategic roles of learners support services in the effective distance education in single and dual modes.

Similarly, Ojokheta (2000) wrote that available learners support services are provided to assist the learners to be closer to the institution thus bridging the physical distance between learners and institution. Distance learning students have their own understanding of the availability of learners support services and their expectations of the support services a distance learning institution should provide. Participants were able to explain their own knowledge on the availability of students support services. Reports from interviews and FGD also emphasise the need for distance learning institutions to provide learners support services to ensure make-up for isolation between learners, tutors and coordinating centres.

A participant from in-depth interview asserted that:

> In university of Ibadan DLC, learner support on orientation /registration for learners incorporates orientation programme for new students at beginning of the session, each student is issued personal portal, there is also face to face interaction with students organised for almost six weeks before examination. New students are provided with on-line registration information for courses to be registered.

Again, a KII participant from the learners support Service Unit/Department said that:

> Advising and counselling services are available particularly on course material study.career counselling during programme and also on line course preparation counselling.

This view is also supported by the centre coordinators' (CC) and managers' views where they said that

> Learner support is made up of different activities and interactive processes which are aimed at helping the students' learning processes which include tutoring, counselling, teaching, advising, orientation, administrative services and peer tutoring as well as administrative support.
> .

A Centre Coordinator indicated:

> Our distance learning institution provide institutional and integrated academic support to teaching and learning the student academic support unit assists faculties in students recognition of prior learning, offer academic literacy courses, orientation programmes for all new students as well as academic counselling for all.

Another Centre Coordinator said that:

> The institutions believe that face to face interaction with students are critical as they create a platform that allows interaction between students and tutors/facilitators and students for mutual benefits

The IDI and KII report above pointed to the fact that there are various types of learners support services for distance learning students. It can be concluded that the learners support services are interdependent. Therefore, it is important that distance learning institutions, single and dual modes, have clear goal oriented support information services and activities that are relevant to orientation and study skills given to distance learning students. The qualitative responses are in line with Brindley, von Ossietzky and Paul, (2004) submission that learners support services include tutoring, counselling, teaching, advising, orientation, administrative services and peer tutoring as well as administrative support.According to the authors, all these supporting activities are usually embedded in a value system that gives students access to fair opportunity in instructional space. In effect, the students know exactly what learner support is and how it should possibly function. The distance learning students' ability to mention some of the main available students support services implies that they know what learners support services entail.

A group of students from the FGD stated:

> The available services include tutorials, tutors and library services and guidance and counselling: to guide us on all the

aspects of our studies by giving us support so that we can succeed in our studies.

To corroborate this, another FGD respondentsaffirmed that:

> Information and communication services are available at the study centre for students to use and assess the internet.Library services are also available to students   to enable them read or borrow relevant materials for academic work.

Another group said:

> ICT services are provide where distance learning students make use of which has assisted us all in obtaining admission form and online registration.

In respect of level of availability of learners support services particularly ICT services,

a NOUN KII participant said:

> We have ICT services that meet the needs of our students. In our study centre ICT services are highly available with adequate power supply particularly on 24-hour access to e-library.

Another participant from the KII interview said:

> The distance learning institutions ensures that library services are available to all distance learners. In library there are many resources available for distance learners which they can make use of for academic work particularly Open Educational Resources

A participant again said:

> In our distance learning institution, before and after admission there are counselling services available to distance learners on issues relating to programmes available for students whom to apply for any programme of their choice

A participant submitted that:

> There is information flow as various services in which orientation is provided for students at the beginning of the session which has made us aware of all courses available.

From the above KII and FGD, it could be inferred that most of them recognised thatlearners Support Service are available in both NOUN and DLC U.I for the respondents use. Simpon (2002) pointed out that activities that make up learners

support services in the open and distance learning are: orientation seminar, group tutorials, assignment feedbacks, tutorial letters, radio broadcast, mock examination, individualised help by tutors, weekend tutorials, study skills and motivational seminars. Some of these activities are part of the learner support services provided by the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN and Distance Learning Centre University of Ibadan.

Research Question 2

What is the degree of quality of students' support services provided by Distance learning institutions?

Table 4.2:Quality of Students' Support Services Provided by Distance Learning Institutions

S/N	Learner Support Services	NOUN			DLC UI		
		PHQ	PMQ	PLQ	PHQ	PMQ	PLQ
1	Information flow services	501 34.2%	256 17.4%	130 8.9%	348 23.9%	186 12.8%	42 2.8%
2	Academic advising services	441 30.1%	247 16.9%	199 13.6%	267 18.2%	200 13.7%	109 7.5%
3	Academic progress report services	414 28.2%	278 19.0%	195 13.3%	333 22.8%	133 9.1%	11 0 7.5%
4	Study/tutorial guide services	395 27.0%	235 16.1%	257 17.6%	238 16.3%	233 15.9%	105 7.2%
5	Library services	435 32.2%	207 14.1%	245 16.7%	324 22.1%	152 10.4%	100 6.8%
6	ICT Services	489 29.7%	252 17.2%	146 9.9%	297 20.3%	147 10.0%	132 9.0%%
7	Counselling Services	446 30.5%	289 19.8%	152 10.4%	245 16.7%	177 12.1%	154 9.4%
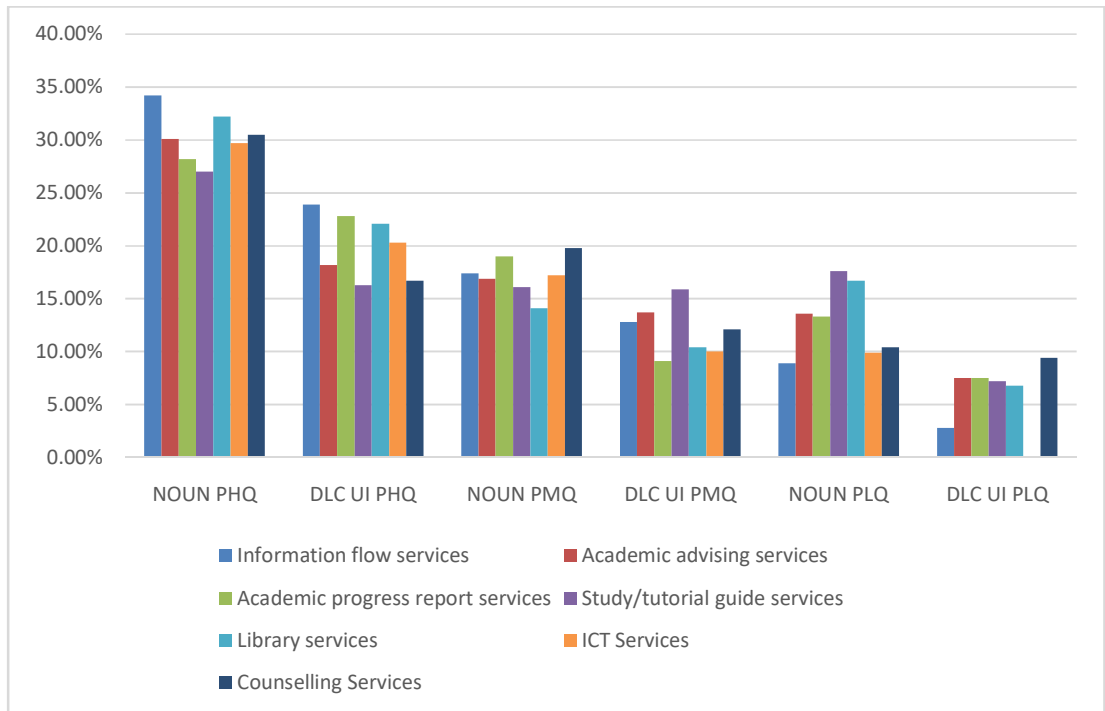
Fig. 4.7: Quality of Students' Support Services Provided by Distance Learning Institutions

The result shows the degree of quality of learners' support services provided by the two distance learning institutions. On the first type of learners support service which is information flow, 34.2% respondents from NOUN considered the service to be of high quality, 17.4% respondents were of the opinion that the service was of a medium quality while 12.2% were of the view that the service was of low quality. Perspectives from the University of Ibadan distance learning students show that 23.9% considered it to be of high quality, 12.8% of medium quality while 2.8% respondents were of the view that the service was of low quality. This shows that the quality of students support services on information flow is high from the distance learning students from the two institutions.

On academic advising services for learners, 30.1% respondents from NOUN perceived the service to be of high quality,16.9% medium quality while 13.6% respondents were of the view that the service was of low quality. Perspectives from University of Ibadan distance learning studentsshow 18.2% high quality,13.7% medium quality while 33.8% respondents were of the view that the service was of low quality. This shows that the quality of students support services on academic advising in NOUN is higher than that of University of Ibadan distance learning centre.This could be attributed to

the fact that NOUN is equipped with necessary resources to reach out to students, using online platforms.

Result on academic progress report services shows that 28.2% respondents from NOUN perceived it to be of high quality,19.0% medium quality while 13.3% respondents were of the opinion that the service was of low quality.In the case of UI DLC students, 22.8% respondents were of the opinion that the service was of high quality,9.1% medium quality and 7.5% believed the service was of low quality. This shows that the quality of students support services on academic progress report services is almost of the same quality from NOUN and UI DLC students.This could be attributed to the fact that both institutions provide and meet the need of the respondents in terms of feedback on online students enquiry about their academic progress through e-mails, WhatsApp, telephone calls, Instagram, Google hangouts, access to checking of E-result on their platform and results placement in individual student portal.

In the case ofstudy/tutorial guide services which is another type of learners support service, 27.0% of respondents from NOUN perceived that it was of high quality, 16.1%; medium quality and 17.6%;Also, 16.3% of the respondent from UI DLC perceived that the service was of high quality, 15.9% of medium quality and 7.2% of low quality. This shows that the quality of students support services on study guide is almost of the same quality levelfor the distance learning students from NOUN and UI DLC. This might not be unconnected with the fact that both institutions provide distance learnerswith guides on how to go about their course of study at any time. Also, the two institutions provide printed course materials as well as supplement printed materials by one or more of the following channels: audio cassettes, video cassettes and online tutorials.

On library services,32.2%distance learning students from NOUN perceived library services to be of high quality, 14.1% of medium quality and 16.7% of low quality. For the UI DLC students, result shows that 22.1% considered the service to beof high quality, 10.4 % of medium quality and 6.8% of low quality. This shows that respondents from NOUN assessedprovision of library services to be of higher quality than UI DLC students.This could be attributed to the fact that NOUN has 24-hour access to e-library, coupled with allocation of username/password to students to access the e-library while UI DLC is yet to provide 24-hour access to e-library. It should be noted that NOUNhad subscribed to over 500,000 e-books and students in the

institutions had been provided with unique codes to individually access the resources from any part of the world (Ipaye, 2007). These online materials had expanded learning opportunities to many students in the institution and this could facilitate the realisation of learning goals in the instructional setting. This could have positively altered their perception of library services by the institution.

On the provision of ICT service,29.7% respondents from NOUN perceived it to be of high quality, 17.2% of medium quality and 9.9% respondents were of the opinion that the service wasof low quality. In the same vein, 20.3% respondents from UI DLC believed that the ICT service provided by the centre was of high quality, 10.0% of medium quality and 9.0% of low quality. The result of finding showed that provision of ICT services are of higher quality in the NOUN than University of Ibadan DLC.This could be due to the availability of well-equipped e-learning facilitiesconnecting various centres of NOUN across the country.

On counselling services, 30.5% of the respondents from NOUN believed that counselling services provided were of high quality, 19.8% of medium quality and 10.4% of respondent agreed that the services were of low quality. 16.7% of the respondents from UI DLC viewedthe services to be of high quality, 12.1% of medium quality and 9.4% of low quality. This might not be unconnected with the fact that NOUN operates a single mode ODL system, which requires functional counselling support to cater for the separation between tutor and distance learners in the institution. Thus, NOUN might not be able to fulfil its core mandates without functional counselling services to cater for the socio-political and educational needs of the learners.

This finding support Simpson (2002), who argues that provision of learners support services cannot be meaningful to different categories of students in instructional system, unless the quality of such interventions can be ascertained to appropriate and relevant to the needs and aspirations of students in ODL system of education. The emphasis is not just on the provision of supports to the students to facilitate teaching and learning process. The focus is basically on the quality of such service, which would determine the appropriateness and effectivenessof these interventions to cater for the immediate and future needs of the students. Thus, the issue of quality cuts across all the support services provided by the learning institutions to enhance instructional delivery system. The counselling service, academic advising service, library service, information flow serviceand other critical

support services need to be of high quality to create a learning atmosphere that conforms with international best practices. This is why experts had been consistently advocating for the need to ensure quality learners support services across all sections in distance learning institution. The assumption is that quality services would translate to quality education for the participants in the system. It is in the light of this that a study on the assessment of the quality of service by students is essential in designing appropriate services that meet their peculiarities wherever they may be found. This is because the quality of students support services has the tendency to affect the credibility and reputation of any distance learning institution that provides distance education.

It had been observed that learners support services vary across different learning institutions and fundamental principle in providing these services is the reduction in the level of isolation among students. Adequate provision of support services allows learners to develop a sense of belonging and high self-esteem to take critical decisions that have to do with their learning.

In respect of level of quality of learners support services as captured in the

FGD, one group of students from NOUNsaid:

> We have qualified tutors that have rich experience in each field of study, they are usually punctual during face-to-face interactions Also, the face-to-face interaction is highly effective and interesting Tutors give relevant assignments and content of course materials are recent and written in simple language for better understanding
> We are very happy about the production of course materials which is very recent in which it being sent to our individual portal for us to download anywhere we are instead of coming to study centres to pick up (DLC UI)

The study shows that both distance learning students from NOUN and DLC were satisfied with the quality of content of course materials, the quality of production of the materials, the provision of weekend tutorials and the information posited on the school website. This indicated that effective and quality tutorials were provided at the study centre and the high dependence of the learners on the tutorials and course materials provided. In order to achieve quality education, the entire process of education provision should be improved. Genoveva (2007) reports that the quality of

support services would determine the relevance of the intervention to the needs and aspirations of the students in the system.

> All course materials are in ODL format and, the institutions ensurethat course materials are reviewed every 3 years by course facilitator's as part of ODL policy (NOUN)

Summary from the FGD from both Distance Learning Institutions submitted that

> We are really satisfied with some of student support services particularly on face to face interaction is of good quality though not so regular   and feedback on academic progress without such   we may have dropped out of the programme (NOUN)
> Distance Learning Centre UI provides good course materials on time to prepare for examination and some of our lecturers give feedback that identifies areas of improvement (DLC, UI)

Another participant from the KII interview said:

> The institution organises orientation activities as and when due for newly admitted students but different staff give orientation for students at times it may be confusing(Administrative Staff)

A participant also said:

> In our institution, counselling services are provided for distance learners on their academic and also main library are equipped with recent books but not all study centres have libraries for now but the virtual library can be assessed anywhere which students have enough materials to be used for academic purposes

A KII participant argued that:

> Course materials are in open education resources format in National Open University of Nigeria though of quality however it is 24 hours ICT driven most times at the main campus Abuja (coordinator).

From the above KII and FGD, it could be inferred that the quality of students support services available in the two institutions under study is not up to global best practices.

Thus, there is much to be done to improve those available students support services in desirable quality and quantity. This means that the level of quality of learners support services is not acceptable to all the students.Tait and Mills (2003);

Thorpe (2004); Mowes (2005); Belawati and Zuhairi (2007); Kangai (2012); Aluko and Hendrikz (2012) argued thatthe success of students in distance learning setting is largely a function of quality learners support services that are made available by the learning institutions. Also, the availability of quality support services provides the basis for high rate of students' retention in teaching–learning process (Kwek, Lau and Tan 2010).

The issue of quality is particularly important in the provision of library services to all categories of students in the system. The strategic importance of library and library services in any education system cannot be over-emphasised. Therefore, stakeholders in open and distance education need to ensure that learners have access to quality learning resources from the library by providing appropriate library services to the distance learners throughout the phases of their educational pursuits. Quality library services would include access to relevant print and electronic learning resources, providing reliable services to the students to address their learning challenges and ability to use library materials from the comfort of their homes and workplaces.

Some of the respondents in FDG have this to say about the quality of library services provided by the two learning institutions used for this study:

> We are satisfied with the library service provided, they are E-copybooks/journals/mimeographs/technicalreports/conf erence proceedings, reference books, and many Open Educational resources for some of course are also available (NOUN students)

They commented further that

> They find it difficult to borrow books to readat home because there are few copies available in the library

Different distance learning students had different views as follows:

> DLC UI library services are of at least good quality. In spite of being centralised attheHeadquarters which is the University Library/, there are few books but not given same opportunity as those ofthe conventional students. Though not everyone of us is getting the library services

From this observation there is the need to stock more books in the main library and also make learning resources available and accessible to distance learning students

particularly E-books, journals and so on.This would help learners, wherever they are, to gain more knowledge for academic excellence.

Both distance learning institutions agreed that the quality of study /tutorial guide is high as they submitted that:

> Some study guides are printed with good quality do help us understand difficult things. Some pages of the study guides are relevant. Helping   us in doing assignments to pass

Therefore, for successful distance learning to take place, both the single and dual modes distance learning institutions must provide quality learners support services within and outside the institution. Availability of quality learners support services is of paramount importance in attaining quality open and distance education.

Research Question 3

What is the level of affordability of learners support services provided by the two distance learning institutions?

Table 4.3: Affordability of Learners' support services provided by distance learning institutions

S/N	Items	NOUN				DLC UI			
		CO	CH	RCH	MAO DLI	CO	CH	RCH	MAO DLI
1	Information flow services	157 10.7%	201 13.7%	124 8.5%	405 27.7%	100 6.8%	75 5.1%	197 13.5%	204 13.9%
2	Academic advising services	231 15.8%	174 11.9%	260 14.1%	222 30.4%	89 12.1%	148 20.2%	174 31.5%	165 11.3%
3	Academic progress report services	177 12.1%	114 7.8%	178 12.2%	240 16.4%	132 9.0%	154 10.5%	87 5.9%	113 7.7%
4	Study/ tutorial guide services	397 27.1%	200 13.7%	133 9.0%	157 10.7%	261 17.8%	210 14.4%	62 4.2%	43 2.9%
5	Library services	232 15.9%	263 18.0%	182 12.4%	167 11.4%	168 11.5%	148 10.1%	119 8.1%	141 9.6%
6	ICT Services	346 23.7%	210 14.4%	242 16.5%	89 6.1%	109 7.5%	259 17.7%	156 10.7%	52 3.6%
7	Counselling Services	111 7.6%	139 9.5%	299 20.4%	338 23.1%	117 7.9%	104 7.1%	133 9.1%	222 15.2%
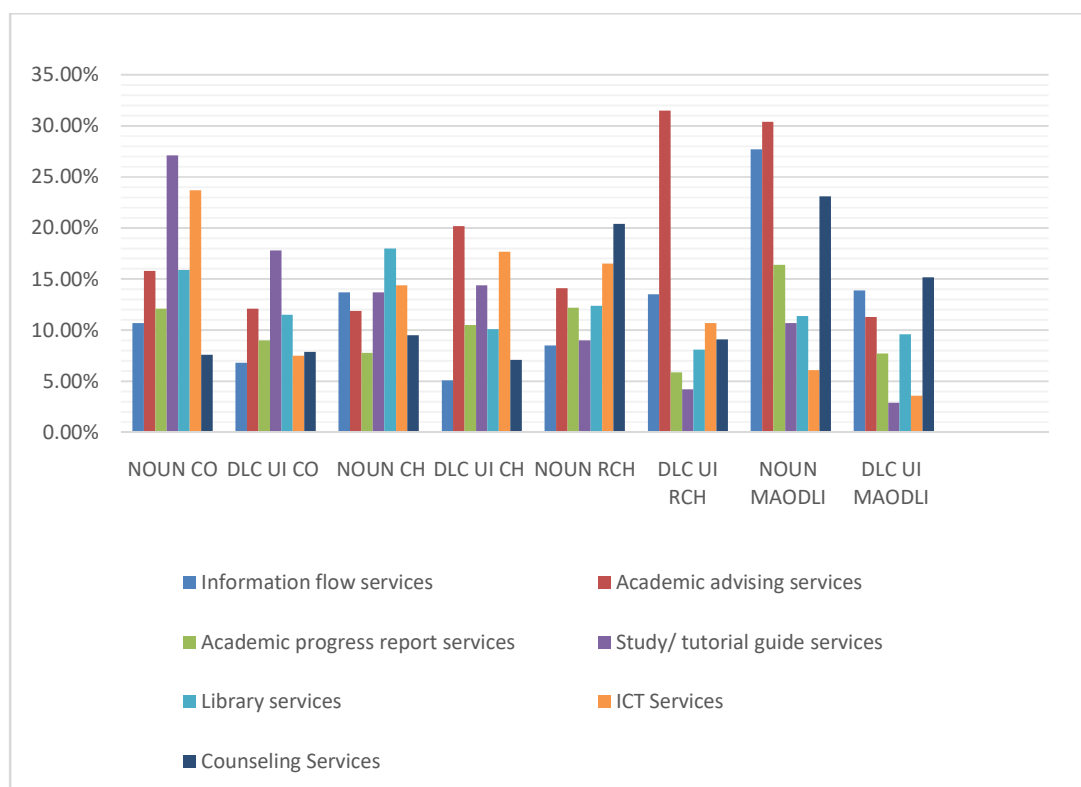
Fig. 4.8: Affordability of Learners' support services provided by distance learning institutions

Table 4.3 above show respondents view on level of affordability of learners support services provided by the two distance learning institutions. On Information flow services, findings revealed that 10.7% of the total respondents from NOUN agreed that the services were costly, 13.7%; cheap, 8.5%; relatively cheap and 27.75% believed that they were made available by the management of distance learning institution.However, in DLC UI,6.8% of the respondents viewed the services to be costly,5.1%; cheap, 13.5%;relatively cheap while 13.9% agreed that they were made available by the management.

On Academic advising services findings from the study revealed that 15.8% of the total respondents from NOUN agreed that it was costly, 11.9%; cheap, 14.1%; relatively cheap while 30.4% agreed that they are made available by the management of the distance learning institution. However, in UI DLC,12.1% of the respondents agreed that it was costly, 20.2% agreed it was cheap, 31.5%; relatively cheap while 11.3% agreed that they were made available by the management.

On Academic progress report services, findings of the study revealed that 12.1% of the total respondents from NOUN agreed that they were costly, 7.8%; cheap, 12.2%; relatively cheap while 16.4% agreed that they were made available by the management of the distance learning institution.For UI DLC respondents, 9.0% agreed that the services werecostly, 10.5%; cheap, 5.9%; relatively cheap while 7.7% agreed that they were made available by the management.

On study/ tutorial guide services,findings from the study revealed that 27.1% of the total respondents from NOUN agreed that the services were costly, 13.7%; cheap, 9.0%; relatively cheap while 10.7% agreed that they were made available by the institution. However, in UI DLC, the 17.85% of therespondents agreed thatthe services were costly 14.4%; cheap, 4.2%; relatively cheap while 2.9% agreed that they were made available by the management.

Result obtained revealed that 15.9% of the total respondents from NOUN agreed that they were costly, 18.0%; cheap, 12.4%; relatively cheap while 11.4% agreed that the services were made available by the management of the distance learning institution.11.5% of the respondents from UI DLC agreed that the services were costly, 10.1%;cheap, 8.1%; relatively cheap while 9.6% agreed that they were made available by the management.

On ICT services,findings revealed that 23.7% of the respondents from NOUN agreed that they were costly, 14.4%; cheap, 16.5%; relatively cheap and 6.1% indicated that the services were made available by the management of the distance learning institution. In the same vein, 7.5% of the respondents from UI DLC agreed that the services were costly, 17.7%; cheap, 10.7%; relatively cheap while 3.6% agreed that they were made available by the management.

On counsellingservices, findings from the study revealed that 7.6% of the respondents from NOUN agreed that the services were costly, 9.5%; cheap, 20.4%; relatively cheap while 23.1% agreed that they were made available by the management of the distance learning institution.Also,7.9% of the respondents from UI DLC agreed that they werecostly, 7.17%; cheap, 9.1%; relatively cheap while 15.2% agreed that they were made available by the management for learners' use.

Responses on the affordability of student's support services provided by distance learning institutions are as shown below:

FGD participants said:

Learners' support services particularly study /tutorial guide   provided for learners some are part of what the institutions provides which is also part of registration fees.

The Learners support services such as instructional materials are cheap for those working because they can easily afford it but to those who are not working it may not be that cheap

The cost using ICT, such as the cost of Internet access, cost of sending SMS, or cost of the mobile telephone itself, is expensive and in Distance education
one must use this support service

An IDI participant said

The distance learning students support services some are provided by management as part of admission and payment requirement For ICT services particularly for downloading course materials and uploading of assignments is done by the distance learning students

Provision of learners support services in ODL in both single and dual mode distance learning institutions seems to be costly on part of learner but cheaper in terms of time and tasks when compared to the conventional higher institutions. This means that distance learning students who are working may be able to afford the cost involved in use of support services than those who are not working. Also, ODL institutions are technology driven which requires all forms of software forinstructional delivery.This is usually capital intensive as it also requires uninterrupted supply of power to enable access for learners. If learners cannot afford such support services, it could hinder their learning which may lead to dropout. In Nigeria, many learners due to the economic situation in the country may be feeling the pressure of costs of instructional materials and may see this support service to be costly.

Research Question 4

What is the level of accessibility of learners' support services provided by distance learning institutions?

Table 4.4: Accessibility of students' support services provided by Distance learning institutions

Variables	ACCESSIBILITY							
	NOUN				DLC UI			
	Excellent	Good	Poor	Very Poor	Excellent	Good	Poor	Very Poor
Information flow services	321 21.9%	307 20.9%	159 10.9%	102 6.8%	189 12.9%	198 13.5%	100 6.8%	89 19.2%
Academic advising services	269 18.4%	299 20.4%	166 11.3%	153 10.5%	177 12.1%	170 11.6%	118 8.1%	111 7.6%
Academic progress report services	232 15.9%	337 23.0%	187 12.8%	131 8.9%	156 10.7%	191 13.1%	106 7.2%	123 8.4%
Study/ tutorial guide services	250 17.0%	311 21.2%	177 12.1%	149 10.2%	187 12.7%	201 13.7%	79 5.4%	109 7.5%
Library services	263 17.9%	289 19.8%	169 11.6%	166 11.3%	169 11.6%	174 11.9%	119 8.1%	114 7.8%
ICT Services	301 20.6%	288 19.7%	156 10.7%	142 9.7%	191 13.1%	139 9.5%	124 8.5%	122 8.3%
Counselling Services	239 16.3%	290 19.8%	169 11.6%	189 12.9%	188 12.8%	171 11.7%	107 7.3%	110 7.5%

Table 4.4 shows the level of accessibility of students' support services provided by distance learning institutions. On information flow services, it would be observed that 21.9% of the respondents from NOUN indicated that the level of accessibility was excellent, 20.9%; 10.9%; poor and 6.8% indicated that the level of accessibility to information flow was very poor. For UI DLC, 12.9% indicated that the level of accessibility to information flow was excellent, 13.5%;good, 6.8%; poor and 19.2%; very poor.

On Academic advising services, it was observed that 18.4% of the respondents from NOUN indicated that the level of accessibility was excellent, 20.4%; good, 11.3%;poor and 10.5%; very poor.In the same vein, 12.1% of the respondents from UI DLCindicated that the level of accessibility was excellent, 11.6%;good, 8.1%; poor and 7.6%; very poor.

On Academic progress report services, 15.9% of the respondents from NOUNbelieved that the level of accessibility to information flow was excellent, 23.0%; good, 12.8%; poor and 8.9%; very poor.In the case of respondents from UI DLC, 10.7% indicated that the level of accessibility was excellent, 13.1%; good, 7.2%; poor and 8.4%;very poor. It should be noted that NOUN is primarily established to provide distance education to the citizens and has adequate resources and educational facilities to progressively monitor academic performance of students in the system.

For study/ tutorial guide services, 17.0% of the respondents from NOUN affirmed that the level of accessibility was excellent, 21.2%; good, 12.1%; poor and 10.2%;very poor. 12.7%of the respondents from UI DLC indicated that the level of accessibility was excellent, 13.7%; good, 5.4%; poor and 7.5% indicated that the level of accessibility was very poor.

On library services it was observed that 17.9% of the respondents from NOUNbelieved that the level of accessibility to information flow was excellent, 19.8%; good, 11.6%; poor and 11.3%; very poor.For the respondents from UI DLC, 11.6% indicated that the level of accessibility was excellent, 11.9%; good, 8.1%; poor and 7.8%; very poor.The National Open University of Nigeria has functional e-library with large volume of e-books for online access by the students across the country and beyond. This could have positively altered the perception of distance learners from this institution on the provision of library services to facilitate teaching-learning process.

On ICT services, 20.6% of the respondents from NOUN indicated that the level of accessibility was excellent, 19.7%; good, 10.7%; poor and 9.7%; very poor.13.5% of the respondents indicated that the level of accessibility was excellent, 9.5%; good, 8.5%; poor and 8.3% indicated that the level of accessibility was very poor. Since NOUN is the only single mode distance learning in the country, it is understandable that lot of resources and funding would be allocated to the institution for the provision of ICT services to the students. It is instructive to note that the institution is configured in such a way that it is practically impossible to function effectively without utilizing the power of technological resources in instructional

delivery process. The institution carries out most of its operations in online mode and this necessitates the use of ICT resources in every department in the organisation. This implies that NOUN could be strengthened with ICT resources more than UI DLC.

On counselling services, 16.3% of the respondents from NOUN indicated that the level of accessibility was excellent, 19.8%; good, 11.6%; poor and 12.9%; very poor.In the case of respondents from UI DLC, 12.8% indicated that the level of accessibility was excellent, 11.7%; good, 7.3%; poor and 7.5%; very poor.The findings show that in NOUN, accessibility tolearners support services were more excellent and good that distance learning students from University of Ibadan. This could be attributed to the fact that NOUN operates 24-hour online services to their students while University of Ibadan is yet to achieve that status.Raza and Allsop (2006) assert that ODL can deliver education at the doorstep so that learners do not have to physically leave their home environment. They further affirm that peculiar advantages of the ODL can only become meaningful to all who are aspiring to benefit from its programmes, if accessibility is feasibly facilitated. This mean that for delivery of ODL programmes both of the two distance learning institutions (single and dual) modes must ensure adequate accessibility to all distance learning students irrespective of their location, as accessibility to support services helps to widen participation. The strength and success of any ODL institution can be first be measured in terms of effective provision, implementation and sustainability of adequate support services in diverse forms in order to compensate the students for the lack of physical contact with their lecturers and the absence of their physical presence at such ODL institutions.

Respondents from the two distance learning institutions all agreed that:

> We have access to registration of courses, course material as well as assignments only after payment of tuition, and also access to face to face interactions (NOUN and DLC UI)

They further argued that:

> Distance learning students have access to ICT services indirectly as they bear the cost of data for course registration, submission of assignment and downloading of course material

This implies that access is dependent on many factors particularly course materials as access to technology facilities is costly for distance learning students who are struggling financially. Therefore, the accessibility of learner support services has cost implications

As regards to interview on Academic advising services:

> We are, to an extent, satisfied with adequate access to our facilitators' advice andcounsellingwhich has been helpful in teaching and learning(NOUN).

As regards to interview on information flow services

> We have access to admission process which is highly supported by the Department of Student Support. This unitprovides us with adequate information related to admissionprocess (DLC UI)

As regards to interview on study /tutorial guides

> We have access to both face-to-face tutorials, online discussion as well as course materials in our student's portal (NOUN and DLC UI)

FGD participants all submitted that:

> We don't have easy access to library services particularly main library. Staff at times are not so quick in meeting our request. We are not allowed to take books inside the library which we need badly it is time restricted between 8 -4pm(DLC UI)

FGD participants submitted that:

> We have easy access to library services particularly E-library at the Headquarters but some of the study centres do not have good library facilities. (NOUN)

They further acknowledged the fact that

> We have easy access to Mobile or E-library services particularly when the internet is good 24 hours daily(NOUN)

Research Question 5

What is the extent of usability of learnerssupport services by the distance learning students?

Table 4.5: Usability of Learner' support services by the distance learning students

S/N	Items	NOUN				DLC UI			
		Frequently	Often	Seldom	Never	Frequently	Often	Seldom	Never
1	Information flow services	318 21.7%	343 23.4%	93 6.4%	133 9.1%	218 14.9%	166 11.3%	92 6.3%	100 6.8%
2	Academic advising services	386 52.9%	273 37.4%	186 9.7%	42 21.0%	158 10.8%	173 11.8%	190 13.0%	55 3.8%
3	Academic progress report services	307 21.0%	325 22.2%	61 4.2%	194 13.3%	237 41.9%	152 18.0%	138 15.3%	49 3.3%
4	Study/ tutorial guide services	231 15.8%	335 22.9%	184 17.8%	137 9.4%	133 9.1%	187 12.8%	110 7.5%	146 9.9%
5	Library services	267 50.3%	293 49.7%	169 11.4%	158 10.8%	267 18.3%	90 6.1%	105 7.2%	114 7.8%
6	ICT Services	271 18.5%	358 24.5%	164 11.2%	94 6.4%	178 12.2%	191 13.1%	119 8.1%	88 6.0%
7	Counselling Services	273 18.7%	283 19.3%	226 15.4%	105 7.2%	226 15.4%	105 7.1%	193 13.2%	52 3.6%

The result shows the usability of student's support services by the distance learning student. 21.7% respondents from NOUN claimed that they use information flow services frequently,23.4% often use it,6.4% seldom use it and 9.1% never use the

service. In the case of UI DLC, 14.9% of the respondents claimed that they use the services frequently,11.3% often use it,6.3% seldom use it and 6.8% never use it.

In the same vein, 52.9% of the respondents from NOUN indicated that they use academic advising servicefrequently,37.4% often use it,9.7% seldom use it and 21.0% never use it. For UI DLC,10.8% of the respondents claimed that they use service frequently,11.8% often use it,13.0% seldom use it and 3.8% never use it.

Report from NOUN shows that 21.0% of the respondents claimed that they use academic progress report service frequently,22.2% often use it,4.2% seldom use it and 13.3% never use.Also, 41.9% of the respondents from UI DLC claimed that they use it frequently,18.0% often use it,15.3% seldom use it and 3.3% never use it.15.8% of the respondents from NOUN claimed that they use study/ tutorial guide service frequently,22.9% often use it,17.8% seldom use it and 9.4% never use it. 9.1% of the respondents from UI DLC indicated that they use study/ tutorial guide services frequently,12.8% often use it,7.5% seldom use it and 9.9 % never use it.

Also, 50.3% of the respondents from NOUN claimed that they use library service frequently,49.7% often use it,11.4% seldom use it and 10.8% never use it. 18.3% of the respondents indicated that they use library service frequently,6.1% often use it,7.2% seldom use it and 7.8 % never use the service.

On the issues of ICT service, 18.5% of the respondents from NOUN indicated that they use ICT service frequently,24.5% often use it,11.2% seldom use it and 6.4% never use it.Also, 12.2% of the respondents from UI DLC claimed that they use ICT service frequently,13.1% often use it,8.1% seldom use it and 6.0 % never use the service. 18.7% of the respondents from NOUN claimed that they use counsellingservices frequently,19.3% often use it,15.4% seldom use it and 7.2% never use it.In the same vein, 15.4% of the respondents from UI DLC affirmed that they use counselling service frequently,7.1% often use it,13.2% seldom use it and 3.6 % never use it..

From the findings it could be deduced that distance learning students from the single and dual models use the learners support services frequently. It could be concluded that learners' support services are being used by distance learners frequently, as without the use of these support services, it could act as a hindrance to effective learning which might lead to poor performance in examinations. Therefore, most of the open distance learning students do make adequate use of students support services in instructional space. The findings of this study had provided evidences that more

than half of the respondents made use of support services from the single and dual modes distance learning institutions. These results are in compliance with the findings of Schwier, Daniel and Ross(2005), Zuhairi (2007), Choudhry, Gujjar, and Hafeez (2008), Jumani, Zaidi, Chishti, and Abbas (2009) which emphasised the strategic importance oflearners' support service in implementation of effective distance education system across the world.

The benefits of Learners support programmes include enhanced academic performance which assists students to clarify concepts, develop study and writing skills, provision of separate, safe space for addressing learning difficulties (Adam, 2006). Learners support programmes also ensure that students gain access to institutions of higher learning and at the same time reduce the attrition rates and increase retention and throughput rates (Kirkham and Ringelstein, 2008). In addition, support programmes such as peer support creates a sense of community.

From the IDI one of the participants said that:

> Learners support services includes tutorials, tutors and library services and guidance and counselling which has helped to guide us on all the aspects of our studies by giving us support so that we can succeed in our studies.

The responses of the respondents show that they understand the meaning and benefits of learners support services and how they could be used to achieve specific purposes. This is in tandem with Cliath (2000) who asserts that the principal aim of learning support is to optimise the teaching and learning process in order to enable students with learning difficulties to achieve adequate levels of competencies in a learning area. He adds that this can be achieved in an efficient way through the implementation of institutional policies and approaches that target the needs of the lowest achieving learners.

The participants explained how learner support helps them in their learning as making it easy for them to do their assignments and answering examination questions in the proper manner. For instance, some of the participantsstated that:

> It helps us and makes the assignments easy to understand and answer. And also enable us to answer the examination questions with confidence.

It was also reported by some students that:

> We use the computers at the centre for examination purposesand only accessible during examination, submit our assignments, do our registrations and other things from local ICT services (NOUN)

> Some of us use our mobile phones as our computers for various activities such as submitting assignments, checking assignments on portal, downloading of   school fees (DLC UI)

In conventionaluniversity classroom, students have direct access to their lecturers, library and other recreational faculties that are available on campus,thus, allowing consistent dialogue to all and sundry in such a learning environment. However, the distance learning students in single and dual modes need students support services in order to cushion the effect isolation, in-decision and lack of direct access that they experience as a result of the distance between the teacher and learner, between the institution and the learners and between learners and other learners. As a result of this,learners support services in form of academic and non-academic support are of great importance in order to mitigate these difficulties. In single and dual modes of distance learning, students and tutors leverage the capability of technology to facilitate the possibilities of personal and group interaction in ODL computer, audio conferencing, printed materials, resources, Open Educational Resources (OER), electronic mails, teleconferencing and the worldwide web.

The finding is in line with Claith (2000) who argues that the expected outcomes of learning-support programmes help in improving the learning of students as well as the application of independent learning strategies by the students which results in the commitment to and involvement in their own learning, positive attitudes to school/institution and high levels of self-esteem. Thorpe (2002) explains the usability of learners support services as the ability to meet of all learners' needsto promote high quality learning guidance about course choice, preparatory diagnosis, study skills, access to group learning in seminars and tutorials and so on. Distance learning institutions should ensure continuous provision of effective student/learner support service, as it is a precursor for creating conducive learning environment which will in turn yield greater instructional dividends, not only in terms of student retention but also in lowering incidence of dropout which is pertinent because of the characteristics of distance learning system.

Research Question 6

Are thelearners support services provided by the two institutions truly supportive of learning goals??

Table 4.6 Learner Support Services Provided is Truly Supportive of Learning Goals

S/N	Items	NOUN		DLC UI		
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Total
1	Learners support services provide qualitative tutorial information in all academic programmes	561 38.3%	326 22.3%	307 20.1%	269 18.4%	1463 100.0%
2	Learners support services provided opportunities to overcome learning difficulties	518 35.4%	212 25.2%	359 24.5%	217 14.8%	1463 100.0%
3	Learners support services provided opportunities overcome personal problems	509 34.8%	378 25.8%	436 29.8%	140 9.6%	1463 100.0%
4	Learners support services provided opportunities to overcome problem of interacting at a distance	597 40.8%	133 19.8%	523 25.0%	210 14.3%	1463 100.0%
5	Learners support services provided opportunities to overcome problem of studying at a distance	469 35.5%	261 25.1%	506 23.9%	227 15.5%	1463 100.0%

Table 4.6 shows respondents' viewsonthe degree at which learners' support services provided by the two institutions truly supportive of learning goals. .38.3% of distance learners from NOUN agreed thatlearners support services provided qualitative tutorial information in all academic programmes while22.3% disagreed. 20.1% of the respondents from UI DLCagreed thatlearners support services provided qualitative tutorial information in all academic programmes while 22.3% disagreed.

From the perspective of NOUN distance learners,35.4% of the respondents agreedthatlearners support services provided them with opportunities to

overcomelearning difficulties while 25.2% disagreed. Also, 24.5% of UI DLC students agreed while 14.8% disagreed. This shows that both distance learning students from the single and dual modes believe that the student support services provided by the institutionsare truly supportive of their learning goal by helping them overcome learning difficulties.

From the perspective of distance learners from NOUN 34.8% respondents agreed thatlearners support services provided them with opportunities to overcome personal problems while 30.3% disagreed. For the UI DLC students, 29.8% respondents agreed while 9.6% disagreed. Dzakiria (2005) and Kelly and Mills (2007) affirm that learner support has frequently been identified by open learning institutions as being of particular importance for student success in ODL. This might not be unconnected with the fact that open and distance education is usually devoid of unrestricted physical contact among learners, tutors and materials. The only substitutes to these isolations are the support services provided by the institutions. Learners in ODL largely place premium values of these services to achieve their learning goals.

From the perspective of distance learners from NOUN, 34.8% respondents agreed thatlearners support services assist them overcome problem of interacting at a distance while 30.3% said disagreed. However, 29.8% respondents from UI DLC agreed while 9.6% disagreed. In the same vein,35.5% of the respondents from NOUN agreed thatlearners' support services provided them the opportunities to overcome problem of studying at a distance while 25.1% disagreed. For the UI DLC students, 23.9% agreed while15.4% disagreed. This shows that learner support services was perceived by m single and dials modes distance learning as critical tools tostrengthen learning activities in instructional setting.

The findings show that distance learning students from single and dual modes almost have the same perception towards learner's support services as truly supportive of learning goals. The respondents were of the opinion that learners support services aimed at helping the learners overcome problems of interacting at a distance, learning difficulties, personal problems as well as assisting distance learners develop their own individual strategy for studying under a distance education system. The finding of the study is in line with Vilardi and Rice, (2014) submission that the introduction of technological tools, online services, interactive programmes, multimedia tools such as video, audio-visual aids and tutorial classes have supported important initiatives in distance and online delivery A real learning community is created through the

emergence of new technologies that afford instructional designers and tutors the opportunities to promote and encourage interaction and collaboration among distance and online learners (Beldarrain, 2006).

The focus group discussions (FGD) also shed further light on the learners support services being truly supportive of learning goals. Distance learning students commented on the fact that learnerssupport services directly impacted on their studies. The observations from FGD were based on the presentation of course material, the course content, communication on academic activities etc.

> Course materials are not difficult because they are readable and even the content is not difficult, we find presentation of study material is in good quality (NOUN)

> Diamond Radio is used to complement the face-to-face teaching. The radio programmes are broadcast to enable us listen while discussing the contents of some courses.Also, our tutor marked assignments (TMAs) had helped guide our learning objectives and the grades are returned to us with comments (DLC UI)

Research Question 7

What are the major constraints facing distance learning students to use learners' support services?

Table 4.7: Constraints Facing Distance Learning Students to use LSSs

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	S.D
1	Poor staff student relationship on Learners support services	334 22.8%	471 32.2%	300 20.5%	358 24.5%	3.63	0.64
2	Insufficient knowledge of information and communication technology (ICT) skills to use Learners support services	377 25.8%	464 31.7%	298 20.4%	333 22.7%	3.42	0.69
3	Insufficient number of qualified staff support on Learners support services	391 26.7%	424 28.9%	448 30.6%	200 13.6%	3.39	0.66
4	Ineffective time management to use support services	442 30.2%	411 28.1%	310 21.2%	300 20.5%	3.34	0.67
5	Inadequate awareness of the availability of various Learners support services to distance learners	425 29.0%	340 23.2%	350 23.9%	348 23.7%	3.21	0.71
6	Non-satisfactory with the quality of feedback on tutor-marked assignments	410 28.0%	339 23.1%	313 21.3%	401 27.4%	3.00	0.90
7	Inadequate high-tech electronic gadgets for Learners support services	445 30.4%	312 21.3%	323 22.0%	383 26.1%	2.89	0.88
8	Confidence and attitude of distance learners to use of Learners support service	381 26.0%	677 46.2%	37 2.5%	368 25.1%	2.86	0.76

9	Facilitators are unable to monitor students one on one as in the case of non-distance learning	444 30.3%	632 43.1%	264 18.0%	123 8.4%	2.77	0.75
10	Shortage of qualified e-teachers on Learners support services	310 21.2%	610 41.5%	109 7.4%	434 29.6%	2.54	0.69
11	keeping up with the trend throughout the duration is challenging due to financial constraints	236 16.1%	721 49.2%	274 18.7%	232 15.9%	2.29	0.60

The finding show that poor staff student relationship (mean =3.63) ranked highest by the mean score rating and was followed by insufficient knowledge of information and communication technology (ICT) skills to use learners support services (mean =3.42), insufficient number of qualified staff support on Learners support services (mean =3.39), ineffective time management to use support services (mean = 3.34), inadequate awareness of the availability of various Learners support services to distance learners (mean =3.21), non-satisfactory with the quality of feedback on tutor-marked assignments (mean =3.01), inadequate high-tech electronic gadgets for learners support services (mean =2.99), confidence and attitude of distance learners to use of learners support service (mean =2.96), facilitators inability to monitor students one-on-one as in the case of conventional institutions (mean =2.74), shortage of qualified e-teachers on learners support services (mean =2.44) and was followed by keeping up with the trend throughout the duration is challenging due to financial constraints (mean =2.09).

The result shows that 55.0% respondents agreed that there is poor staff student relationship on learners support services while 45.0% respondents disagreed. 57.5% agreed that there is insufficient knowledge of information and communication technology (ICT) skills to use thelearners support services while 42.5% respondents disagreed. 55.6% agreed that there is an insufficient number of qualified staff support on Learners support services while 44.4% disagreed, 58.3% of respondents agreed that ineffective time management to use support services while 41.7 disagreed. 52.2% agreed that there is an inadequate awareness of the availability of various Learners support services to distance learners while 47.8% disagreed. 51.1% agreed that non-satisfactory with the quality of feedback on tutor-marked assignments while 48.9% disagreed,51.7% agreed that inadequate high-tech electronic gadgets is a constraint to Learners support services while 48.3% disagreed. 72.2% agreed that confidence and attitude of distance learners to use of Learners support service while 27.8% disagreed, 73.4% agreed that teachers are unable to monitor students one on one as in the case of

conventional institutions while 26.6% disagreed. 62.7% agreed that shortage of qualified e-teachers on Learners support services while 37.3% disagreed. 65.3% agreed that keeping up with the trend throughout the duration is challenging due to financial constraints while 34.7% respondents disagreed.

The finding shows that the major constraints facing distance learning students on students support services are poor staff student relationship on Learners support services,insufficient knowledge of information and communication technology (ICT) skills to use Learners support services ,insufficient number of qualified staff support on Learners support services,inadequate awareness of the availability of various Learners support services to distance learners and non-satisfactory with the quality of feedback on tutor-marked assignments. The finding implies that there are challenges facing distance learning students on the usage of the Learners support services

One FGD group had the following to say:

> There are many barriers to distance learning students on Learners support service. One of such is that at times staff does not relate well with the learners, they are not patient with us and hardly answer their phones when we call. Though we place high value and importance on the learners support services as far as our studies is concerned (DLC UI) Besides that, the distance learning students indicated that their ICT knowledge is very limited which makes it difficult to access some of the support services particularly on the internet.

One group said:

> Some distance learning students also experience difficulty in using internet because   of insufficient (ICT) skills to use Learners support services particularly downloading course materials, registration and payment having to use the services of café attendance (NOUN).   .

Another participant argued that:
We are not satisfied with the quality of feedback on tutor-marked assignments particularly in general courses as the scores by tutors are very poor and no useful comment to guide student on what to do (DLC UI)

Distance learning students are mostly working class having limited time to access or use the Learners support services. To overcome this challenge in the use of support services learners needs to be committed, dedicated and have high degree of self-

discipline to be able to manage the little time available to them satisfactorily.

A KII participant added;

> The economic situation in the country is really bad. Most distance learners are civil servants and salaries are not fully paid this could affect their access and use of internet as it is costly (Director).

In spite of the huge advantages associated with learners support services for distance learning students, a number of factors or obstacles still serve as impediments to the availability and utilisation of these resources by the distance learning students. These include irregular power supply, poor network connectivity, inadequate funding, lack of expertise, lack of technological infrastructure to support the services, as well as poor IT skills, to mention but a few.

FGD participants remarked that:

> They are putting effort to remove many obstacles that might come up and that the one they could mot combat is technical know-how of handling Learners support services in terms of student's access and knowledge of the availability. Some of the administrative staff in the centres is not well trained to deal with student's queries particularly on counselling students on areas where they are experiencing problems

Another participant said:

> We have challenges that are manageable and we try as much as possible to prevent the challenges at hand to have negative effect on our students. However, students have their personal problems such as technical know-how of the electronic resources, lack of time to explore the Learners support services, domestic problem, erratic power supply and at times financial problem (Director).

Hypotheses Testing

H0₁: There is no significant difference in availability of learnerssupport services in National Open University of Nigerian and The Distance Learning Centre University of Ibadan

Table 4.8 Availability of learners' Support Services provided by Single and Dual Modes   Distance Learning Institutions

Distance Learning Institution	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Crit-t	Cal-t.	df	P
NOUN (Single)	887	17.4681	7.7239	1.96	2.78	1461	.000
DLC UI (Dual)	576	12.4388	2.6157				

Table 4.8 reveals that there was a significant difference in availability of learners' Support Services provided for Distance Learning Students in NOUN(Single mode) (mean score of17.4681) and that of distance learning students in Distance Learning Centre University of Ibadan(Dual Mode) (mean score of 12.4388) (Crit-t = 1.96, Cal.t = 1.78 df = 1461, P< .05 level of significance). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This implies that availability oflearners support services varies in the twoinstitutions. Thelearners support services provided by NOUN are made readily available for students than what is obtainable inDistance Learning Centre, University of Ibadan.In other words, NOUN is equipped with resources that ensure availability of learners support services than UI DLC.

This might not be unconnected with the fact that NOUN is the only single mode distance learning institution in the country and substantial amount of investments on online education accrues to this institution. Ojokheta, (2010) argues

that ODL institutions have well-stated policies on the UNESCO's major components of distance education systems on the mission, programmes, curriculum, teaching-learning strategies, learning materials and resources. The availability of interactive and collaborative tools such as computers, Internet, email, chat and video-conferencing encourages constructivist–based learning that aims to inspire, support and satisfy the learners' needs in distance learning institutions. Cavanaugh, Gillan, Kromrey, Hess, and Blomeyer(2004) argued that when instructional delivery of distance and online learning environments are well structured with the new technological tools, they provide more effective experiences than is obtainable in face-to-face classroom learning.

Some respondents from the FGD also indicated the types of learners support services available in two distance learning institutions. One group affirmed:

> As a distance learner, there are many learners support types available to us, which include orientation/registration for learners conducted in the beginning of a new session for learners (NOUN)
> Learners are allocated username/password to access the e-library which helps in downloading additional materials for reading, courses and preparing for exams (NOUN)
>
> Course materials are usually given to the students and are only available in CD-ROM formats for us to be able to print and read before face to face interaction (DLC UI).

Three KII participants made same remarks on the Learners support services:

> We have students support services in this stance

A facilitator in one of the Distance learning institutions has this to say:

> It is certain that learners support services are available which we provide like study materials. In hard and soft copies which is the responsibility of the institution

Both the focus group interview and the quantitative data clearly indicate that the learner support model of Tait (2000) which comprise the cognitive, affective and administrative/systemic support systems are in place at NOUN than what is obtainable in UI DLC UI.In conclusion the single and dual modes distance learning institutions generally have learners support services available to facilitate and improve open and distance learning in Nigeria, although the degree of availability varies across institutions.

H0₂: There is no significant difference in the quality of learners support services provided by single (NOUN) and Dual modes (DLCUI)

Table 4.9:Quality of Learners' support services provided by the two Institutions

Distance Learning Institution	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Crit-t	Cal-t.	df	P
NOUN (Single)	887	20.4122	9.5066				
				1.96	11.1450	1461	.000
DLC UI (Dual)	576	14.7939	3.8530				

Table 4.9 above showed that there was significant difference in quality of Learners'' Support Services provided for Distance Learning Students in the single mode NOUN with a mean score of 14.7939) and dual modeDistance learning Centre University of Ibadan (with a mean score of 20.4122); (Crit-t = 1.96, Cal.t = 11.1450, df = 1461, p< .05 level of significance). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

From the findings it shows that the quality of learners' support services provided in NOUN is not the same as the quality of students' support services provided in Distance learning centre of the University of Ibadan. This implies that the quality of students' support services provided in single mode is not the same as the quality of students' support services provided in dual mode. This shows that distance learning student of NOUN have expressed a higher level of satisfaction to quality of learners support services. These learners seem to perceive that the quality of NOUN learners support services package is relatively more satisfactory. This could be attributed to the fact that in Nigeria, NOUN is the only university that is solely based on ODL while other universities operates or offers ODL as a complimentary to the conventional mode of study.

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) is the only national university in Nigeria which offers all its programmes in the Distance Education mode. The NOUN offers range of programmes through its wide network of study centres. The University is responsible not only for the delivery of course material but also for providing support for its learners.

H0₃: There is no significant difference in the level of accessibility of learner' Support Services provided for Distance Learning Students in the Single and Dual Modes Distance Learning Institutions

Table 4.10: Table Showing the Difference in Accessibility of Learners' Support Services provided for Distance Learning Students in the Single and Dual Modes Distance Learning Institutions

Distance Learning Institution	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Crit-t	Cal-t.	df	P
NOUN (Single Mode)	887	16.5213	7.7687	1.96	11.1870	1461	.000
DLC, U.I (Dual Mode)	576	11.8822	3.5205				

The Table 4.10 above indicates that there was significant difference in accessibility of learners' Support Services provided for Distance Learning Students in the Single (with a mean score of 11.8822) and Dual Modes(with a mean score of 16.5213) Distance Learning Institutions (Crit-t = 1.96, Cal.t = 11.1870, df = 1461, p< .05 level of significance). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This implies that accessibility of learners support services in National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) which is the single mode is easier and higher than that of the Distance learning centre University of Ibadanwhich operates a dual mode system.

NOUN distance learning students' easy accessibility to learning resources could be attributed to TETFUND intervention which has assisted the institution in solving technological and geographical challenges to promote easy accessibility of learners support services by their students. NOUN has an excellent Learning Management System (LMS) in place, ensuring access by almost all students in different locations with no restriction through 24-hour service.This is an online tool

that is available to all registered students who have access to the Internet. Further, it is an asynchronous learning management system. A clear understanding of level of accessibility of learners support services offered in NOUN was stated by some of the distance learning students

> Our facilitators are able to interact with us at all times where the interactive responses between us and the facilitators were possible due to easy accessibility. We also have access to online video conferencing and on line facilitationbetween us and facilitators (NOUN)

H0₄: There is no significant difference in usability of learners support services provided the two institutions

Table 4.11: Usability of Learners Support Services provided for Distance Learning Students in the Single and Dual Modes Distance Learning Institutions

Distance Learning Institution	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Crit-t	Cal-t.	df	P
NOUN (Single Mode)	887	16.4920	7.8919	1.96	1.799	1461	.000
DLC, U.I (Dual Mode)	576	11.9126	3.9205				

The result shows that there was a significant difference in usability of students' support services provided for distance learning students in the single(with a mean score of16.4920) and Dual Modes(with a mean score of11.9126) distance learning institutions (Crit-t = 1.96, Cal.t = 1.799, df = 1461, P< .05 level of significance). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

This implies that the usability of students' support services in NOUN is higher than that of the University of Ibadan Distance learning centre. The two types of distance learning institutions have various types of support services for different academic and non-academic activities. However, most of the learners support services provided by NOUN are effectively utilized by the students to realize learning goals. This could be due to the fact that the only acceptable of learning in NOUN is through online platform, which requires the use of such learners support services at every level. It should be noted that students from UI DLC could still participate in instructional process through conventional means that are not available to single mode learners.

FGD participants made same remarks on the Learners support services:

> We use internet almost for the same purposes we use it for registration, downloading of course materials and sending

> online tutor marked assignmentand writing exams particularly general courses (NOUN)

Other participants commented that:

> Learners supportservices provided are of great help to the distance learning student because they do not have the time to visit the tutorial session but with the instructional support services provided we are able to meet up with our studies (NOUN)

> That the introduction of smart phone, tablet has helped learner to group –chat with our peers and discussed issues not clear to us in our course materials which helps us to learn with little effort (DLC UI)

This is corroborated byTaiti (2003),Mbwesa (2014) who agree that provision of effective learner support services increases motivation of learners, make them more confident in the use of technology hence they are able to persist and avoid dropping out.

H0$_5$: There is no significant difference in affordability of learners' Support Services provided for Distance Learning Students in the Single and Dual Modes Distance Learning Institutions

Table 4.12: Table Showing the Difference in affordability of learners' Support Services provided for Distance Learning Students in the Single and Dual ModesDistance Learning Institutions

Distance Learning Institution	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Crit-t	Cal-t.	df	P
NOUN (Single Mode)	887	19.3350	9.4312	1.96	10.164	1461	.000
DLC U.I (Dual Mode)	576	11.1960	5.3854				

The Table 4.12 above showed that there was significant difference in affordability of learners support services provided for NOUN Students (with a mean score of19.3351) and UI DLC students (with a mean score of14.1196) Distance Learning Institutions (Crit-t = 1.96, Cal.t = 10.164, df = 1461, p< .05 level of significance). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

This implies that distance learning students from NOUN are able to afford learners'support services more than distance learning students from UI DLC. This might bedue to TETFUND interventions in the provision of infrastructure as well as the student population in NOUN. Though distance and online learning can be offered

through single, dual, mixed and virtual modes of learning, the type of distance learning institution could have an effect on the funding of learners support services(Okoronkwo and Jegede, 2010).NOUN, as a single mode institutionis wholly dedicated to offer distance and online learning forms of education which may affect the allocation of funding to the institution and by extension, the provision of learnerssupport services for students. Single modes distance learning seems to be grounded in a specific framework of student support through e-learning.Therefore, total commitment to learners supportservices is engendered in the operation of NOUN, as the only single dedicated comprehensive open distance learning institution in Nigeria.

Some of the respondents from the FGD argued that:

> The cost of going through distance and online learning in Nigeria is very high some of the learners support services are made available by the institution for example on information flow the institutions make this available to us through different means (NOUN and DLC UI)

This is a comment from KII interview

> NOUN is being subsidized through TETFUND, our tuition is not toohigh for students that is the reason why our students support services are affordable

This finding support the submission of Ojo,Ogidan, and Olakulehin, (2006) that distance and online learning is often the most cost-effective means of acquiring education at all levels.The system of education allows for judicious utilization of available learning resources to expand access to education in the society. The establishment of NOUN has ensured that the disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in the society have the capabilities to access educational opportunities and contribute to the development of the country and the world at large. Therefore, ODL remains a veritable platform to make education readily available to different groups of people in the society at a reasonable cost.

H0$_6$: There is no significant difference in learners support services that are truly supportive of learning goals for Distance Learning Students in the Single and Dual Modes distance learning institutions

Table 4.13: Learners Support Services that are truly supportive of learning goals provided by the Institutions

Distance Learning Institution	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Crit-t	Cal-t.	df	P
NOUN (Single Mode)	887	19.4787	9.3673	1.96	1.731	1461	.000
DLC U.I (Dual Mode)	576	14.0138	5.3091				

Table 4.13 above showed that there was significant difference in learners support services truly supportive of learning goals provided for Distance Learning Students in the Single(with a mean score of19.4787) and Dual Modes(with a mean score of14.0138) Distance Learning Institutions (Crit-t = 1.96, Cal.t = 1.731, df = 1461, p< .05 level of significance). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

This implies that in relation to learners' support services both the distance learning students insingle mode which is NOUN and dual modes which is Distance learning Centre distance learning students attached almost the same degree of importance to learner support services truly supportive learner's learning goals. This indicates that these learners are well aware of the importance of learners Support Services as being truly supportive of learning goals. It is interesting to note that learners from NOUN expressedhigh level of satisfaction to support services such as information flow services, academic advising services, academic progress report services, library services, study/tutorials services, ICT Services, counselling services than their counterparts in UI DLC. Learners seem to perceive that the components of the ODL package from NOUN and DLC UI as relatively satisfactory by meeting their needs by providing necessary assistance to enable them overcome difficulties that are often encountered by distance learning students.

Learner support services are developed for distance learning students to communicate with the university. The question was asked to find out how if learners support services are truly supportive of learning goals. The learner support Services are made to enhance communication between the students and the university. This shows that the distance learning students from the single and dual modes perceived LSS as providing them with as much assistance as possible in order to enable them to overcome difficulties that are often encountered by distance learning students.

Some of the respondents from the FGD argued that:

> The support services provided for them in the cost of their studies are really supportive of learning for them to achieve their learning goals, that the support services was able to cushion the effect of isolation that they encountered in the cost of learning. This support services are made available timely by the two institutions (NOUN and DLC UI)

This is a comment from KII interview

> NOUN been the only ODL institution in Nigeria is being subsidised through TETFUND as a result the institution spends more on learners support services that are of immense benefit to the learners through her interaction/collaboration with other international open and distance learning institutions that have over years established learners support services providing support to learners to achieved their learning goals.

This agrees with studies done by Tait (2003),Rovial and Downey (2010), Mbwesa (2014) who agree that provision of effective learner support services increases motivation of learners, support learners learning goals and make them more confident in the use of technology hence they are able to persist and reduced attrition rate in ODL system.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary

The study attempted to provide a better understanding of the provision of learners support services in single and dual-modes distance learning institutions in Southwest Nigeria. Base on this, the researcher dwell on a general introduction which includes background to the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, significance of the study and scope of the study. Some relevant terms that might appear ambiguous were carefully defined under operational definition of terms. Also, there were sets of research questions, which were raised to elicit response from respondents. Relevant literatures on all the variables in the study were reviewed in chapter 2 of the study. Mixed method research design was adopted which involved collection of qualitative and quantitative data for the study.

The summary of findings are as follows:

- From the findings, it shows that most of the respondents were more of males thanfemale which imply that distance education serves an alternative form of education for male education in Nigeria.

- From the findings, it shows that most of the respondents were more of singles than married respondents,which implies that distance education provides second chance opportunity to those who missedor could not be accommodated by the conventional system of education in the country.

- Many of the Learners Support Services identified in literature are available in both the single (NOUN) and duals modes (DLC UI) distance learning institutions

- From these findings it could be deduced that the quality of students support services provided in NOUN is of a higher quality than that of University of Ibadan Distance learning centre.

- From these findings it could be deduced that the affordability of students support services provided in NOUN is almost the same as that of University of Ibadan Distance learning centre.

- Learners support services are truly supportive of learning goals both in the single and dual modes distance learning institutions

- The findings showthat in NOUN distance learning students were able to access Learners Support Services often and very often more that distance learning students from University of Ibadan. This could be attributed to the fact that NOUN operates 24-hour online services to their students while University of Ibadan is yet to achieve that

- From the findings it could be deduced that distance learning students from the single and dual models use the Learners support services regularly for almost the same reasons of administrative, academic and emotional support

- There was no significant difference in availability of learner's Support Services provided for Distance Learning Students in NOUN(Single mode) (mean score of 12.4388) and that of distance learning students in Distance Learning Centre University of Ibadan(Dual Mode) (mean score of 17.4681) (Crit-t = 1.96, Cal.t = 1.78 df = 1461, p< .05 level of significance).

- There was significant difference in quality of Learners Support Services provided for Distance Learning Students in the single mode NOUN with a mean score of 14.7939) and dual mode Distance learning Centre University of Ibadan (with a mean score of 20.4122) (Crit-t = 1.96, Cal.t = 11.1450, df = 1461, p< .05 level of significance).

- There was significant difference in accessibility of learners' Support Services provided for Distance Learning Students in the Single (with a mean score of 11.8822) and Dual Modes(with a mean score of 16.5213) Distance Learning Institutions (Crit-t = 1.96, Cal.t = 11.1870, df = 1461, p< .05 level of significance).

- There was no significant difference in usability of LearnersSupport Services provided for distance learning students in the Single(with a mean score of 11.9126) and Dual Modes(with a mean score of 16.4920) Distance Learning Institutions (Crit-t = 1.96, Cal.t = 1.799, df = 1461, p< .05 level of

significance). This may be as a result of the nature and population of students in NOUN

- There was significant difference in affordability of learner's Support Services provided for Distance Learning Students in the Single(with a mean score of 14.1196) and Dual Modes(with a mean score of 19.3351) Distance Learning Institutions (Crit-t = 1.96, Cal.t = 10.164, df = 1461, p< .05 level of significance).

- There was no significant difference in learners' Support Services truly supportive of learning goals provided for Distance Learning Students in the Single(with a mean score of 14.0138) and Dual Modes(with a mean score of 19.4787) Distance Learning Institutions (Crit-t = 1.96, Cal.t = 1.731, df = 1461, p< .05 level of significance).

5.2 Conclusion

This study assessed the provision of learners' support services in both single and dual modes distance learning institutions in south-west Nigeria based on Keegan's criteria.Based on the findings of this study, distance learning students affirmed the need forthe provision of learners' support services that are affordable, readily available, accessible, reliable, usable and supportive of learning goals for effective leaner-centred instructional system. It is instructive to note that National Open University of Nigeria substantially provides learners' support services that conform with world's best practices. This implies that this institution is equipped with requisite human and material resources for effective implementation of distance learning in the country. Also, UI DLC provides adequate access to critical services like counselling, information flow, tutorial and so on. It could therefore be concluded that educational stakeholders need to provide adequate e-learning resources for dual mode institutions across the country with a view to reducing the burden on NOUN to satisfy the ever-increasing number of people, who are desirous of efficient open and distance education at all levels.

5.3 Recommendations

Following recommendations are made, based on the findings from the study:

- It is important that educational stakeholders provide necessary support structures that could enhance effective learners' support system to cater for personal and professional needs of the participants.

- Report from FGD reveals that the issue of insufficient number of qualified staff to provide learners'support services is a major constraint facing distance learning students. There is therefore the need for intensive training for all administrative staff and recruitment of qualified personnel to deal with students queries especially concerning counselling on courses and procedures.

- Distance learning institutions should consider the call for providing more quality learners support as an integral part of open and distance learning.

- The issue of accessibility was a recurring decimal during the FGD and interview. Therefore, personnel in the department of LSS should ensure that appropriate information and resources are made available to distance learners to cater for their socio-political and educational needs within the society.

- Adequate attention should be given to process of ensuring that students are well informed about the interventions that are available to address their challenges in the instructional system.

- It had been observed that some administrative staffs of distance learning institutions are not approachable to learner, it is therefore recommended that administrative and support staff should be well trained on the etiquette of acceptable learner-staff relationship.

- Some respondents commented on the poor quality of tutor-assessed assignments in the system. Thus, institutions need to further strengthen their assignment monitoring system to assess the marking procedures and standards at all times.

- Some of the distance learning students in this study remarked on their lack of information and communication technology (ICT) skills. It is therefore recommended that distance learninginstitutions design and implement appropriate ICT courses to empower students adequately for the use of modern ICTs.

- It is further recommended that the distance learning institutions carry out an analysis on accessibility to ICT on a frequent basis in order to maintain up-to-dateprovision of learners support services to the students.

5.4Contributions to Knowledge

The major purpose of any research is to contribute as well as improve on existing knowledge. This study has contributed to knowledge in the following ways:

(i)   Distance learning was achievable with learners' support services in single and dual-modes institutions in Southwestern Nigeria.

(ii)   Learners' support services enhanced distance learners' accessibility of course materials.

(iii)   Inadequate high-tech electronic gadgets hindered the provisions and use of the learners' support services in the two institutions.

5.5   Limitations to the study

In this study, there were some limitations.

- The interactive sessions that brought all the students together was more of a crash programme and the respondents were not willing to let a second go without attending to their academic needs.
- The study was limited to only two institutions in the south-west.
- Some respondents did not cooperate with the researcher in the administration of the research instruments.
- For the quantitative and qualitative data to be gathered, the researcher paid several visits to the institutions. This constituted a major delay on the field work. However, this challenge was overcome through patience, persistence, perseverance and resilience on the part of the researcher.

5.6   Suggestions for further studies

From the results of this study, it is evident that related further researches are necessary. Some areas are suggested below:

- As the current research is restricted only to distance learners in Distance Learning Institutions running both single and dual modes further research could focus on only institutions organising distance learning programme in either single mode only or dual mode only.
- Future research could consider including other determinants influencing the use of social supports services among distance learners in National teacher Institute, Kaduna.
- Future research could also focus on accessing learners support services in a distance education context at various distance learning educational institutes.

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APPENDIX I

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

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DEPARTMENT OF ADULT EDUCATION

Inventory of Learners support Services Provision Questionnaire for Distance Learning Students

This questionnaire is designed to obtain information from you on the Learners support services provided by your Distance Learning Institution which ought to assist you to reduce learning difficulties you may be experiencing in your learning as well as enhance your academic performance during examinations. Your candid and honest response to the questions will tremendously assist the researcher to develop a

framework which will guide Distance Learning Institutions in the provision of Learners support services. Be assured that your responses are purely for research purpose and will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

Section A: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

- ✓ **Age**

20-25	{ }
26-30	{ }
31-35	{ }
36-40	{ }
41-45	{ }
46-50	{ }
50 and above	{ }

- ✓ **Sex**

Female	{ }
Male	{ }

- ✓ **Marital Status**

Married	{ }
Single	{ }
Divorced	{ }
Separated	{ }

- ✓ **Distance Learning Institution**

DLC, UI	{ }
NOUN, Lagos	{ }

- ✓ **Faculty**

Education	{ }
Arts	{ }
Social Sciences	{ }
Sciences	{ }

- ✓ **Course Level**

100L	{ }
200L	{ }
300L	{ }
400L	{ }
500L	{ }

Section B: Knowledge of Learners support Services in Distance Learning (Please tick the columns that appropriately answer the questions below)

- ✓ Which of the following best represents what Learners support services means?

    i.   Services provided to distance learning students to achieve and improve their learning goals {   }

    ii.   Services provided learners to cushion the effect of isolation from their tutors {   }

    iii. Services provided learners to help them improve their academic performance {   }

    iv.   Services provided learners to reduce learning difficulties that they encounter in their learning {   }

- ✓ The provision of Learners support services to learners by the institution is:

    i.   Highly important   {   }

    ii.   Relatively Important   {   }

    iii. Important   {   }

    iv.   Unimportant   {   }

- ✓ What kind of support services do you need as a distance learner? (Please rank according to their order of importance using 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8)

    i.   Counselling services   {   }

    ii.   ICT services   {   }

    iii. Library services   {   }

    iv.   Study-skill services   {   }

    v.   Tutorial guide services   {   }

    vi.   Information flow services   {   }

    vii. Academic advising services   {   }

    viii. Academic progress report services   {   }

- ✓ Which of these services have had utmost positive impact on their learning? (Please rank according to their order of importance using 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8)

    i.   Counselling services   {   }

    ii.   ICT services   {   }

    iii. Library services   {   }

    iv.   Study-skill services   {   }

    v.   Tutorial guide services   {   }

    vi.   Information flow services   {   }

vii.   Academic advising services   { }

viii.   Academic progress report services { }

✓ Which of the following justifies the reason(s) for the provision of Learners support services? (Please rank according to their order of importance using 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6,)

      i.   To create an environment conducive to distance learning { }

     ii.   To facilitate the distance learning method   { }

   iii.   To motivate students to continue their education   { }

   iv.   To encourage socialization   { }

    v.   To promote team work/team spirit   { }

   vi.   To improve the educational standards of students   { }

✓ As a distance learner, what type of problem(s) do you encounter? (Please rank according to their order of importance using 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6,)

      i.   Feeling of isolation from tutors and other learners   { }

     ii.   Reading problem   { }

   iii.   Study skill problem   { }

   iv.   Lack of peer-peer interaction   { }

    v.   Lack of proper intimation from institution/study centre   { }

   vi.   Lack of proper academic support   { }

  vii.   Hurdle of distance from the study centre   { }

Types of learners' Support Services AvailableinInstitution

S/No	Notable Variables of Learner Support Services	YES	NO
1	Information flow services		
2	Academic advising services		
3	Academic progress report services		
4	Study/tutorial guide services		
5	Library services		
6	ICT Services		
7	Counselling services		

Degree of Quality of Students' Support Services Provided by Distance LearningInstitutions

 Key

PHQ: Perceived High Quality

PMQ: Perceived Moderate Quality

PLO:Perceived Low Quality

S/No	Learner Support Services	PHQ	PMQ	PLQ
1	Information flow services			
2	Academic advising services			
3	Academic progress report services			
4	Study/tutorial guide services			
5	Library services			
6	ICT Services			
7	Counselling Services			

Level of affordability of Learners' support services provided by Distance learning institutions

Key
CO: Costly
CH:Cheap
RCH:Relatively Cheap
MAODLI: Made Available by Distance Learning Institution

S/N	Items				
		CO	**CH**	**RCH**	**MAODLI**
1	Information flow services				
2	Academic advising services				
3	Academic progress report services				
4	Study/ tutorial guide services				
5	Library services				
6	ICT Services				
7	Counselling Services				

Level of accessibility of students' support services provided by Distance learning institutions

LSS	Excellent	Good	Poor	Very Poor
Information flow services				
Academic progress report services				
Academic advising services				
Study/ tutorial guide services				
Library services				
ICT Services				
Counselling Services				

The Usability of students' support services by the distance learning students

S/N	Learners Student Services	Frequently	Often	Seldom	Never
1	Information flow services				
2	Academic advising services				
3	Academic progress report services				
4	Study/ tutorial guide services				
5	Library services				
6	ICT Services				
7	Counselling Services				

Learner Support Services Truly Supportive of Learning Goals

S/N	ITEMS	YES	NO
1	Learners support services providequalitative tutorial information in all academic programmes		
2	Learners support servicesprovided overcome study and learning difficulties		
3	Learners support servicesprovided overcome personal problems		
4	Learners support services provided overcome problem of interacting at a distance		
5	Learners support services provided overcome problem of studying at a distance		

Constraints Facing Distance Learning Students Scale

S/N	Items	SA	A	SD	D
1	Insufficient number of qualified staff support on Learners support services				
2	Ineffective time management to use support services				
3	Poor staff student relationship on Learners support services				
4	Insufficient knowledge of information and communication technology (ICT) skills to use Learners support services				
5	Inadequate awareness of the availability of various Learners support services to distance				

	learners				
6	Facilitators are unable to monitor students one on one as in the case of non-distance learning				
7	Inadequate high-tech electronic gadgets for Learners support services				
8	keeping up with the trend throughout the duration is challenging due to financial constraints				
9	Non-satisfactory with the quality of feedback on tutor-marked assignments				
10	Shortage of qualified e-teachers on Learners support services				
11	Confidence and attitude of distance learners to use of Learners support service				

Key **SA** –strongly Agree **A** – Agree **SD** Strongly Disagree and **D** –Disagree

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KEY INFORMANT   INTERVIEW GUIDE

Warm up and explanation

A. Introduction

Welcome participants

Describe what KII is- a method in which the researcher asks open-ended questions orally and record the respondents answer.

B. Purpose

We will be discussing students support services

I am interested in your comments both positive and negative ones are welcome. Please, feel free to express your view. I will like to have many points of view. All comments are confidential and for research purposes only. I will also want you to speak clearly so that tape recorder can pick your voice appropriately.

C. Self-instruction

Ask each participant; tell us your name and something about yourself

Section I – Institution Identification

1. Name   of Institution.……………………………………………………………..

2. Position/Rank…………………………………………………………………
…

3. Present Age……………………………………………………………………
…

4. Religion……………………………………………………………………
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Section II: Guiding Questions

1) Learners SupportServices?

   Probe for types available:

2) What is your view of Learners SupportServices? Importance or significance

3) What is your view of availability of Learners SupportServices?

   Probe for:

❖ Available

❖ Not available

4)What is your view of the degree of quality of Learners Support Services?

❖ PHQ= High Quality

❖ PMQ =Medium Quality

❖ PLQ =Low Quality

5)What is your view of the accessibility of Learners SupportServices?

❖ ACC= Accessible

❖ NACC= Not Accessible

6)What is your view of the affordability of Learners Support Services?

❖ AF= Affordable

❖ NAF= Not Affordable

❖ C-Costly

❖ CH –cheap

❖ Made available by institution

7)What is your view of the usability of Learners Support Services?

❖ US= Usability

❖ NUS= Not Usable

8) What is your view of the Learners Support Services supportive of learning?

❖ SL= Supportive of Learning

❖ NSL= Not Supportive of Learning

10) What is your view ofchallenges confronting distance learning students in terms of availability, accessibility, affordability and usability of student's support services?

Conclusion

Summary of the key points of the discussion

Thank you

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN, IBADAN

DEPARTMENT OF ADULT EDUCATION

FOCUSGROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR DISTANCE LEARNING STUDENTS

Warm up and explanation

A. Introduction

Welcome participants

Describe what the FGD is. It is a group discussion forum that allows you to discuss among yourselves the topic rather than talking to us.

  Purpose

We will be discussing students support services

I am interested in your comments, both positive and negative one are welcomed; please feel free to disagree with one another. I will like to have many points of view. All comments are confidential and for research purposes only. I will also want you to speak one at a time so that tape recorder can pick your voices appropriately.

B. Self- instruction

Ask each participant; tell us your name and something about yourself

Section I – Institution Identification

1. Name   of Institution.……………………………………………………………..
2. Level………………………………………………………………………… .
3. Present Age………………………………………………………………………..
4. Marital   status ………………………………………………………………………
5. Occupation ………………………………………………………………….

Section II - Guiding Questions

1) How do you view the significance of students support services?

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2) Do you think Institutions operating Distance learning programmes should provide Learners SupportServices to distancelearners? If yes, why and what types should be provided

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3) What is the quality concerning Learners Support Services provided to distance learning students?

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4) What is your comment on view of availability of Learners SupportServices? Are students Learners Support Services available in quantity and equal proportion

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5) What is the degree of quality of Learners Support Services?

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6) Do distance learning studentshave access to Learners Support Services? Accessible or not

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7) Mention how often LearnersSupport Services are used by distance learning students? What is each type of students services meant for?

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8) Mention how affordable are the Learners Support Services? Which type of students services is affordable? affordable ornot, if yes All or some

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9) Are the Learners SupportServices supportive of learning? Supportive or not if Yes,is each type of student's services supportive of learning?

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10) What are the challenges confronting distance learning students in terms of availability, accessibility, affordability and usability of Learners Support Services?

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11) Any other recommendation you have for the achieving availability, accessibility, affordability and usability of Learners Support Services

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Conclusion

Summary of the key points of the discussion

Thanks for your time

PHOTO GALLERY

The Researcher and DLC Support Staff University of Ibadan.

National Open University of Nigeria Help Desk

The Researcher and DLC Support Staff University of Ibadan