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## QUALITY ASSURANCE IN NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA: CASE STUDY OF THE SOUTH WEST CENTRES

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### ABSTRACT

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) was established with the aim of ameliorating the problem of deprivation of university admission being experienced by many candidates. The objective of giving wider access to university education will be an exercise in futility if the quality of education provided in NOUN is below standard, hence the paper explored quality assurance in National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) using the South West centres as case study. The study adopted descriptive survey design of ex-post facto type. From the selected States, 31 Principals, 62 Conventional University Graduate Teachers (CUGTs), 62 NOUN Graduate Teachers (NGTs) were sampled. Three validated instruments, Principals' rating scale ( $r=0.87$ ); Graduate Teachers' Questionnaire ( $r=0.89$ ); Graduate Teaching Quality Observation Scale ( $r=0.85$ ); were used to gather information. Three research questions were raised and answered. The data obtained were analysed using descriptive statistics, t-test and multiple regression at 0.05 level of significance. Observation of teacher-students classroom interactions showed that CUGTs were significantly better than NGTs in communication skills ( $t = 2.15\%$ ,  $df = 122$ ). There were no significant differences in lesson preparation, introduction, presentation, delivery method and classroom management between CUGTs and NGTs. Employment status ( $\beta = .08$ ), availability of resources ( $\beta = .34$ ), functionality of resources ( $\beta = .89$ ), adequacy of resources ( $\beta = .40$ ), facilitator online interaction ( $\beta = .94$ ), students' online interaction ( $\beta = .76$ ) and access to open education resources ( $\beta = .04$ ) had significant relative predictions on NOUN graduates' job performance; with a joint significant prediction of  $F(7, 1149) = 549.03$ . NOUN impacted positively on graduates' job performance. The study recommends that the Federal Government should make acquisition of NCE, a prerequisite for admission for a degree programme in education; Communication skills should be included in courses offered by NOUN undergraduates.

**Keywords:** access, distance-learning, conventional universities, NOUN, job performance

DOI:

### INTRODUCTION

*Quality Assurance in National Open  
University of Nigeria*

Quality is the standard of an object, or a

phenomenon as compared with another object or phenomenon that is similar. It is the degree of excellence of such an object or phenomenon. It is someone's distinctive at-

tribute or characteristic. It refers to how good an object is, compared with a similar object, the extent to which a collection of innate qualities satisfies a set of standards. Although quality assurance is a component of quality management, it is primarily concerned with fostering confidence, that quality criteria will be met. Quality education is germane to the stakeholders in the education industry. Each time there is an argument on standard of education, it is referring to quality of education and how quality can be assured. Quality assurance (QA) according to Gandhe (2007), includes: effectiveness, efficiency and accountability which connote the registers of business and commerce but their meanings in the field of education differ because human beings are involved at every level of education. Every element that is, input, process and output is human, the reason for the complexity. Being educated is far beyond being enlightened, it is even more than being knowledgeable but application of the enlightenment and knowledge to achieve success in life, live comfortably, thrive and attain economic wellbeing. It is a reflection of the necessities and ambitions of learners. Hence, quality in university education means fitness for the purpose. As this may be an evasive measure, Ghandhe (2007), opines that quality in education means excellence, standard, distinction, constancy, performance assessed, utility derived and unique ability. He is of the opinion that higher education generally aids unique ability which he refers to as an agent of transformation. Similarly, Harman (2000), believes that Higher Education institutions and systems have used QA as a systematic management and assessment technique, to track performance against goals and ensure the production of high-quality outputs and quality improvements. He argues that QA might be viewed as a quality

management strategy that places a strong emphasis on process management. It also seeks to regularly implement agreed-upon methods to achieve established standards.

As expected, the managers of the education industry place quality on a high pedestal because the society keeps demanding for standard education. In the nations of the world, the government, students and employers expect high standard from the education sector, this enforces quality input, quality process, resulting in quality products. The governments of the nations demand transparency from public institutions, the state of the economy globally, the need for capacity building, to be able to have a formidable work force that will surmount the challenges of the world economy. This makes the issue of quality paramount in the educational sector because it enhances effectiveness. Hence, the need for universities to continue to refine the standard of their products. (Tam, 2021). Many terms refer to the idea of upgrading the standard of university education, they are: quality assessment, quality improvement, and quality development (Harman, 2000; Brennan and Shah, 2000; Hopkins and Lee, 2001; Gosling & D'Andrea, 2001). Although, the definitions of QA are not the same, all the terminologies have the same objective which is to make sure the course content is relevant and of high quality so that learners can attain unique capability and the certificates awarded will be acceptable globally. Buttressing this stance, Zuhairi and Belaweti (2008), state that QA for Open Distance Learning (ODL) is crucial to the institutions, the students, employers of labour and the society at large.

Similarly, job performance is a crucial factor in QA measurement. Job performance evaluates how successfully a person does his job.

It relates to the assignment that an employee is required to do and how successfully those tasks are carried out. It is a way to carry out a task, perform a duty, or advance within an organization. According to Campbell (1990), a single person's performance on the job is a personal variable. Neither national nor organizational performance are comparable to it. It is a behaviour that an employee exhibits. Performance must be pertinent to the goals. It must be focused on the objectives important to the position. It might not be a person's overt activities that are being discussed. It consists of mental output like solutions. Some of them are task specific behaviours which are undertaken by an individual as part of a job. They are the core substantive tasks that differentiate one job from another. Non-task specific behaviours are those which one is required to undertake and do not pertain to any particular job. Others include written and oral communication tasks. The individual is evaluated on the adeptness with which he delivers the communication tasks. Employee's efforts on day to day basis or in extra ordinary circumstances, are also used to determine performance. They serve as a gauge of how seriously people take their work. The performance domain also includes personal discipline. In workplaces where people work closely together or are highly dependent on one another, supervisory or leadership components of performance are also examined. This is because helping out the group and ones coworkers goes a long way. Many of the tasks listed under the aforementioned factors will be delegated to the employee, who will also be in charge of imposing rewards and penalties.

ODL's higher education standards have generated debate (Dede, 1996; Harrison,

2001; referenced in Peat and Hellard, 2002). Although Clark (1994), finds no discernible difference between ODL graduates and graduates of conventional universities in terms of their learning outcomes, Young (1994), notes that the society has an unfavourable disposition towards ODL institutions. Buttressing this stance, Belaweti and Zuhairi (2008) states that QA for ODL is crucial to the institutions, the students, employers of labour and the society at large. According to Uvah (2011), the elites in Nigeria query the quality of ODL. High standard of an ODL institution will enhance approval, respect and recognition of its certificates. It enables the institution to be accountable to the populace, assists the learners to make the right choice, improves pedagogy, facilitates administration, encourages the ideal behaviour for the advancement of the institution, and establishes a benchmark for evaluation.

According to Anih (2010), improving educational access for all in Nigeria through the Open University and distant learning programmes may be challenging without purposeful efforts to ensure quality in the input, process, and output of ODL. The input into any production process is the most critical agent in determination of quality, process and outcome. The critical quality issues that must be addressed include the minimum entry requirement, the qualification and professional competence of trainers, and the physical resource input ratio (the ratio of physical facility per trainee). In other words, assertion must be made to see how far the resources put into NOUN programme is, based on the Nigeria University Commission's (NUC) minimum standard and professional requirements of relevant professional bodies. The process involves the quality of instructional delivery, the shortest amount of time needed to cover the material, and the ease of the

minimal standards for programmes similar to those in conventional colleges in Nigeria. While the evaluation process, length of internship for courses required and how these processes compare with the output are the standards set for Open University and distance learning. Do they compare with similar programmes for conventional universities in terms of admission requirement, minimum course load for graduation and graduating scales?

Candidates seeking admission to NOUN are required to have five (5) credits in not more than two sittings in West African School Certificate Examination (WASCE), Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE)/ NECO, NABTEB or equivalents in subjects relevant to the proposed field(s) of study for 100 levels. The five credits include credits in Mathematics, English and three other relevant subjects; 200 level requires an HND with upper credits or an NCE; 100 level requires an OND with lower credits. These are the requirements for conventional university applicants too.

A range of personnel types are involved in the delivery of academic services in NOUN. Additionally, all academic staff members are expected to engage in professional, academic, and community duties, as well as conduct research. NOUN facilitators are PhD holders just like the academic staff in conventional universities. They are part-time academic staff. The regular organising of tutorial sessions and the facilitation of lessons at various study centers are the primary responsibilities of the instructional and tutorial facilitators. They support the conception and design of expert workshops. They are in charge of the tutor-marked homework and also invigilate examinations.

Focusing on the discrepancy between ODL and traditional learning methods, Aniete and Ogundele (2013) look at work performance among teachers in the Offa metropolis and discover that there is no discernible difference between conventional graduate instructors and ODL teachers in terms of job performance. Studies carried out by Oparinde (2021), Dare (2013), Belgore (2004), Agboola (2007), Jegede (2011a), Ogundele and Sofoluwe (2012), Etajere and Ogundele (2008) reveal that the products are trained the same way and there is no significant difference in their job performance.

At the inception of NOUN, many were skeptical about the quality of the products of the university. Hence, this study investigated quality assurance at the National Open University of Nigeria using the South-west centres as case study. It also considered the extent to which the seven variables - employment status of students, availability of learning resources, the functionality of learning resources, adequacy of learning resources, access to open educational resources, level of facilitators' online interaction, and level of students' online interaction predicted NOUN graduates' job performance.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Sample and Procedure***

This study used an ex-post facto survey design, which is regarded as a systematic empirical investigation in which the researcher has no direct control over the variables of interest because their manifestations have already occurred in the population. The target population comprised education graduates and their principals in the study centres in South-western, Nigeria. This study used a multi-stage sampling technique. Three out of the six states in southwest Nigeria were chosen in the first stage using the purposive sam-

pling technique. This is because though NOUN has Conventional Centres in the six states in the Southwest, only three of them have Special and Community Centres. For example, in addition to Conventional Centres, Lagos State has Special Centres, Ogun, and Osun States have community Study Centres. Lagos State was purposively selected because of its peculiarity of having Special Centres. Ogun State was also purposively selected because its Community Centre has been in existence for five years while that of Osun State was newly established, and did not have enough records required for the study. Oyo State was randomly selected from the States which have only Conventional Centres. All the study centres in the three selected states were used in the study. There were four Centres in Lagos State, two Centres in Ogun State, and one Centre in Oyo State.

NOUN graduates were traced to their places of work through their records that were obtained from the Alumni Associations, Study Centres, and NOUN headquarters in Lagos. A purposive sampling technique was also employed to select 45 NOUN education graduate teachers in Ogun State, 15 in Oyo State, and 30 in Lagos State. For a school to be selected, it must have both NOUN education graduate(s), as well as education graduate(s) of conventional universities teachers. To control for extraneous variables, they must have NCE certificates,

as well as a first degree. They must have been teaching for six to ten years. Principals of such schools took part in the study. Out of these 70 education graduate teachers, 62 were available for observation, sixty-two education graduate teachers from conventional universities and 31 Principals participated in the study. Thus, 31 Principals of NOUN education graduate teachers in the states studied, 70 NOUN graduates and 62 graduates of conventional universities. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics (percentages and frequency counts), t-test and multiple regression.

## RESULTS

### Research Question 1

What are the demographic characteristics of NOUN graduates?

The demographic characteristics of the sampled NOUN graduates in the selected states revealed that majority (50%) were within the age range of 31 to 40 years while 16 (22.9%) were already above forty years (Table 1). Some (25.7%) were still within ages 21 to 30 years. Majority (52.9%) were females, 44 (62.9%) of the sampled NOUN graduates have been working for more than 5 years but less than 11 years. As regards employment status, 62 (88.6%) of the sampled graduates are fully employed while only few of them are yet to be permanently employed. (Table 1)

**Table 1. *Percentage and Frequency Distribution of the Demographic Characteristics of NOUN Education Graduates***

<b>Graduates</b>		
<b>Demographic</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Age</b>		
21-30 years	19	27.1
31-40 years	35	50.0
41 years and above	16	22.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	33	47.1
Female	37	52.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Academic Qualification</b>		
B.Sc (Ed)	40	57.1
B.A(Ed)	30	42.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Working Experience</b>		
Less than 5 years	14	20.0
5-10 years	44	62.9
Above 10 years	12	17.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Employment status</b>		
Employed	62	88.6
Not Employed	8	11.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field work 2018

**Research Question 2**

Is there any significant difference in the quality of education of NOUN graduate teachers and conventional university graduate teachers?

The  $t(119) = 15.12$   $p < 0.05$  (Table2) was less than 0.05, so there was a significant difference. The mean scores show that the principals rated NOUN graduate teachers better

than their counterparts from conventional universities in terms of quality.

**Table 2: Quality of NOUN Education Graduates**

Category of staff	N	Mean	SD	DF	T	Sig
NOUN graduates	62	126.95	21.92			
Conventional University Graduates	62	64.15	23.68	119	15.12	.000

Source: Field work 2018

The study reveals that there exists a significant difference between NOUN graduates and Conventional University graduates in terms of communication skills displayed in the class during teaching ( $t=2.152$ ,  $df=122$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) but there was no significant difference in terms of Lesson preparation ( $t=1.128$ ,  $df=122$ ,  $p>0.05$ ), Lesson introduction ( $t=0.965$ ,  $df=122$ ,  $p>0.05$ ), Lesson presentation ( $t=1.325$ ,  $df=122$ ,  $p>0.05$ ), Lesson delivery method ( $t=1.862$ ,  $df=122$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) and classroom manage-

ment of ( $t=1.782$ ,  $df=122$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) (Table 3). The mean scores shows that conventional University graduates (11.94) had better communication skills during teaching than their counterparts who are from NOUN (10.62). Though the mean scores also showed that the conventional University graduates are better in terms of lesson preparation, lesson presentation and classroom management than their counterparts the NOUN graduates, the differences were not significant (Table 3).

**Table 3: Comparison of Job Performance of NOUN Education Graduates and Conventional University Graduates Teachers**

Quality of education	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	DF	P
Lesson Preparation	NOUN	62	7.87	2.59	1.128	122	0.261
	Conventional University	62	8.33	1.97			
Introduction of lesson	NOUN	62	11.37	2.34	0.965	122	0.336
	Conventional University	62	10.89	3.15			
Lesson presentation	NOUN	62	22.26	6.80	1.325	122	0.188
	Conventional University	62	23.67	4.88			
Communication skill	NOUN	62	10.62	3.88	2.152	122	0.033*
	Conventional University	62	11.94	2.85			
Lesson delivery method	NOUN	62	20.37	4.35	1.862	122	0.065
	Conventional University	62	18.54	6.40			
Classroom management	NOUN	62	4.87	2.03	1.782	122	0.077
	Conventional University	62	5.46	1.65			

Source: Field work 2018

**Research Question 3**

To what extent would the seven variables (employment status of students, availability of learning resources, the functionality of learning resources, adequacy of learning

resources, access to open educational resources, level of facilitators' online interaction, and level of students' online interaction) predict NOUN graduates' job performance?

**Table 4: Summary of Regression between Job Performance and Seven Independent Variables**

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R = .877

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R Square = .770

Adjusted R Square = .768

Std. Error = 17.60

Model	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Regression	190885.613	7	170126.516	549.025	.000a

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The multiple correlation coefficients (R) of the combination of seven independent variables with NOUN graduates job performance was 0 .877(Table4). The adjusted R Square (which estimates the variance accounted for by the combined independent variables to the dependent variable measure) was 0 .768, which implies that the combination of all the independent variables (that is employment status, availability of resources, functionality of resources, adequacy of resources, facilitators online interaction, students' online interaction and access to open education resources) had 76.8% contribution to NOUN graduates job performance (that is the dependent variable). It shows that the combination of the

independent variables jointly related with NOUN graduates' job performance with positive high correlation at R = .877, a multiple R of .770 with Adjusted R square of .768. The multiple correlation of .877 indicates a high relationship among the seven independent variables and NOUN graduates' job performance. Moreover, a combination of the seven independent variables explains 76.8%, 77% of the variance observed in NOUN graduates performance (Table4). The observed R value was statistically significant at F (df=2), =5.49; p<0.05). This implies that the seven variables are effective in predicting NOUN graduates' job performance.



**Table 5: Relative Contributions of the Predictors Variables on Job Performance**

Model	Unstandardised Coefficient		Standardised Coefficient	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
Constant	265.780	30.480		8.720	.000
Employment Status	5.801	1.017	.083	5.705	.000
Availability of resources	4.195	.487	.343	8.619	.000
Functionality of resources	20.880	.532	.893	39.273	.000
Adequacy of resources	15.430	1.161	.400	13.292	.000
Facilitator online interaction	112.781	4.161	.935	27.104	.000
Student online interaction	74.079	2.672	.755	27.727	.000
Access to open education resources	.190	.066	.042	2.864	.004

There are relative significant contributions of seven variables (employment status, availability of resources, functionality of resources, adequacy of resources access to open education resources, facilitator online interaction, students' online interaction) to the prediction of NOUN graduates' job performance (Table 5). Facilitator online interaction contributed most ( $\beta=.935, t=27.104, p<0.05$ ), followed by functionality of resources with ( $\beta=.893, t=39.273, p<0.05$ ). This is followed by students 'online interaction with ( $\beta=.755, t=27.727, p<0.05$ ) adequacy of resources with ( $\beta=.400, t=13.292, p<0.05$ ) and availability of resources is next to it with ( $\beta=.343, t=8.619, p<0.05$ ), next to it is employment status with ( $\beta=.083,$

$t=5.705, p<0.05$ ) and access to open education resources with ( $\beta=.042, t=2.864, p<0.05$ ).

### DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that there was a significant difference in communication skills exhibited by NOUN graduates and Conventional University graduates in the classroom (Appendix B). The mean score showed that the Conventional University graduates displayed better communication skills while teaching than their counterparts who are NOUN graduates. This was observed during their classroom teaching and the rating of the Principals of the observed NOUN graduates. The Principals indicated that Conventional University graduates in their schools were better than NOUN graduates in preparation of notes of lessons, lesson presentation and class management (Appendix A). The Principals also indicated that most of

the NOUN graduates relate well with parents and colleagues, they do not wait for students to call them before going to classes and they fill the records of work regularly. The mean scores also revealed that Conventional University graduates are better than NOUN graduates in preparation of lesson, lesson presentation and classroom management.

Similarly, the observers noticed that most of the NOUN graduates did not wait to be called before going for lessons, they started their lessons on time and prepared lesson notes in line with the scheme of work. Most of those observed used eclectic methods while teaching. They cited various examples to convey their messages to the students. The observation reports showed that the observed NOUN graduates spoke in clear and simple English for students to understand. However, the findings revealed that though the mean scores showed that the Conventional University graduates are better in terms of lesson preparation, lesson presentation and classroom management than their counterparts the NOUN graduates, the differences were not significant.

Principals of NOUN graduate teachers observed, perceived that NOUN graduates are better than graduates of Conventional Universities in terms of dressing, human relations, regularity and punctuality to work, class teaching and co-curricular activities. This agrees with Oyinlola (2015), who found out that NTI/PGDE graduates possess the qualities of good teachers. It also agrees with that of Gayne and Shepherd (2001), who confirmed that ODL graduates are as good as graduates of Conventional Universities and graduates of ODL institutions make similar grade as graduates of Conventional Universities. Hence, NOUN

graduates can compete favourably with Conventional University graduates.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that the combinations of independent variables (that is employment status of students, availability of learning resources, functionality of learning resources, adequacy of learning resources, access to open educational resources, facilitators online interaction and students' on line interaction) had significant contributions to NOUN graduates' job performance. The obtained regression equation model is effective in reliably predicting NOUN graduates' job performance using the seven predictor variables (that is employment status of students, availability of learning resources, functionality of learning materials, adequacy of learning materials, access to open educational resources, facilitators online interaction and students' on line interaction). Hence, there is composite significant effect of the seven variables on NOUN graduates' job performance.

This is in line with Oyinlola (2015), who found that the combination of four independent variables (that is Instructional techniques during training, Human Material Availability, Instructional Material Utilization and Facilitator Qualification) are effective in predicting NTI/PPGDE graduates' professional competence. It also corroborates Oni's study (2013), which revealed that combinations of independent variables contributed significantly to students' perception towards Education Trust Fund. It is further buttressed by Babatunde's (2013), finding that five independent variables combined to effectively predict MDG's beneficiary teachers' pedagogical strategy score.

The findings also reveal that the independent variables (employment status, availability of

resources, functionality of resources, and adequacy of resources, access to open education resources, facilitator online interaction and students' online interaction) contribute significantly to NOUN graduates' job performance. Employment status, availability of resources, functionality of resources, adequacy of resources, facilitator on line interaction and students' online interaction contribute meaningfully to the regression model. They are influential variables in the prediction of NOUN graduates' job performance. This corroborates Oni's (2013) submission that availability of instructional strategy contribute positively to students' perception of ETF programme.

The responses of the Principals of schools where NOUN graduates were observed revealed that they are as good as graduates of conventional universities (Appendix A). They are punctual in school, they relate well with colleagues and parents, they do not wait to be called before going to classes and they discuss their subject areas with confidence. The presence of observers in their classes did not make them uncomfortable. This finding is in line with Olugbenga (2010) and Jegede (2009b) that there is no difference in the standard of academic work done in NOUN and Conventional Universities.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

NOUN was established in order to meet the yearnings of Nigerians for University Education and reduce the pressure of university placement on the Conventional Universities. It is to provide wider access to education. Based on the data and findings from this study, it is revealed that NOUN education graduates are as good as education graduates in Conventional Universities

but for communication skills. NOUN students require the same level of commitment as regular students in traditional universities. NOUN programme is neither easier nor harder than Conventional University programme, it is only more flexible because the learners may have other commitments.

Since both the NOUN graduates and Conventional university graduates sampled for the study had National Certificate in Education, the implication is that their previous knowledge of Education is responsible for their effective job performance. Hence, it is recommended that the Federal government should make acquisition of NCE a prerequisite for admission into the undergraduate education programme in NOUN. Communication skills should be added to undergraduate programme in NOUN. It is also recommended that parents and students seeking university education should entertain no fear as far as quality of education provided in NOUN is concerned because NOUN graduates are as good as graduates of Conventional Universities. Since this study focused on South West centres, further work can be done to investigate quality assurance in NOUN centres in other geopolitical zones of Nigeria.

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