

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Exploring students' experiences with face- to- face tutorials in National Open University of Nigeria

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**This study examined face-to-face tutorials as a means of providing learner support services to open and distance learning (ODL) students enrolled at National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). The study adopted the descriptive survey design and generated quantitative data using questionnaire as instruments for data collection. A sample of 200 students was drawn from a population of 1200 returning students of the School of Education, using the purposive sampling technique. Data was analyzed using simple percentages, means and standard deviation. The results among others indicated that getting better understanding of the study materials, as well as enhancing capacity for improved performance in assignments and examinations are the major expectations of the students. Satisfaction with prior arrangements for tutorials via timely preparation of time-table, provision of conducive environment and dissatisfaction with non-usage of newer technologies such as projectors and flip charts were also among the findings of the study. The most preferred tutorial modes were whole class discussions using expository approach and question and answer sessions.**

**Keywords:** Face- to –face tutorials, National Open University of Nigeria, Open and Distance Learning, Study centres.

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## INTRODUCTION

The advent of National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), in the Nigerian education system is a relatively recent one. However, evidence abounds to show that as far back as 1977, the idea of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) was already reflected in the National Policy on Education. In this document, it was stressed that: “maximum efforts should be made to enable those who can benefit from higher education to be given access to it. Such access may be through Universities or Correspondence Courses or Open Universities, or Part-

time and Work-Study programme” (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1977:44). This statement indeed, paved the way for the National Open University (NOU), the forerunner of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN).

The National Assembly Act of 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 1983 formally established NOU which could not fully take off because of its suspension in 1984, after a military takeover of the government. However, in 2002, another democratically elected government which assumed power in 1999 resuscitated the University with the name –National Open

University of Nigeria, (Adewale, Ajadi and Inegbedion, 2010). NOUN was formally launched on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2002 by President Olusegun Obasanjo who not only supported the smooth take off of the programme but also enrolled as one of the pioneer students of the University.

Accordingly, the Blueprint and Implementation Plan of the National Open University of Nigeria specified its operational modalities (Federal Ministry of Education, 2002). The objectives of the programme include:

- i. The widening of access to education to ensure equity and equality of opportunities,
- ii. The enhancement of opportunities that support Education for All and life-long learning,
- iii. The enhancement in the Nigerian populace of the emerging global culture of technological literacy
- iv. Provision of infrastructure for the acquisition and dissemination of educational resources via information and communication technology (ICT),
- v. Provision of avenues for the acquisition of flexible and qualitative education for all categories of learners which will be accessible anywhere, anytime and via an appropriate and cost-effective medium.

Presently NOUN has eight Schools namely, School of Agricultural Sciences, School of Arts and Social Sciences,

School of Management Sciences, School of Education, School of Health Sciences, School of Law, School of Science and Technology and Access and General Studies.

The University has 67 Study Centres across the country. Each Study Centre is headed by a Study Centre Director, who is either a Professor or an Associate Professor. The Student Counselors and other Administrative Officers assist in the administration of the Study Centres. At the Study Centres, students meet for face-to-face tutorials, receive counseling and also collect available study materials. The study centres are also provided with a variety of multimedia facilities to enable the students study at their own pace. Some of the multimedia includes study materials, textbooks, workbooks, and study materials in CD-ROMs, audio and video cassettes, websites for courses, e-assignments, tutorial facilities and periodic face-to-face sessions (NOUN, 2007).

### **Process of Tutorial Services in NOUN**

Face-to-face tutorial is one of the support services that NOUN provides for her students. Tutorials provide opportunities for effective communication between the students and the tutors, and between the students themselves. Tutorials are provided every semester at all

the study centres for a period of two months. A minimum of eight hours per semester is allocated to a 2credit hour course while twelve hours is allocated to a 3credit hour course. However, for some courses in the University, face-to-face tutorials are provided only if the number of registered students is up to 50. The tutors are paid based on the number of hours assigned to them for the tutorials. The study centre directors monitor the tutorials at the centres.

According to the NOUN concept, a tutor who is appointed to give tutorials in a particular course is called a "Facilitator". Academic qualifications and experiences are taken into consideration in the selection and appointment of a facilitator. The minimum qualification for appointment as a facilitator in the University is a Masters degree in the relevant discipline. The tutorial classes are conducted simultaneously as scheduled in the University's academic calendar in all the study centres. Most of the tutorials hold on week-ends, but some take place on week days.

The researchers were prompted to carry this study out of practical experience as members of staff of the University who have been involved in ensuring quality tutorial facilitation at Awka Study Centre. It is therefore hoped that this study will provide an empirical basis for appraising the quality of face-to-face tutorials as well as the experiences of the open and distance learning students, with a view to improving the quality of tutorial facilitation at NOUN study centers.

### **Statement of the Problem**

One of the greatest problems facing Nigeria and other developing countries is the provision of education for all her citizens. The present demand for education particularly at tertiary level is so heightened that the limitations of space has imposed some restrictions on access to higher education. Available statistics from Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), has shown that over the years, only about 12% of those who apply for admission to Nigerian Universities are able to secure placement (Jimoh, 2013). National Open University of Nigeria was specially designed to obviate the limitation of space which imposes some restrictions on access to higher education in conventional Universities by operating on the open and distance learning mode. To this end, quality tutorial becomes a pivot on which successful academic work is anchored in order to maximize the gains of open and distance learning. Generally, students have high expectations for their academic programme, hence the tutors ought to discharge their duties creditably well to maximize their

participation and retention. If on the contrary the students' expectations are not met, it could lead to a feeling of dissatisfaction and consequently, absenteeism from tutorials, drop-outs and withdrawals from the programme. It may therefore be necessary to examine the quality of face-to-face tutorial facilitation at National Open University of Nigeria by inquiring on the experiences of the returning students of the Awka Study Centre.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study sought to examine the experiences of students with respect to the face-to-face tutorials at National Open University of Nigeria. Specifically, the study was geared towards exploring the students':

- i. Expectations from the face-to-face tutorials.
- ii. Extent of agreement on the adequacy of experiences gained from the tutorials.
- iii. Tutorial-mode preferences.

### **Research Questions**

This study was guided by three research questions as stated below:

- i. What are the students' expectations from the face to face tutorials?
- ii. To what extent do students agree with the adequacy of experiences gained from the tutorials?
- iii. What are the face-to-face tutorial-mode preferences of the students?

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted the descriptive survey design. The population for the study was all the 1200 returning students of the School of Education at the Awka Study Centre of NOUN for the first semester of 2013/2014 academic session. The sample consisted of 200 returning students of the School of Education at Awka Study Centre, selected using the purposive sampling technique based on those who gave their consent to participate in the study. This technique was adjudged adequate since the respondents were believed to be familiar and experienced in face-to-face tutorials, as they had been on the programme for at least, a semester. This is in agreement with Babbie (1993), who asserted that purposive sampling involves a conscious selection of typical subjects with particular characteristics and knowledge and understanding about the phenomenon being studied. The instrument for data

collection was a 40-item questionnaire which the respondents filled and returned, with only ten questionnaires returned unfilled. Section 1 sought for information on the expectations of the students from the programme. Sections 2 and 3 which were modeled in 4-point rating scale inquired into the quality of experiences gained and their tutorial- preference modes. They were provided with response options of Strongly Agree (SA), 4-points; Agree (AG), 3-points, Disagree (DA), 2-points and Strongly Disagree (SD), 1-point. The instrument was validated by two experts in educational research and statistics and their comments led to the modification of some questionnaire items. Following the pilot testing of the final version of the instrument, a reliability index of 0.75, using Cronbach alpha formula, was determined for the instrument. The value was considered high enough and hence reliable and adequate for the study. Data were analyzed using percentages, means and standard deviation. Decisions on the questionnaire items' mean responses were taken by comparing them with a benchmark of 2.50. Any item that has a mean rating of 2.50 and above was accepted as agreed, while any with rating below 2.50 was considered as disagreed and rejected. This implies that items with mean values of 2.50 and above were deemed to be accepted while those with cut-off point less than 2.50 indicated the contrary.

### **RESULTS**

The result of the study is presented according to the research questions in tables 1-3:

**Research question one:** What are the students' expectations from the face-to- face tutorials?

From table 1, the percentage of expectations ranged from 45% to 70% for enhancing inter-personal relationship, receiving guidance from facilitators and gaining better understanding of the course materials respectively.

**Research question two:** To what extent do students agree with adequacy of experiences gained from the tutorials?

Table 2, indicates that seventeen (17) items were accepted while five (5) were not accepted.

**Research question three:** What are the face-to- face tutorial mode preferences of the students?

**Table 1.** Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Responses on Students Expectations from Face-to-face Tutorials. N=190

Students' Expectations	F	%
Better understanding of the course materials	133	70
Enhanced capacity to work on assignments	124	65
Improved performance on written exercises	114	60
Getting additional information outside course content	114	60
Enhanced confidence to face examinations	124	65
Improvement in study skills	105	55
Enhancing the scope of inter-personal relationship	86	45
Familiarization with facilitators	105	55
Capacity to form viable study groups	91	48
Receiving guidance from facilitators	86	45
Sharing in the experiences of the facilitator	105	55

**Table 2.** Mean Ratings of Responses on Adequacy of Experiences Gained from the Tutorials

Issues considered during tutorials	Mean	S.D	Decision
Timetable for tutorials are available	3.47	0.92	Accept
Timetable for tutorials are prepared on time	3.55	0.87	Accept
Facilitators and students are timely informed of tutorial arrangements	3.15	0.65	Accept
Venues for tutorials are clearly specified	3.00	0.86	Accept
Conveniences are available at study centres	3.11	0.92	Accept
The environment for tutorials is conducive	2.84	1.33	Accept
I attend the tutorials regularly	2.56	0.75	Accept
I attend the tutorials punctually	2.56	0.55	Accept
I took active part in the tutorials	2.56	0.55	Accept
Tutorials are needed in all courses	2.85	0.43	Accept
Minimum of 8hours a semester for GST course of 2 credits is adequate	2.16	0.88	Reject
Facilitators are punctual to class	2.62	0.86	Accept
Facilitators attend classes regularly	2.56	1.01	Accept
Facilitators are usually are prepared to classes	3.14	0.86	Accept
The quality of tutorials is satisfactory	3.20	1.22	Accept
Facilitators promote active student participation	2.80	0.85	Accept
Face-to-face tutorial is acceptable to me	3.50	0.50	Accept
On-line facilitation is also encouraged	2.55	0.80	Accept
Facilitators at times use power point presentation	1.60	1.00	Reject
Facilitators at times use flip charts	1.80	0.90	Reject
Facilitators at times use overhead projectors	1.60	0.80	Reject
Facilitators at times play video tapes	2.20	0.80	Reject

**Table 3.** Mean Ratings on Tutorial-Mode Preferences of the Respondents

Face-to-face Tutorial-Modes	Mean	SD	Decision/Rank Order
Leading a whole class discussion using expository approach	4.00	0.80	Accept/1
Leading a whole class discussion using question and answer Approach	3.80	0.90	Accept/2
Getting students to take turns to present a topic in the class	2.50	1.04	Accept/7
Organizing small group discussion in the class	3.00	0.80	Accept/5
Giving individual guidance to students	3.60	1.05	Accept/3
Involving students to participate in role play/simulation	2.55	1.00	Accept/6
Inviting and involving a resource person/mentor	3.56	1.09	Accept/4

From table 3, all the different tutorial modes were acceptable to the respondents. However, the respondents preferred the class discussion using expository approach most with rank order of 1. Getting students to take turns to present assigned topics was the least preferred with the rank order of 7.

## DISCUSSION

The findings arising from research question one, in respect of students' expectations from the face to-face tutorials in NOUN, indicate that the tutorials would help the respondents in gaining better understanding of their course materials and enhance their performance in written assignments and examinations. This expectation is not uncommon with ODL students. For instance, Fung and Carr (1999) reported that such expectations are understandable as adult learners are often faced with conflicting demands arising from their study, work and family commitments and so may become rather 'instrumental' in their attitudes to learning; they tend to look for specific support and guidance from tutors to help them to complete their studies successfully. Again, it would be appreciated that some respondents also expected to gain insight beyond the scope of their course materials since their knowledge is not only applicable to written assignments and examinations but for solving problems in the society. Although the respondents seemed to make lower indication for expectations on formation of viable study groups, gaining counseling services, broadening inter-personal relationship both with peers and facilitators, these nonetheless, make significant contributions to students of ODL programmes.

On the adequacy of experiences gained from the face-to-face tutorials, it was found that arrangements for tutorials were adequately made. Timetables were not only prepared on time and conducive lecture venues specified but tutors and students were fully communicated on tutorial schedules. Perhaps, the outcome of the provision of these essential requirements was the regularity of attendance, punctuality and active participation of students and tutors. The students however, longed for more contact hours for the General Studies (GST) course most of which have extensive scope. Furthermore, the respondents expressed displeasure on the non- utilization of newer technologies including projectors, flip charts, power point presentations for instructional delivery, although they were being encouraged to also make use of the NOUN on-line facilitation platform known as noun-ilearn. The authors had earlier made a similar observation with instructional media in Nigerian Polytechnics (Nnaka and Anaekwe, 2015). These findings are consistent with Chikoko and Chiome (2013) who reported the failure of tutors to use modern technologies in tutorials at Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe.

The findings arising from research question three in relation to tutorial-mode preferences of the students indicate that leading a whole class discussion using the expository approach was most preferred, closely followed by interjecting lectures with questions and answer sessions. On the other hand, the respondents showed least preference for the practice of assigning topics to students to take turn to present to the class. This finding indicates that the students preferred tutorial modes that involved a mixture of lecture and discussions.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the discussions so far, it was concluded that students have high expectations from the face-to-face tutorials of National Open University of Nigeria hence the enthusiasm needs to be sustained to maximize the gains of open and distance learning. Adequate preparations must be made to ensure the provision of enabling environment for tutorials as anything to the contrary might jeopardize the attainment of the goals of the University. Face-to-face tutorials in NOUN should incorporate the use of modern technologies.

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