Analysis of distance education in Uganda using ADEA’s characteristics of distance education

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an analysis of the characteristics of distance education in Uganda in relation to their conformity to the definition of distance education by ADEA. Very little in depth study had been done on ADEAs recommendations and their application in Uganda. This research undertook a case study of eight universities from Western and Eastern Uganda offering distance education programs. They were analysed using ADEA's characteristics of distance education namely: institutional accreditation, use of a variety of media, provision of two-way communication and, possibility of face-to-face meetings for tutorials. The paper concluded that institutional accreditation played a major role in student selection of university and all eight participating universities conducted face to face sessions. However, there was still a lot of improvement needed in the areas of adoption of technology, the use of a variety of media including computer based learning, video, radio and compact discs. There were also observable gaps in the two way communication between teacher and student.

KEY WORDS: Distance Education, Characteristics of Distance Education by ADEA.

INTRODUCTION

Distance education refers to the education given to students who may not always be physically present at school. (Kaplan, Andreas M; Haenlein, Michael, 2016). In England, it is believed that the first education course was developed by Sir Isaac Pitman in 1840 and it involved student feedback. He taught a course of shorthand by mailing texts on postcards to students who sent back their work for marking using the same postal system. (Tait, 2003) In America, documented evidence shows that distance education started in the late 1800s at the University of Chicago. (Marina, Stock McIsaac; Charlotte, Nirmalani Gunawardena, 2001). In Uganda, distance education started in the 1960s when people enrolled for General certificate of education (GCE) and Cambridge school certificate but the program of distance education was introduced in Uganda’s education system in the late 1980s with Mubende Integrated Teacher Education project (MITEP). (Juliana, Bbuye; John, Mango Magero, 2005). This project was funded by Action Aid UK. It was replicated in Rakai, using Rakai Integrated Teacher Education Program (RITEP), in Luwero, using Luwero Integrated Teacher Education Programme (LUTEP) and Northern Uganda Integrated Teacher Education Programme (NITEP) operated between 1993 and 1998 and funded by the World Bank. These programs were mitigations to train the large numbers of untrained teachers at that time. Universities and other tertiary institutions seeing the large numbers of untrained interested mature students started distance education programs to cater for the need of the population. Makerere University started three external degree programmes namely, Bachelor of Education (B.Ed), Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com) and Bachelor of Science (B.Sc).
Kyambogo University started two distance education programs: the Diploma in Primary education (DEP) and the Grade 111 teacher program. Soon, many other universities across the country also introduced distance education programs to cater for students in their localities who were too many to be absorbed by Makerere University and Kyambogo University. In Uganda, students study from their homes using printed materials, online and occasionally go for face to face sessions with their lecturers.

It is the prerogative of universities to choose the form of distance education to use for any given program under distance education. It was observed that most universities use hybrid mode of instruction, a blend between face to face sessions, online, and print media. (Matovu, 2012).

ADEA is an acronym for Association for the Development of Education in Africa. It was established with the intention of promoting the development of effective education policies, including distance education and open learning policies, for Africa. It was a brain child of World Bank in 1988 under the name “Donors to African Education” (DAE) and its original objective was to encourage collaboration and co-ordination between development agencies in support of education in Africa. Currently, ADEA is a network of African Ministries of Education, development agencies, education specialists and researchers, and non-governmental organisations active in education. ADEA now focuses on developing partnerships between ministers of education and funding agencies to promote effective education policies based on African leadership and ownership. (ADEA, 2002)

**CHARACTERISTICS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**

According to (ADEA, 2002), the characteristics of distance education include:

**Institutional accreditation:** The degree or diploma program should be accredited or certified by the institution enrolled into or an affiliated agency.

**Use of a variety of media:** This program is hinged on the use of print, radio and television broadcasts, video and audio cassettes, computer-based learning and telecommunications to replace the student’s physical full time presence at the university.

**Provision of two-way communication:** It is expected that there should be a vibrant relationship between the tutor and learner to enable consistent interactions. This enables the lecturer to guide the student and evaluate his/her progress.

**Possibility of face-to-face meetings:** These are included to cater for the needs of the human being to have physical interactions with others of their kind in this case other learners on the same distance program, for tutorials, library study and laboratory or practice sessions.

**ANALYSIS**

An analysis was conducted using questionnaires, observation guides and interviews with students.

**Institutional accreditation**

The research established that all the students in both the Eastern and Western regions of Uganda selected a university after being assured that the degrees and diplomas offered by the institution were credible. Students who joined distance programs were usually working somewhere and seeking to upgrade their academic qualification. Consequently, they deliberately selected institutions they were sure of and that accounted for the large numbers in particular universities even when the students complained of neglect by tutors and the university administration. The selection of university was also on the basis of location and popularity. The students selected universities depending on how many of their colleagues had gone through the
same university and how accessible the university was for the student where it was near their home or work place.

Table 1 Distribution of distance learners in both public and private universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES</th>
<th>PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REGION</td>
<td>YEAR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E1 PU UNPOP</td>
<td>Y1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Y2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Y3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2 PU POP</td>
<td>Y1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Y2</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Y3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W1 PU UNPOP</td>
<td>Y1</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Y3</td>
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<td>W2 PU POP</td>
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<td>Y2</td>
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<td>Y3</td>
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According to table 1 above, the number of students who enrolled in public universities was more because the students were sure they would get ‘respected’ accreditation from public universities unlike their private counterparts who they said might find their institution closed in future. In y3 there was a total of 192 students in W2 PU POP while W2 PR POP that same year had 129 students for both the diploma and degree programs. A close observation of the figures confirms that accreditation is a very important element that draws working class men and women to undertake distance education courses in order to get the necessary academic qualifications required to keep their jobs or to secure the desired promotions. Y1 students were few in both public and private universities because of the influence of COVID 19 which brought with it financial hand cap and yet all distance education programs are privately sponsored.

Chart 1 Distribution of Distance Education University Student Enrolment for Diploma programs
KEY:  
E1 PU UNPOP:  Unpopular Eastern Public University  
E2 PU POP:  Popular Eastern Public University  
W1 PU UNPOP:  Unpopular Western Public University  
W2 PU POP:  Popular Western Public University  
E1 PR UNPOP:  Unpopular Eastern Private University  
E2 PR POP:  Popular Eastern Private University  
W1 PR UNPOP:  Unpopular Western Private University  
W2 PR POP:  Popular Western Private University  

According to the chart above the bars of the unpopular public university are higher than the popular private university because of the issue of accreditation. In response to a question on the questionnaire the students said they chose the public universities because of the recognised state of their certificates. The students said that certificates obtained from public universities are easily accepted by employers unlike certificates from private universities which are sometimes frowned at.

*Chart 2 Distribution of Distance Education University Student Enrolment for Degree programs*
In chart 2 above, the students who enrolled for degree programs in public universities were more than those who enrolled for the same degree programs in private universities. In the responses gathered from the questionnaire, the students preferred public universities because of the perceived weight of the certificate they would obtain from those universities. The students on the public university programs felt that once they completed the course they would have better bargaining power for jobs than their counterparts in private universities. When they were probed they said that private universities did not have a guarantee of longevity and they feared being left holding a certificate of a no longer existent university.

Use of a Variety of Media

Print

Print refers to the text appearing in a book, newspaper, or other printed publication, especially with reference to its size, form, or style (Google, print definition, 2020)

Print materials (COUNCIL, 2009) refer to consists of all written material which convey planned course information. Examples of print resources include, but are not limited to: textbooks, workbooks, reference books, newspapers, journals and magazines.

Textbooks and reference books

According to Wikipedia, a textbook is a book containing a comprehensive compilation of content in a branch of study with the intention of explaining it. (Wikipedia, textbook, 2020). A reference book refers to any book intended primarily for consultation rather than for consecutive reading such as an encyclopaedia, dictionary, atlas and yearbook. (Merriam-Webster, reference book, 2020). In response to the question about availability of textbooks, 70% of all respondents from both private and public universities said that they did not have access to textbooks. They expressed their disappointment at the universities' failure to provide them with reference books for them to refer to. Only thirty percent of respondents had access to suitable textbooks and reference books in the libraries.

Journals and magazines

A journal is a periodical or magazine published for a special group or profession (Collins, 2020). Dictionary.com defines a magazine as a periodical publication containing articles and illustrations often on a particular subject or aimed at a particular readership. (Google, magazine, 2020). The universities visited physically did not have sufficient journals for students to refer to. The magazines in the libraries were mostly old and not up to date. There was need for the universities to work on the journal and magazine sections.

Newspapers

A newspaper is a regularly printed document consisting of large sheets of paper that are folded together, or a website, containing news reports, articles, photographs and advertisements. (Cambridge, 2020). These were available in all the universities which participated in the study in their libraries according to the observations made during the university visits. There was a least one copy of the major newspapers in Uganda, ‘The New Vision’ and ‘Monitor publications’ for each day of the month. Some universities in addition to the physical newspapers had the soft copies of the newspapers on computers in the library.

Workbooks /modules

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According to Cambridge dictionary, the workbook is a book used in school containing text and questions and sometimes having spaces for students to write answers. (Dictionary, 2020). Only 40% of the distance education students especially those in private universities had received workbooks called modules in their respective disciplines. The students in public universities had never received workbooks and they said that the universities expected them to gather their own notes on most of the topics on the course outline.

**Radio and television broadcasts**

Radio is defined as sound communication by radio waves, usually through the transmission of music, news, and other types of programs from single broadcast stations to multitudes of individual listeners equipped with radio receivers. (Sterling, 2020). According to Wikipedia, a television is a telecommunication medium used for transmitting moving images in monochrome or in colour and in two or three dimensions and sounds. (Wikipedia, television, 2020). The students interviewed said they sometimes received radio announcements from their local area radio stations about when the university would be resuming the next face to face sessions.

**Chart 3 Communication using radio**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Diploma</th>
<th>Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E1 PU UNPOP</td>
<td>Unpopular Eastern Public University</td>
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<tr>
<td>E2 PU POP</td>
<td>Popular Eastern Public University</td>
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<td>Popular Western Private University</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In chart 3 above students on both diploma and degree distance programs in private universities received more communication using radio than their counterparts in public universities.
Video and Audio cassettes/ Compact Discs

Video refers to a recording of moving visual images made digitally or on videotape. (Google, Video, 2020). While audio cassette refers to a flat, rectangular device containing a very long strip of magnetic material that is used to record sound or pictures; an audiocassette or videocassette. (cambridge.org, 2020). And compact discs refer to a small plastic disk with a shiny surface on which information, especially high-quality sound, is recorded. (Cambridge.org, 2020). Of all the 8 institutions only students from two universities had ever received compact discs. All the respondents to this question said that they had not received any video and audio cassettes.

Chart 4 Video, Cassette and CD Distribution

The two universities that gave students CDSs were both private universities in Western Uganda in order to become competitive and attractive to students.

Computer based learning

Computer based learning refers to the use of computers as a key component of the educational environment whether in the classroom or in a structured environment in which computers are used for teaching purposes. (K12Academics, 2020) All the eight universities that were visited had computer laboratories but they never conducted lectures for distance education students there. This exclusion from modern aspects of education made the students comment bitterly and accuse the universities of not treating them as good as how they treated pre-service students who enjoyed all those benefits.

Telecommunications

Telecommunications refers to communication at a distance (as by telephone). (merriam-webster, 2020). This is a relatively new way of communication in Uganda’s education system. It only gained prominence during 2020 when there was a lockdown and students could not report to universities for their face to face sessions. According to the questionnaire all the universities had
used phone programs like Whatsapp to send notes and sometimes voice notes to students. However this was short lived as both lecturer and students felt the pinch of having to load data in order to communicate regularly and they soon dropped off one by one. By June most of the groups had gone silent as shown below.

**Chart 5 Frequency of the Use of Telecommunication**

![Chart 5 Frequency of the Use of Telecommunication](image_url)

**Provision of two way communication**

According to the communication theory, Communication is the transfer of information from one person to another, whether or not it elicits confidence but, the information transferred must be understandable to the receiver (Brown, 2012). There were numerous complaints among students in both public universities that they were not receiving communication whether verbal or written early enough. Some said that there was a communication gap between the administration and the students that sometimes made it difficult for students to meet the deadline because information was given just before the deadline. Students also said that they wanted a distance education representative on the university body to present their issues to the relevant offices.

**Possibility of face-to-face meetings**

This was one of the characteristics that were almost 100% implemented. All the 8 universities that participated in the study conducted face to face sessions which lasted from between two weeks to three weeks every school holiday. These sessions were conducted during school holidays because most of the students on distance education programs where practicing teachers.

**CONCLUSION**

ADEAs’ definition of distance education is broad enough and includes every possible component of distance education. Using this criterion, students would be effectively taught and assisted to achieve their goals. However, in Uganda, some of the components of distance
education like computer based learning, telecommunication, videos and compact disc technologies had not been fully embraced by the universities.

Further research could be conducted with the universities to establish why they have been unable to fully embrace all the characteristics in the ADEA definition.

After the case study analysis above, it was observed that there is a lot more effort needed in order to improve the distance education courses for the students.

Ugandan universities may need to revisit the components of their distance education programs and update the modes of delivery and interaction between teacher and learner and find ways of improving communication between the university and the distance learners.

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