

# Impact of Learner Support Services on Students' Motivation to Learn in Ogun State Study Centres of the National Open University of Nigeria

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## Abstract

*This study investigated the effectiveness of the learner support services in promoting students' motivation to learn in the Ogun State study centres of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). Two research hypotheses were tested in the study. A descriptive survey research design of ex-post-facto was used for the study. The population comprised all the 5893 active students at the Abeokuta and Awa Ijebu Community NOUN Study Centre of Ogun State. The sample size comprised 848 students selected through simple random sampling technique. A 32-item research instrument with reliability coefficient of .93 titled "Effectiveness of Learner Support Services and Students' Motivation to Learn Questionnaire" (ELSSSMTLQ) was designed by the researchers and validated by lecturers in Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation to collect data for the study. Data collected were analysed using One Way Analysis of Variance to test the two hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The result showed that the provision of Learner Support Services had significant impact on students' motivation to learn, with the highest effect manifesting between high and moderate extent. There was also a significant impact of students' attitudes towards the utilization of learners' support services and their motivation to learn with the highest effect manifesting between negative and neutral attitudes. It was recommended that management of NOUN should provide adequate learner support services in the study centres, in addition to provision of adequate orientation to students on the effective utilization of their support services.*

**Keywords:** Learner Support Services, Motivation to learn, National Open University, Study Centre.

## Introduction

The establishment of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) as an Open and Distance Learning institution is basically for the provision of functional, flexible, accessible and cost-effective education aimed at ensuring that university education is delivered at the threshold of all those who are desirous of having it. The government visualized an institution capable of providing university education to Nigerian citizens irrespective of their social conditions and situations (NOUN, 2018a). Based on the mission and vision of open university, some of the objectives of establishing the National Open University include: ensuring the provision of equal university educational opportunity; provision of broad access to university education in the country; enhancing a continuing education and enduring learning for every citizen; establishing an international best practice for learning approaches; provision of technology-driven learning materials; giving adaptable, yet, good quality education, and cutting down the price and reducing the difficulties involved in getting uncomplicated opportunities to education and its mode of transmission (NOUN, 2018b). These objectives are pointers to the fact that the university has a strong feeling of seeing its graduates to obtain degrees in various fields of study, possess good moral principles and be able to compete favourably with their counterparts all over the world. Oyebade's diary (as cited in Ibijola, 2017) has likened the university system to the manufacturing industries where raw materials are processed into finished products. In this case, the processing circle does not only involve transmission of knowledge but sufficient provision of requisite assistance in all ramifications, since the students enrolling into the university are characterised with a lot of needs, such as social, psychological which obviously have to be met for the student to be successful. This therefore, makes learners' support services imperative. Learners support services are the assembly of amenities and undertakings that are made available to facilitate the process of learning and make it more fascinating for the learners. They serve as the bonding mechanisms between the institution and the learners. The standard of an educational institution has direct link with the extent of the provision of the learner support services and the inability of the institution to provide adequate and appropriate support to the learners is a reflection of the level of inefficiency of the institution (Kaur, 2016).

Chattopadhyay (2014) posited that learner support services are important aspects of any open and distance learning educational system. It comprises a series of educational and other allied tasks. The support services should not

only take cognizance of the needs of the students but also be attainable. Examples of such services are interactive support services at the study centres, staff obligation for the provision of the services, technology-driven equipment, method of service provision and the oversight procedure. As part of the commitment of the management of the National Open University of Nigeria in ensuring that students acquire appropriate learning experiences, the Directorate of Learners Support Services was put in place under the office of the Vice-Chancellor in order to provide appropriate guidance on choice of courses, facilitating students' registration formalities, preparatory diagnosis, developing study skills in the learners, solving adjustment problems, providing opportunity for access in group learning, giving assistance to students on how to complete chosen courses for the semester, provision of orientation programmes, etc. (Ibrahim, 2016).

The focus point of the university's learner support services therefore, is to assist learners in optimizing the benefits and essence of their academic pursuit with the slightest challenges and to provide adequate assistance to all categories of students in the course of their educational attainment, thereby, ensuring that they put in their best. This has to do with encouraging students to evolve the culture of attachment to the university by developing a deep pleasure in being university students, developing a sense of bearing and get motivated to learn, so that they can complete their programmes within the university as soon as possible (NOUN, 2007).

Nsamba and Makele (2017) stated that the learner support services are rendered by distance learning institutions in order to facilitate students' learning. The services are to address the psychological, cognitive and social needs of the students, and serve as the bonding mechanism between the institution and the students. The learner support service according to Krishnan (2012), thus, serve as a means of rewarding the “detached” person, with the provision of requisite resources due to lack of “physical assistance” from the teacher. Learner support is no doubt an avenue for arousing the interest of students in learning, herein referred to as motivation to learn. Motivation to learn can be described as the students' willingness to get involved in the process of learning. Huitt (2011) defined motivation as inner state of mind that stimulates human condition and gives it direction to embark on a certain course of action. Motivation to learn therefore, is the internal condition of the mind stimulated by perceived benefits a learner anticipates to gain if he undertakes a particular course of learning activities. For effective delivery of these services, and in making efforts towards the creation of the avenue to address learners' needs, the university created study centres. Each study centre is expected to have a counselor who by the status of his employment is under the Directorate of Learner Support Services. The student counselor is expected to be professionally qualified and perform the following functions: provision of information about the requirements for completing the modules/courses; choosing courses; and determining what the learners are required to learn; getting feedback from the facilitators; setting requirements for assessment; and getting the students acquainted with the requirements for enrolment in the university's programme. Other staff in the study centres include: the Director, ICT Staff, Bursary Staff, Academic and Administrative Staff all of whom work together to provide appropriate learning experiences for the students (NOUN, 2012).

In a study by Uzoukwu (2014) on academic advising and students' learning outcomes in NOUN, it was reported that a significant positive relationship was found between academic advising on one hand and students' choice of course, students' reading habits, students' academic achievement and adjustment to Open and Distance Learning setting on the other. According to Moore (as cited in Nsamba & Makele, 2017), learner support services are crucial to academic attainment in Open and Distance Learning education. Since students and lecturers are physically disconnected in this mode of learning, provision of technologically enhanced media such as print and electronics becomes necessary to enhance teaching/learning activities. The physical disconnection between the two (that is, the learners and the lecturers) has implications on the teaching and learning process as it could contribute to the solitary and unsettled reactions which may result in low level of motivation, involvement and attritions. This may equally lead to a large number of students abandoning the programme, thus bringing about educational wastages. Majority of the open and distance educational institutions in the world are characterized with low students' completion rate in their academic programmes and this issue is so prevalent in the developing countries where many of the students are deprived and caught off guard (Simpson, 2002). Studies (Commonwealth of Learning, 2008; Higher Education Quality Committee, 2010 and Nsamba, 2016) have indicated that Open and Distance Learning (ODL) students support system in the university of South Africa was difficult and that the extent of provision of the support system was far below expectation and could not meet the needs of the students. Relatedly, Okafor (2015) carried out a study on the utilisation of learners' support

services by students of NOUN in study centres in the South Eastern Nigeria and found out that some student support services were utilized but the extent of utilization was low in promoting academic attainment of the students. In another study, Ajadi, Salawu and Adeoye (as cited in Okafor, 2015) found out that there was imbalance in provision of students' support services for the use of students of NOUN, and that majority of the students were unwilling to undertake learning, rather, choose to be indulged endlessly and this could have implications on their academic accomplishment.

Library services is one of the Learner Support Services in any university. Infact, it is an essential component of the university system and the museum of knowledge. Uzoagba (2015) in a study on the provision and usage of library services in NOUN reported that the library services were inadequate in some study centres, and that the orientation of most students towards library usage was low. The report further showed that the library environments were not favourable to meaningful reading. From the foregoing, it can be deduced that the learner support services are very instrumental in assisting students to excel in their academic pursuits, and the extent of their accomplishment can be determined by the quantum of the support services provided. It is against this background that the study investigated the effectiveness of learner support services in determining students' motivation to learn with particular reference to Abeokuta study centre of National Open University of Nigeria. From the various review, it could be seen that the role of learner support services in enhancing students' academic excellence cannot be over emphasized. However, there was an application gap in the literature reviewed as their findings cannot be taken to be true of the peculiarities of ODL programmes. It was equally observed with serious concern, that a reasonable number of NOUN students seem not to take a good advantage of the services as evident in seemingly ineffective utilisation. Relatedly, the delivery of these services by officers of the university at the study centres seem to be user-unfriendly. These without doubt, have implications on students' adjustment into the ODL system and academic success. Consequent upon these, the study investigated the effectiveness of Learner Support Services on students' motivation to learn in Abeokuta, Ogun State study centre of the National Open University of Nigeria.

### **Purposes of the Study**

The specific objectives of this study were to:

1. investigate the impact of provision of learner support services on students' motivation to learn; and
2. examine the impact of students' attitude towards the utilisation of learner support services on motivation to learn.

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested:

- H01:** Provision of learner support services has no significant impact on students' motivation to learn in NOUN programme.
- H02:** NOUN students' attitude towards utilisation of learner support services has no significant impact on their motivation to learn.

### **Research Methodology**

The design for this study was ex-post facto type of descriptive research design. This is because this study was conducted after the fact has occurred without interference from the researcher. Hence, the researcher does not manipulate the independent variable but use questionnaire to elicit responses on the variables under investigation. The population for the study comprised all 8,473 active students (as at the time of the study) in Ogun State Centres of NOUN. These centres are Abeokuta study centre with a total student population of 5,893 and Awa-Ijebu community study centre with 2,580 students. The sample size for the study comprised 848 students randomly selected from the two centres. This consist of 590 and 258 students from Abeokuta and Awa Ijebu Community study centres respectively. This sampling technique gave every student in each of the centres equal chance of being selected in the sample, thus, resulting in an unbiased selection. The instrument used for data collection for the study was a 32-item researchers-constructed questionnaire titled "Effectiveness of Learner Support Services and Students' Motivation to Learn Questionnaire (ELSSMTLQ). The instrument had two parts. Part A sought demographic information on the participants. Such as sex, employment status, age, level, course of study and marital status. Part B consisted of three sub-sections. The first sub-section measured the extent of provision of Learner Support Services, the second sub-section elicited responses on the attitudes of students towards utilisation of Learner Support Services, while the third sub-section measured students'

motivation to learn. The face and content validity of the instrument were established by academics in the Department of Educational Management and Open Distance Learning at the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos, Nigeria. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Split-half reliability and a correlation co-efficient of 0.93 was obtained. With this high value, the instrument was adjudged reliable for use in the study. Copies of the questionnaire were taken to these study centres and administered on the participants. The data were collated and analysed using One Way Analysis of Variance to test the two hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

## Results

**Ho1:** Provision of learner support services has no significant impact on students' motivation to learn in NOUN programme.

The hypothesis was tested using one-way analysis of variance statistical tool and the result is presented in table 1.

**Table 1: Provision of Learner Support Services and Students' Motivation to Learn**

Provision of learner support services	n	x	SD
High Extent	261	16.31	4.32
Moderate Extent	379	12.42	4.98
Low Extent	190	13.36	5.72

  

Source of Variation	Sum of Square	Degree of Freedom	Mean of Variation	Sig.
Between Group	53.28	2	26.64	9.62.001
Within Group	2346.21	845	2.77	
Total	2399.44	847		

Significant at 0.05; df = 2 and 845

Table 1 shows that the F = ratio of 9.62 resulted as the impact of the provision of learner support services on student motivation to learn. This indicates that the impact is statistically significant ( $P = 0.001 < 0.05$ ) given at 2 and 845 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that the provision of learner support services had significant impact on students' motivation to learn. However, in order to determine the direction of the impact of the provision of learner support services on students' motivation to learn, further examination was carried out using Fisher's Least Square method statistics to do a pairwise comparison of group mean in order to determine which group differ from the other on motivation to learn. The result is presented in table 2.

**Table 2**

**Pairwise Comparison of the Direction of the Effect of Provision of Learner Support Services on Students' Motivation to Learn**

Provision of Learner Support Services	High Extent n = 261	Moderate Extent n = 397	Low Extent n = 190
High extent	16.31	29.70*	18.67*
Moderate extent	3.89	12.42	6.30*
Low extent	2.95	-0.94	13.36

Group means are on the diagonal, differences between the means are below the diagonal, while protected t are above the diagonal.

Table 2 shows that the highest effect of provision of learner support services manifested between higher extent and moderate extent ( $t = 29.70$   $df = 626$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ) followed by high extent and low extent ( $t = 18.67$ ;  $df = 449$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ) while the least effect was between moderate extent and low extent ( $t = 6.39$ ;  $df = 585$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ). This therefore means that the provision of Learner Support Services was between high extent and moderate extent and this had significant effect on students' motivation to learn.

Ho2: Students' attitude towards the utilisation of learner support services has no significant impact on students' motivation to learn.

To test this hypothesis, one-way ANOVA statistical tool was used, the result is presented in table 3.

**Table 3**

**Students' Attitude towards the Utilisation of Learners Support Services and Motivation to Learn**

Attitude towards the utilization of learners' support services	n	X	Sd
Positive	208	13.72	3.74
Negative	289	18.43	5.23
Neutral	351	9.56	7.39

Source	Sum of Square	Degree of Freedom	Mean of Square	F-Ratio	Sig
Between Group	23.09	2	11.55	5.55	0.000
Within Group	1776.76	845	2.08		
Total	1776.76	847			

Significant 0.05;  $df = 2$  and 845

Table 3 shows that the F-ratio of 5.55 resulted as the impact of the students' attitude towards the utilisation of learner support services on motivation to learn. This indicates that the impact is statistically significant ( $P = 0.000 < 0.05$ ) at 2 and 845 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. It then means that students' attitude towards utilisation of learner supports services had significant impact on motivation to learn. However, in order to determine the direction of the impact of students' attitudes towards the utilization of learner support services on motivation to learn, further examination was carried out using pairwise comparison/Fisher protected t-test. The result is presented in table 4.

**Table 4**

**Pairwise Comparison of the Direction of the Effect of Students' Attitude Towards the Utilisation of Learner Support Services on Motivation to Learn**

Students' Attitude towards the utilisation of LSS	Positive n = 208	Negative n = 289	Neutral n = 351
Positive	13.72	36.23*	3.20*
Negative	-4.71	18.43	80.64*
Neutral	4.16	8.87	9.56

Group means are on the diagonal, differences between the means are below the diagonal, while protected t are above the diagonal.



Table 4 shows that the highest impact of students' attitude towards the utilisation of learner support services manifested between negative and neutral ( $t = 8.87$ ;  $df = 638$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ) followed by positive and negative ( $t = 36.28$ ;  $df = 495$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ), while the least impact was between positive and neutral ( $t = 3.20$ ;  $df = 557$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ). This therefore means that the students' attitude towards the utilisation of learner support services ranged between negative and neutral and this had significant impact on their motivation to learn.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The first finding of this study showed that there was a significant impact of the provision of learner support services on students' motivation to learn and the highest effect was between high extent and moderate extent. This means that to a large extent, the study centres provided services that addressed the cognitive, educational, emotional and social needs of the students. From the data collected, it was evident that Guidance Counselors were not adequate, this made the centres to make use of Faculty Officers who are administrative staff to carry out most of the counsellors' responsibilities. It was also evident that printed copies of course materials were not always available for all courses, though, all course materials by the students also have some cost implications. The library facilities were found to be inadequate though the centres had very effective and functioning e-libraries. There was the availability of computer systems used for the computer-based examinations. This therefore, determined the level of students' interest in learning since those services help to facilitate learning in the students. This present finding contradicts South African Institution of Distance Education (2003) who reported that in most cases, students on distance education programme were not provided with education of good quality due to the nature of the programme. Similarly, Nsamba (2016) reported that the system of student support in South Africa was deficient and lacking to the extent that it did not adequately address the needs, yearning and aspirations of the students. The study confirms the earlier one by Okafor (2015) that counseling services, library services, fact-to-face tutorials, study kits and feedback on assignment were provided but not to the extent of promoting learning on the part of the students.

The second result showed that students' attitude towards utilisation of learner support services had significant impact on their motivation to learn. Specifically, the highest impact of the attitude towards utilisation of LSS was between neutral and negative. This means that the attitude of most of the students towards the utilization of the services was ambivalent. This finding was supported by Ajadi, Salawu and Adeoye (2008) who reported that majority of students in the National Open University of Nigeria were indifferent to taking responsibility for their learning and had preference for being spoon fed. In the same vein, Kaur's (2016) study laid credence to this present study that a significant correlation existed between the learning capability of students and efficacious use of the support services, and that majority of distance learning students did not make effective utilisation of some of the services. Hence, they found it difficult to make use of the services effectively.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the learner support services are to a reasonable extent made available in the NOUN study centres in Ogun State and the extent of provision has been able to predict students' motivation to learn. The attitude of students towards utilisation of the services was also found to be ambivalent as it ranged between negative and neutral. This nature of attitude also had significant effect on students' motivation to learn.

### **Implications for Institutional Management**

As a matter of necessity, management of the NOUN should prioritise the provision of learner support services in different study centres. In doing it, efforts should be made to ensure that all students are provided with hard copies of course materials in all courses. Library services in study centres should also be improved upon by making provision for a state-of-the-art library as well as making the library environment to be more reading friendly. As a matter of policy, adequate student counselors should be employed and all study centres should have a good mix of counselors bearing in mind, the enrolment in the study centre. All study centres should be connected to the internet, in order to facilitate easy access to online materials and multi-media facilities. The importance of orientation programme in fine-tuning students into the academic culture and the institution's environment cannot be under-estimated. Therefore, considering the nature of the NOUN programme and its students, the orientation of new students should be taken with more seriousness. Management of the study centres should ensure that students are provided with adequate information that will develop

their attitude towards adjusting to and getting familiarized with the Open Distance Learning environment, so that they will continue to take good advantage of the available facilities and services in order to enhance their academic attainment in the university. Efforts should be made to improve on the human relations of staff of study centres through capacity building programme most especially on their relationship with the students as this will go a long way in enhancing their service delivery capacities, thus, protecting the image of the university. Therefore, the Quality Assurance and Servicom unit of the university should be made to be more functional in study centres. This is essential due to the fact that what every administration put in place in any educational institution should be in the “best interest” of the students.

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