Challenges Confronting Study Centre Administrators of the Distance Education Programme of the University of Education, Winneba

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted at 36 Study Centres of the Institute for Educational Development and Extension of the University Education, Winneba, involving a population of coordinators, administrators and students. The researchers investigated challenges facing study centre administrators; the extent to which these challenges affected them and the types of relationships existed between the challenges and administrators' performance. Five research questions and a hypothesis guided the study. A triangulation/concurrent mixed-method design was adopted by the researchers and 421 respondents participated. Questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide were used to elicit data. Descriptive statistics (percentage, mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (correlations) were used to analyse the quantitative data, while thematic approach was used to analyse the qualitative data. Key findings of the study revealed that although the administrators were highly equipped for respective administrative roles, however, they encounted several challenges including ineffective communication, difficulties in getting accommodation, and insufficient supply of materials and office equipment. It was also revealed that administrators' performance was negatively affected by these challenges. There was a strong and statistically significant relationship between the challenges and administrators' performance. The study concluded that unless these challenges such as ineffective communication among stakeholders and delay in supply of materials are dealt with, study centres administrators will be at a low ebb. Based on these conclusions/findings, it was recommended that the issue regarding the inadequate supply of materials and equipment should be addressed by the Institute for Educational Development and Extension taking in consideration the specific needs of each study centre.

Keywords: *Distance education, Study centre, Administrators, Challenges, Performance.*

1. BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

One major constraint that accounts for the seemingly low standards of education in developing countries is an inadequate number of qualified teachers. Both the quantity and quality of teachers produced in most of these countries are far below the levels expected because the demand for teachers has always outstripped the supply. This situation has sometimes necessitated the admission of untrained and undertrained teachers into the service, thus affecting the desired quality of education (Kale-Dery, 2017).

There is also rapid growth and increase in youthful populations in many areas of the world fueling pressure on higher education institutions to respond to new and creative ways of educating them. In most countries, continuous learning by adults is becoming essential as jobs change and entire career tracks are eliminated with new ones developed. Thus, access to education from any location, at any time, for any age, and in alternative ways is critical for the individual and collective wellbeing (Keesee, 2011).

In recent years, distance education has been a means of educating those who could not or would not make use of traditional forms of education. There are many reasons why the move toward distance education is inextricably linked with changing organizational processes and procedures as well as developing new organizational models. In other words, people from all walks of life enroll as learners on distance education programmes, making it obligatory that staff (study centre coordinators) such as administrators of distance education offices should perform exceptionally well when relating to students. Further demand for learning across the globe is increasing as national economies become increasingly knowledge-based and technological in nature (Akrofi, 2010). In this regard, the researchers agree with the view that distance education administrators as front desk officers are expected to perform a multiplicity of functions or roles which include:

a. Receptionists – they are the first persons to come in contact with the prospective student including answering all phone calls.

b. Provide excellent customer service at the Study Centre offices. In this case, it includes students to support services (its management and administration).

c. They are tasked as managers of the Study Centre office environment and are accountable for maintaining a professional working and learning environment (Kale-Dery, 2017).

To put this into context, the University of Education, Winneba distance education programme, support services are put in place to help students. Among other things, the learners are expected to make themselves available for tutorial services or face-to-face at least once a month on Saturdays. At these tutorials, students are taken through their study materials by their tutors who also serve as academic counselors (Owusu-Mensah *et al.*, 2015).

The Institute for Educational Development and Extension (IEDE) runs the distance programmes of the University. These include Diploma and Post Diploma programmes in Basic Education, Early Childhood Education, Business Management, Accounting and Human Resource Management. It also runs Master of Education programmes in English, Mathematics, Science, Mentorship and a Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. As part of its support structure for the distance programme, UEW follows the United Kingdom's (UK) Open University model of decentralized student support system with 36 Study Centres scattered nationwide and tutors as core staff members for all enrolled students (Tait, 2003). The study centre administrators support the coordinators to provide very useful services to the distance learning students by overseeing both academic and administrative activities of the centres (UEW Annual Report, 2016).

Although the literature seems to outline some challenges bedeviling Study Centres' administrators (Owusu-Mensah *et al.*, 2015) one is poised to ascertain whether these challenges exist and the rate of their occurrences in the

Distance Education Programme of the University of Education, Winneba. As such, this study sought to ascertain, the challenges of the distance education study centre administrators in the light of prevailing issues from different perspectives in the Institute for Educational Development and Extension Services of the University of Education, Winneba.

1.1. Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What is the nature of roles Distance Education Administrators in UEW Study Centres perform at the Study Centres?

2. What challenges confront Distance Education Administrators in UEW Study Centres in performing their functions?

3. To what extent do the challenges confronting Distance Education administrators occur in the UEW?

4. How are the challenges hindering Distance Education Administrators affecting teaching and learning at the Study Centres?

5. What is the relationship between challenges Distance Education Administrators face and the performance of their functions in the UEW?

1.2. Hypothesis

H_0: There is no significant relationship between challenges Distance Education Administrators face and their performance.

H_1: There is a significant relationship between challenges Distance Education Administrators face and their performance.

2. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Perraton (2004) theorized a framework for distance education in relation to the way distance teaching maximizes education, increases dialogue and the method or approach employed to achieve the latter. Perraton stated that any medium can be utilized to teach anything when implementing distance education; distance can reduce the difficulty of fixed staffing ratios that limit the expansion of education because teachers and students have to be in the same place at the same time. He contended that in some cases distance can be cheaper than traditional education when audience is reached or the level of learning involved are used as a gauge. This brings about the creation of study centres. Analytically, in view of the aforementioned, Perraton's theory on distance education underpins the present study because from Perraton's perspective, distance education is complex and requires systematic approach including the setting up and administering of study centres which can be challenging when not properly organized.

In recent times, several educators have come to realize that Knowles (1984) work entitled *The Modern Practice of Adult Education* underpins distance education implementation because most often adults are involved in distance education and the theory of andragogy was an attempt to create a theory to differentiate learning in childhood from learning in adulthood.
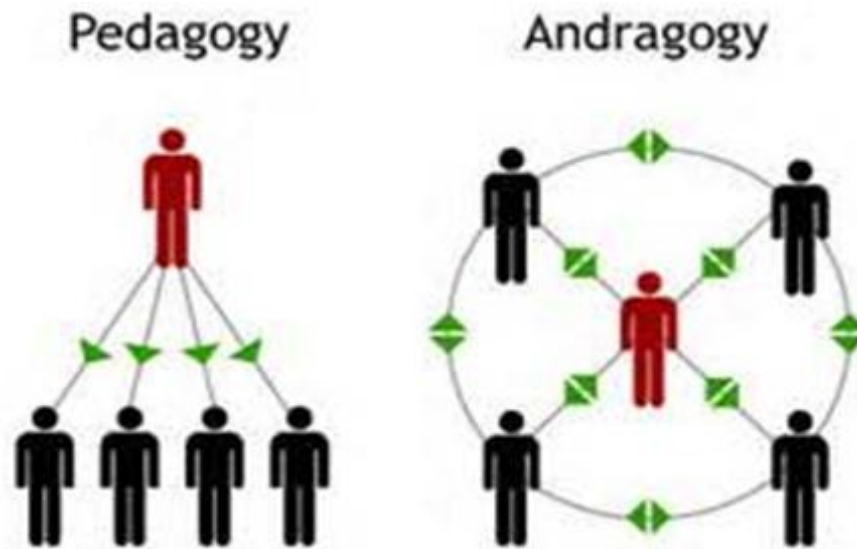
Fig-1. Conttrast Between Pedagogy and Andragogy Cconrast Between Åpedagogy
Source: Disadvantagebydesign.com, 2012

Integral to the distinction between pedagogy and andragogy as depicted in Fig. 1, is the fact that andragogy is learner-centered and facilitated by adult students' evaluation. This frank appraisal of facilitators' activities in connection with teaching and learning provides feedback for facilitators with the intent of facilitating the qualitative approach to teaching. This is not the case in teaching of children (pedagogy) But the literature (Keesee, 2011) is indicative of the fact that the delivery of any adult education programme whether by distance or otherwise, must be well planned and administered in terms of those who coordinate learning sites and facilities, Indeed, the positive optimism regarding distance education is that through well organized supervision, planning and administration of various resources and units, it can serve as a useful complement of traditional education. Practically, the researchers' perception of the causes of the challenges facing study centres' administrators as gleaned from literature (Keesee, 2011; Owusu-Mensah *et al.*, 2015) is graphically illustrated in the conceptual framework below:

As seen in Figure 2, the perceived challenges centred largely around limited experience, inadequate support system and inadequate office equipment. These arguably directly or indirectly affect students and administrators.

2.1. Challenges Confronting Distance Education Administrators in Performing their Functions

There are several perceived challenges faced by administrators in the delivery of Distance Education programmes. The findings of previous studies substantiate similar challenges. In her desire to develop a model of academic learner support service for distance education programmes for higher education in Aurora University, Perraton (2000a) indicated in her results some challenges that were faced by the Aurora University. The study adopted a qualitative research paradigm for analyses of data. Interview guide and focus group discussion were the main instruments for collecting data. Findings of the study revealed that administrators were facing several challenges in connection with students' needs and concerns. These challenges can be categorized into four sections, namely: writing, assessment, communication and feedback. The study revealed that learners needed to improve their writing skills, including the ability to conceptualize a problem, design the applied research project to study the problem, analyze, and report their results in a meaningful fashion. The study further found out that learners desired feedback on course papers and practicum and dissertation documents more quickly than the programme's "two-week rule". The challenges confronting distance education as noted in the study by Perraton (2000a) are very much

akin to those confronting distance education providers in the University of Education as indicated by Owusu-Mensah *et al.* (2015).
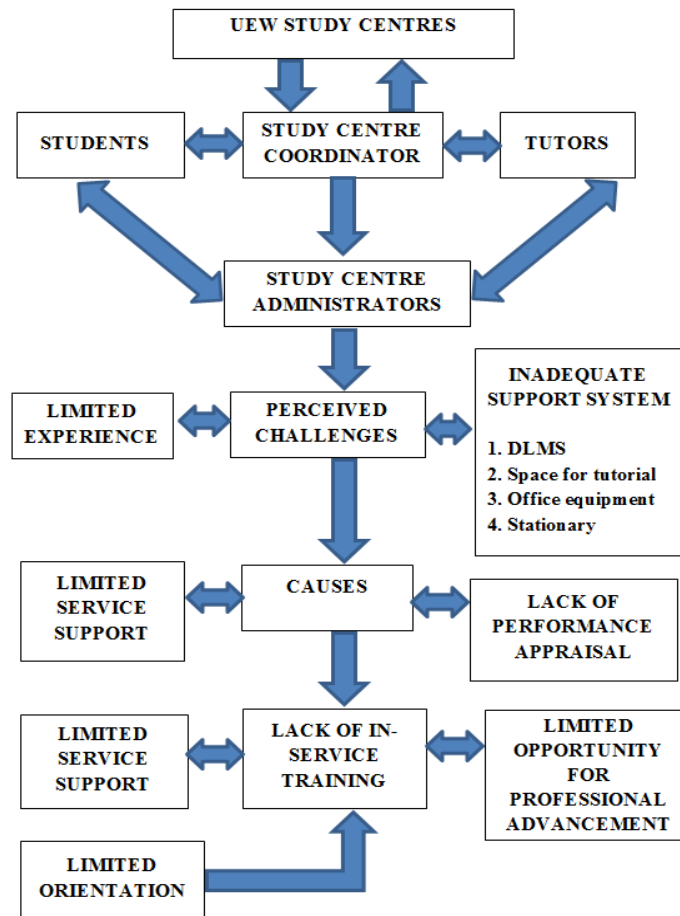

Fig-2. Conceptual framework on Challenges faced by UEW study centers administrators

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The triangulation/concurrent mix-method was employed for the study. This design employs the use of a questionnaire and interview in sampling views on a phenomenon by selecting the unbiased sample to respond to the questionnaire and interview concurrently.

3.2. Population

Table-1. Population

Category of Respondent	Target population	Accessible Population
DE Administrators	36	36
Centre Coordinators	36	36
DE Students	17,683	3,600
Total	17,755	3,672

Source: Field Survey, 2017 DE (Distance Education)

3.3. Sample and Sampling Techniques

The census method of data collection was used for both DE administrators and coordinators because the researchers used all of the participants whose numerical size was not vast, and higher accuracy of data was assured.

Multi-stage sampling technique was employed in selecting the students for the study. The researchers first and foremost for the purposes of the study, used the stratified sampling method to select students from the various Study Centres. A sample size of 360 students was selected to carry out the study at the Diploma, Post-Diploma and Post-graduate levels.

The selection of 360 students was done based on Neuman's criteria for determining the sample size for a given population of over 1000, 10% of the accessible population is used (Avoke, 2005). Therefore, the sample size of 360 students, 36 administrators and 36 coordinators was the actual group of respondents from which data were collected to answer the research questions. The total sample size for the study therefore was 432. In selecting the sample above, the researchers employed proportional stratified random sampling method to select the 360 students. The researchers developed a sampling frame based on the list provided by DE administrators for each study centre. The names listed in the register were substituted with numbered papers so that each paper corresponded to the name of student. The papers were put in a container and mixed thoroughly and were randomly removed one by one without replacement. The number of any selected paper was registered to correspond to a students' name. This process continued until the required number of students in each of the Study Centres was reached. The method was repeatedly used until all 360 students were selected. The distribution of sampled respondents is presented in Table 2 below.

Table-2. Sample Distribution of Respondents

Category of respondent	Population	Respondents	%
DE Administrators	36	36	100
DE Students	3,600	360	10
Centre Coordinators	36	36	100
Total	3,672	432	11

Source: Field Survey, 2017 The percentages are non-addictive

3.4. Instruments for Data Collection

The researchers employed a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interview schedule as another instrument for data collection. The interview was conducted for administrators and centre coordinators. It was semi-structured and the telephone was used to interview some participants. The semi-structured interview was relevant to the study because it was more flexible, allowed the researchers decipher the extent to which an interviewee understands the phenomenon under study and it offered concrete, reliable and valid data (Avoke, 2005).

The questionnaire contained largely close-ended questions even though some open-ended items were also included. There were basically two sets of questionnaires; one for students and the other for administrators.

3.5. Validity and Reliability

To guarantee that the study attains face validity the researchers gave the questionnaires to colleagues in the Department of Educational Administration and Management for proof-reading and to guarantee content validity, the researchers submitted the questionnaires to experts in educational research, for scrutiny and constructive criticisms.

The Cronbach's Alpha measure of internal consistency was used to establish the reliability of the questionnaires. This statistic provides an indication of the average correlations among all of the items that make up the scale of the instrument. This resulted into an internal consistency reliability co-efficient of 0.765.

Table-3. Analytical framework adopted for the respective research questions and hypothesis

Research Question	Respondents	Statistical Tool
RQ 1	Administrators Students	Mean and Standard Deviation
RQ 2	Administrators Students	Mean and Standard Deviation
RQ 3	Administrators Students	Mean and Standard Deviation
RQ 4	Coordinators Administrators	Thematic Analysis
RQ 5	Administrators Coordinators	Correlation and Thematic analysis
HyP 1	Administrators Coordinators	Independent Sample t-test

Source: Field Survey (2017) Where RQ=Research Question; HyP=Hypothesis

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Research Question One: How are Distance Education Administrators in UEW Study Centres performing their functions?

Table-4. Nature of functions performed by DE Study Centre's Administrators

Statement	RES	Mean	SD
Administrators keep and manage good records at the study centre/ offices	A	4.8	1.5
	S	4.9	1.4
Administrators serve as beneficial links between UEW and the DE students	A	4.4	1.3
	S	5.0	1.4
Study centre administrators have adequate administrative knowledge and skills needed to perform their functions Centres.	A	4.8	1.5
	S	4.6	1.4
Study centre administrators properly help students with registration and contextual issues that may affect their learning.	A	5.0	1.4
	S	4.8	1.5

RES= Respondents; SD=Standard Deviation; A=Administrators; S=Students.
Source: Field Survey (2017)

Results from Table 4 shows that administrators and students agreed that study centre administrators performed their functions well. This was evidenced by levels of agreement in terms of keeping and managing records serving as beneficial links between UEW and DE students and helping students with registration and contextual issues that may affect them. Analytically, good record keeping, serving as a liaison between distance learners and students and helping students with registration constitute very significant functions that inure to the benefits of the distance learners.

Obviously, these functions could not have been performed very well had the study centre administrators not imbibed adequate administrative knowledge and skills (M=4.8; and S=1.5) for administrators and students respectively. The results are consistent with Perraton (2004); Tait (2003) and Annan (2012) frameworks for distance learning which emphasize proper management and coordination of institutional activities, given attention to students' needs and difficulties and being adept of facilitating the resolution of issues that may hinder students' learning.

Although, the results gave indications that respondents agreed that study centre administrators had adequate knowledge and skills needed to perform their functions, however, the results go contrary to Owusu-Mensah *et al.* (2015) and Kale-Dery (2017) that many administrators do not have the knowledge and competencies of handling their functions. Arguably, the point of disagreement relative to the results and the related literature reflect Perraton's theory that distance education in varied locations is a complex venture which requires systematic approaches.

Research Question Two: What challenges confront Distance Education Administrators in UEW Study Centres in performing their functions?

Table-5. Challenges encountered by DE Study Centre's Administrators

Statement	RES	Mean	SD
No training and orientation for administrators before assumption of duty at Study Centres	A	2.0	1.1
	S	2.2	1.2
Role conflict and role confusion as a result of ineffective communication between administrators and centre coordinators.	A	4.7	1.4
	S	5.0	1.5
Difficulty in finding suitable accommodation to settle in when posted to Study Centres affects administrators work output.	A	4.8	1.5
	S	4.9	1.4
Ineffective communication between study centre coordinators and administrator.	A	4.1	1.3
	S	4.5	1.4
There is ineffective communication between Study Centres and IEDE	A	5.0	1.5
	S	4.8	1.4
Delay in supply of materials and office equipment to work with	A	4.3	1.3
	S	4.5	1.2

Where RES= Respondents; N=Number of Respondents; Std. Dev=Standard Deviation; A=Administrators; S=Students.
Source: Field Survey (2017)

As per the Mean scores in Table 5, the majority of the respondents agreed that role conflict and ineffective communication between administrators and study centre coordinators and delay in supply of materials and office equipment were challenges that hindered the work the DE Centre Administrators. Rationally, these are very crucial issues that every educational institution, be it distance or otherwise must give adequate attention. Analytically, the issue of role conflict will emerge when there are no clear job specifications and unclear organizational organogram (Annan, 2012; Anderson, 2013; Kale-Dery, 2017). Equally, the issue of role conflict can be exacerbated by poor or inadequate communication which another challenge encountered by the study centre coordinators. These findings contradict Knowles's theory which postulates that distance education is a well-structured activity that meets the learning needs of adults through effective planning, communication timelines and provision of adequate materials and office equipment (Knowles, 1980;1984).

A related issue was that of training and orientation for administrators before assumption of duties, A mean and standard deviation scores revealed that respondents disagreed that these did not exist. Induction training and orientation are a crucial element for the work of all administrators, and as Knowles (1984) intimated, all managers of distance education including administrators and coordinators, should possess adequate knowledge and skills to effectively coordinate the complex day- to- day activities of various study facilities.

Research Question Three: To what extent do the challenges confronting Distance Education administrators occur in the UEW?

Table-6. Rate of Occurrence of Challenges faced by DE Study Centre's Administrators

Statement	RES	Mean	St. Dev
Insufficient supply of materials and office equipment to work with	A	4.7	1.5
	S	4.3	1.3
Ineffective communication between centre coordinators and administrators	A	4.7	1.4
	S	5.0	1.5
Ineffective communication between Study Centres and IEDE authorities in terms of dissemination of information	A	4.8	1.5
	S	4.9	1.4
Role conflicts between centre coordinators and administrators at the Study Centres	A	2.1	1.3
	S	2.5	1.4
Provision of pre-service orientation and training before being posted to study centre offices	A	2.0	1.3
	S	2.8	1.4

Res= respondents; n=number of respondents; std. Dev=standard deviation; a=administrators; s=students.
Source: Field Survey (2017)

The data in Table 6 reveal that insufficient supply of materials and office equipment and ineffective communication between study centre coordinators and administrators had the highest rate of occurrences, while conflict situations and provision of pre-service orientation and training had low mean and standard deviation scores

indicating a low rate of occurrence. Administratively, significant attention should be devoted to materials and equipment and lines and modes of communication in distance learning institutions, and as Sokano (2017) warned distance education study centres which are scattered should not experience insufficient inputs and poor communication that can totally disrupt their smooth functioning. Rather, in consonance with Knowles Theory of andragogy, distance education learners who are indeed adults should be treated as such and with respect through a regular supply of course materials, office equipment, proper planning and effective organization of activities to suit students' complex schedules (Knowles, 1984).

The findings, particularly on ineffective communication are the same as those of Sokano (2017) whose studies revealed ineffective communication between administrators and coordinators, which created greater difficulties in terms of clarity of roles, vision and feedback. On the other hand, respondents disagreed with the construct that role conflict and pre-service orientation and training had high rates of occurrences. This was positive result for the IEDE programme, ideally, in other to deliver quality distance education, there should not be a confusion of role among administrators, and consistent with Perraton's theory that administrators of distance education should acquire adequate knowledge, skills needed to harness administrative structures.

Research Question Four: How are the challenges hindering Distance Education Administrators in the performance of their functions affecting teaching and learning at the Study Centres?

This section of the analyses was conducted via a qualitative paradigm. In relation to challenges on information and communication, most of the administrators and coordinators indicated that it was negatively affecting teaching and learning. For example, one of the study centre coordinators stated:

> *Although the difficulty in connection with information and communication is gradually being addressed but it is still present. For example, sometimes a tutor or student may need clarification pertaining a module, registration, or other issues pertaining teaching and learning and you will call without any response, sometimes you will be told the person in charge of the issue is not available. After some time, most of the student lose trust in us, since things affecting their study are not been catered for (Study Centre Coordinator # 1)*

Another coordinator stated:

> *On several occasions, I have to use my own money to source for information for some of the student because for some time now we do not have access to the internet and all the complaint about it is not often considered. Sometimes, due to distortion in the information we were sent what we did not request for of which we have to send it back and wait for the item we requested. Misinformation and delay in communication are seriously affecting teaching and learning because some tutors have to wait for certain information for an extended period of time and those who cannot wait, teach the student based on the available information which may not be up-to-date (Study Centre Coordinator # 2).*

One of the administrators also intimated:

> *You cannot always be complaining of misinformation and delay in communication, you have to take charge and improvise where necessary. I work collaboratively with the coordinator in this regard. Where we cannot improvise we wait for the main office and sometimes it can be very disturbing because students and sometimes tutors are not able to enjoy the teaching and learning process very well (Administrator # 1).*

Unequivocally, interview data from the field show that information and communication formed a major challenge hindering the performance of administrators in connection with teaching and learning. In aggregate terms the responses of the coordinators and administrators show that communication was often delayed indicating that when a piece of important information or communication regarding a certain issue affecting students was urgently needed, they may have to wait for extended period of time. However, one of the coordinators indicated that the situation was gradually changing and now they didn't have to wait for a very long time before receiving

feedback but the majority disagreed with the notion. They strongly believed that there was still a chronic problem in getting feedback especially with Study Centres that are very far from Winneba, the main office.

Regarding supply services, materials and equipment, some of the respondents indicated that this aspect formed the bane of their challenges because as one administrator puts it: "students do not get full knowledge on the modules they have to study".

One administrator in conjunction with the centre coordinator stated:

On several occasions, we have to use our own money to replace certain items or equipment so that the students can enjoy their studies because you cannot be complaining all the time. It becomes a problem when major equipment gets broken or is not available, you have to call several times without any response and keep calling until one day the problem will be fixed. The issue of supply is a very serious one due to the distance our centre is located in comparison to the main office (Study Centre Coordinator #3 and Administrator #2).

Another administrator intimated:

As I am talking with you this air-condition you see is now working, it developed fault recently and is yet to be fixed. Most of the students are yet to receive their textbooks and we are getting closer to the exam, how will they do well, how can the tutors teach aright, these are disturbing questions that we administrators and the coordinators must answer before the exams otherwise the students will lack the requisite knowledge and skill regarding their line of discipline. The issue of supply of services and materials are really affecting the teaching and learning (Administrator #3).

As shown in the interview data, most of the administrators, as well as coordinators interviewed, had problem in connection with the supply of services, materials and equipment and it was seriously affecting teaching and learning. More importantly, as the respondents indicated above, it was affecting their output as administrators and coordinators.

This means, the issue of supply was a problem and this is in line with the statement of Sokano (2017) that due to the distances between the various Study Centres, there are variations in the form of challenges administrators faces and their effect on teaching and learning at the Study Centres.

Depicted in Figure 3 were the effects of the several challenges administrators faced during the course of carrying out their collective duties.
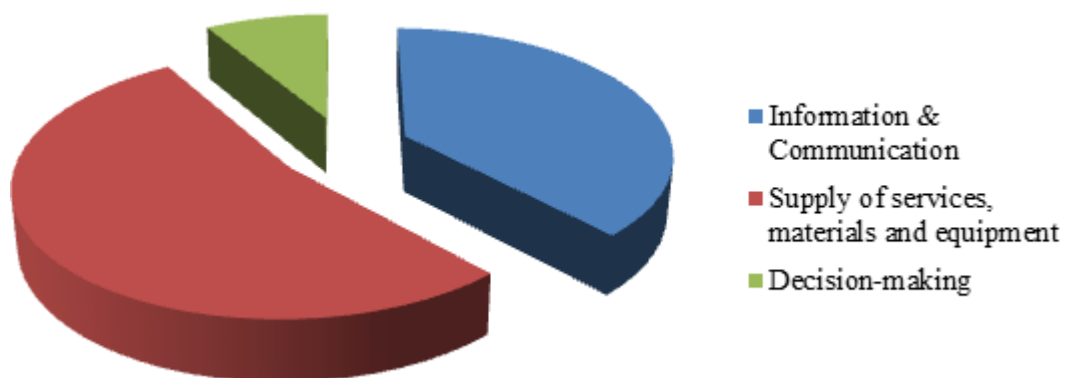

Figure-3. Effect of Challenges on Teaching and Learning

Source: Field Survey, 2017

The largest quadrant (red) showed that the challenge of insufficient supply of service materials and this equipment was exacted much effect on administrators' functions. The next quadrant (blue) (lack of adequate information and effective communication between administrators and other stakeholders of distance education) was also influenced students' learning negatively. The last quadrant (green) was in connection with inability of

administrators to make certain decisions that facilitate students' understanding or situations where administrators were not included in a particular decision, which could seriously jeopardize students' learning.

In sum, this section has shown that challenges related to information and communication, supply of services, materials and equipment and participation of administrators in decision-making are presently affecting the performance of administrators in terms of teaching and learning at the Study Centres. However, tutors and students were interacting very well with ample opportunity for students to improve their performance academically. The interview data support previous findings of Sokano (2017); Knowles (1984) that there are challenges that affect distance learners which managers need to devote adequate attention to.

Research Question Five: What is the relationship between challenges Distance Education Administrators face and the performance of their functions in the UEW?

Table-7. Correlations (Challenges Vs Performance)

		Challenges	Performance
Challenges	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.722**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	25	25
Performance	Pearson Correlation	.722**	1.000.
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	25	25

Where N= Number of Respondents;
**=Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)
Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) was used. The result is summarized in Tables 7.

4.1. Relationship between Challenges and Performance

The Pearson Correlation Coefficient was between 'Challenges and performance'. Results shown in Table 7 revealed a correlation coefficient (r) of .722 ($p \leq .005$) which is strong and positive. This means the coefficient (r) showed a high level of relatedness to administrators' performance. In essence, the lesser the challenges administrators had to face, the higher their level of commitment with concomitant improvement in performance. In other words, when challenges are numerous and overwhelming, such as those enumerated above, they often results toless motivated and ill-performing administrators.

This finding is in consonance with the expressions of Aja-Okorie (2010) that when challenges are overwhelming or numerous they tend to lower administrators' productivity especially their ability to gain the respect and trust of the student body. In their study, Owusu-Mensah *et al.* (2015) posit that the role of the administrator is key to the overall performance of an institution or study centre, hence, when there are several challenges to overcome, it divides the attention of the administration in relation to students' achievement academically and in the long run affect administrators output in terms of high-quality education and improvement in students' academic achievement.

4.2. Hypothesis Testing

H$_0$: There is no significant relationship between challenges Distance Education Administrators face and their performance.

H$_1$: There is a significant relationship between challenges Distance Education Administrators face and their performance.

The essence of this hypothesis was to ascertain whether the relationship between distance education administrators' performance and the challenges they faced during the course of discharging their onerous duties

was statistically significant. First, descriptive statistics was usedto know the extent of relationship and secondly, independent sample t-test was used to ascertain its significance. Result of the test is summarized in Tables 8 and 9.

Table-8. Group Statistics

Administrative role	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Challenges	25	4.3451	1.4324	0.6236
Performance	25	4.2625	1.5245	0.5443

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Table 8 shows the influence of challenges on administrative roles (*M*= 4.3451, *SD*=1.4324) as well as on the performance of administrative roles (*M*=4.2625 *SD*= 1.5245). It becomes obvious from the results that challenges faced by administrators during the course of carrying out administrative roles had a higher mean as far as administrators' performance was concerned. However, it is important to find out whether this difference has any statistical significance and Table 8 presents the results of the t-test.

Table-9. Results of Independent Samples T-test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variance		t-test for Equality of Means							
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. 2-tail	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	95% Interval Difference	Confidence of the	
								Lower	Upper	
Equal variances assumed	2.9	.05	1.80	101	.026	3.82	2.71	.072	10.60	
Equal variances not assumed			1.79	47.8	.055	3.82	3.03	-.272	11.11	

P<.05 (Significant difference)
Source: Field Survey 2017

From Table 9, it is clear that the mean of challenges faced by administrators (*M*= 4.3451, *SD*=1.4324) and the mean of administrators' performance (*M*=4.2625, *SD*= 1.5245) showed that the difference was statistically significant (*t*=1.8, *p*=.026). Therefore, because p<.05, the null hypothesis was rejected and it was concluded that there was a statistically significant effect of challenges on the performance of administrators.

This result authenticates the findings of Sokano (2017) that such challenges are numerous and they interfere with administrative roles, they limit administrators' performance and students' learning experience and achievement often diminished. Also, Tait (2003) asserted that when administrators face the challenge of lack of feedback from other stakeholders of education, especially in the distance education programme, it lowers the performance of administrators especially in support services and improvement of students' learning experience. This finding was inconsistent with the underlying principle of Knowles (1980) theory of learning that feedback is important, in fact, it is an integral facet in distance education.

4.3. Conclusions and Implications for Adult Education and Planning

Based on the findings of the study, it was revealed that the administrators were qualified and highly equipped for their various responsibilities and performed their roles well when the challenges were less. However, they performed less when the challenges were more. It was shown that they possessed requisite skills that could steer DE programme forward towards the delivery of uninterrupted and high-quality education. The study also showed

that several challenges such as ineffective communication among stakeholders and delay or insufficient supply of course materials were mitigating administrators' performance though they received pre-service training on administrative tasks. The study also revealed, along with corroborative evidence that most of the challenges occurred on several occasions despite their effort at alerting study centre coordinators and other stakeholders. The investigation also revealed that these challenges are currently exacting negative impact on administrator's roles and their overall performance which could jeopardize the influx of students to UEW DE programme due to poor services and ineffective arrangement for delivery of high-quality education.

The overall effects of these findings, especially in terms of the challenges, provide justification for the inclusion of adult education principles in the training of managers of distance education programmes. Implicitly, the pre-service orientation for administrators and study centre coordinators should be executed by persons versed in the theories, principles and administration of adult education. If these challenges are left unattended they may lead to the low patronage of DE, lack of motivation and low performance of Study Centres Administrators in the performance of the roles and functions.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the emerging results from in-depth and investigative inquiry of this study, the following recommendations are appropriate:

1. The administrators were given pre-service orientation and training before being posted to study centre offices, Stakeholders of DE programme should continue to organize intermittent training and professional development for administrators but the facilitators for these training sessions should have background knowledge in adult education and administration.

2. In view of the findings of the study that there was confusion of roles between study centre coordinators and administrators due to ineffective communication, the researchers recommend that stakeholders of DE programme including IEDE should properly outline the roles of coordinators and administrators by means of workshops on channel of communication to be organised by IEDE so as to avoid duplication of efforts.

3. Considering the result of the study that issues creating challenges for administrators were very frequent without much attention given to them, the researchers recommend that stakeholders of DE Programme and IEDE should resolve logistic issues so that the frequent occurrence of insufficient supply of textbooks, materials and equipment are resolved so as to improve students' learning experience and administrators' confidence in DE programme arrangements.

4. In view of the findings of the study that course material delayed or they were not enough for students, and lack of maintenance culture especially in relation to ICT infrastructure, the researchers recommend that provisions, replacement and maintenance of ICT infrastructure and other relevant equipment that will contribute to the smooth running of each Study Centres should be installed so that both the tutors and students can enjoy high-quality teaching and learning sessions.

5. Based on the results of the study that administrators have challenges regarding decision-making with dire consequences on student learning experience, the researchers recommend that stakeholders in DE programme and IEDE should strive to give due consideration to administrators in terms of practical recommendation or suggestions they bring to fore regarding how their Study Centres can function smoothly so as to improve their performance and increase students' learning experience.

6. In view of the findings of the study that administrators faced several challenges, the researchers recommend that the numerous challenges faced by administrators should be carefully considered by stakeholders in DE programme and IEDE so as to reduce their occurrence and the negative impact on administrators.

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