

ONLINE REGISTRATION CHALLENGES FACED BY OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNERS OF NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF ENUGU STUDY CENTRE

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Abstract

The introduction of internet has revolutionized the education sector. This is attested to by the fact that majority of institutions of higher learning in Nigeria are embracing online registration system. The study focused on the online registration challenges faced by Distance Learners of National Open University of Nigeria, NOUN, Enugu Study Centre. A descriptive survey design was adopted. A population of 131 students was drawn through accidental sampling method. Copies of a Structured questionnaire titled Online Registration Challenges faced by Open and Distance Learners (ORCFODL) were administered to students of NOUN. The data obtained from the students were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The findings are that main online registration challenges are lack of internet service, computer illiteracy, high cost of internet services, network problems, insufficient power supply and delay in posting of money from the bank to student e-wallet and variations in course codes and course titles. Recommendations were made, including that NOUN management should organize a special practical orientation for fresh students at the point of admission on online course registration procedures.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has changed the way people go about their daily activities, in education, banking, marketing etc. for instance, in Education,

students' no longer pay for services manually because as they do their cash lodgment in the bank, their e-wallets are credited immediately. Online registrations and payments (mobile banking, Point of Sale (POS), Automatic Teller Machine (ATM), etc) are made possible through the use of ICT. The role of ICT in tertiary education is expanding and changing (Ailken, 2007). Before now, most activities which were done manually like filling of forms by students are now in most institutions carried out through online. This no doubt has a lot of benefits but with striking challenges. These challenges if not checked, will cause more harm than good in our education sector.

One is not regarded as a bonafide student of any institution without passing through the registration processes. It is during this registration that students witness some challenges especially the online as is practiced in NOUN. These challenges no doubt frustrate and demoralize the students. The effects of these challenges experienced by NOUN students with respect to Enugu Study Centre include: inability of the students' to register their courses as soon as they pay their fees at the bank, students' not being able to see their results after the release of result by Directorate of Examination and Assessment (DEA), wrong course registration by students and incorrect data entry by students.

NOUN is an ICT driven institution with 63 study centres spread across the nation.

It has a student population of over one hundred and twenty thousand (120,000). NOUN currently offers over 50 programmes and 750 courses which are run at certificate, diploma and degree levels. NOUN focuses on lifelong learning and online education. The study centres are where the academic activities are carried out. NOUN, Enugu Study Centre is one of NOUN Study Centres located at the South –Eastern part of Nigeria. Students are meant to register through their desired study centres and the students' data collated centrally. Students report their challenges to the study centre where they register. The study centres in turn report the challenges faced by these students to the headquarters.

This study explores the causes of these challenges faced by students during online registration. Online registration is an electronic version of manual registration. Students registration which are hitherto carried out in most institutions through manual filling and signing of forms are now in many ICT driven institutions done through the internet. Oladunjoye & Omemu (2013) opined that online registration system allows students, through the internet to register, drop or add courses within the registration period. The students are expected to go into a cyber café or other available internet facilities and log in to the school website and register courses for the semester/session. They submit at the end of such registration and all these are collated into the registration file which can easily be assessed by the management. Such registrations are often online within a period of time. As soon as such sites are blocked or closed, registration becomes impossible and such defaulting students may have to suspend studies for that semester/session. Akinkoye (2008) observed that in most higher institutions of higher learning in Nigeria, online course registration are often contracted to vendors who litter the campus with assorted laptops and modem for brisk business. As a result of the scramble, serious errors are made such as wrong spelling of names, irregular

entries, wrong course registration etc are made. He noted that in an ideal situation, the students are to register their courses by themselves even at the comfort of their homes. The worst is that most of the students are too careless to crosscheck data entered for them by these cyber vendors before submission. In most cases, the course registered for might not be the required course by the students. Some go to the extent of registering for the courses without registering for the examination. The resultant effect is that they will not be allowed to sit for the examination and those who happen to sit for the examination will end up not seeing their results. Hence the issue of missing results.

Gbola (2010) assessed that online/e-registration include programmes which contain a detailed information of the students since first date of enrolment and up to the graduation day. The registration includes all students' information and procedures required by the students during study semesters. For one to be recognized as a bonafide student of any institution, such a person must go through the registration procedures stipulated by the institution. He added that online registration allows institutions to focus less on processing paper work and more on what matters most – meeting the educational needs of their students by having a cost – efficient and secure registration process that allows for easy access to students files.

Odero & Okoko (2013) supported Gbola that online registration emerged because of problems associated with manual handling of registration and students records. Such problems according to them include mismanagement of students' academic records, mismanagement of courses registered for, among others. Manual registration brings about wear and tear during file handling and in most cases data are lost. This equally makes data sharing very difficult and reproduction cost is always very high. It is in view of these and

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other reasons that online registration was welcomed as a remedy to obsolete manual registration. However, even with the advent of online registration, there still exist some challenges which this paper has addressed with respect to National Open University of Nigeria, Enugu Study Centre.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to find out the challenges encountered by NOUN students during online registration. Specifically the study did the following:

1. Ascertained the level of computer literacy of NOUN students'. two and table three were equally based on four point Likert scale of Strongly Agree = 4 Agree =3 Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1. Mean and Standard Deviation were used to answer the research questions. Any mean score of 2.50 and above are accepted while those below 2.50 are rejected. The questionnaire was validated by two NOUN course facilitators who specialized in Measurement and Evaluation. Their comments, observations and corrections guided the researcher in producing the final copy used to collect data for the study.

To determine the reliability of the instrument, it was administered on 10 students who would not be included in the sample size. Data generated from the 10 students were analysed using Cronbach Alpha. A reliability index of .76 was obtained. This indicates that the instrument was reliable.

2. Found out the challenges NOUN students faced in making payment for their course registration.
3. Ascertained the challenges NOUN students experienced in registering their courses.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent are NOUN students' computer literate?
2. What challenges do NOUN students' face in making payment for their course registration?
3. What challenges do NOUN students' experience in registering their courses?

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study is descriptive survey. The population of the study consists of all NOUN students' of Enugu Study Centre. The population of Enugu Study Centre as at April, 2015 is thirteen thousand and ninety seven (13,097) students. (*Administrative Portal, NOUN, Enugu 2015*). One hundred and thirty one (131) students were selected from Enugu Study Centre using accidental sampling technique since the students do not come to the centre regularly. A structured questionnaire developed by the researcher titled Online Registration Challenges faced by Open and Distance Learners (ORCFODL) was used to collect data for the study. 131 copies of the questionnaire were administered on the respondents by the researcher who was assisted by four trained research assistants. The questionnaire consists of three tables with twenty one (21) items. The response format for the items in table one was based on four point Likert scale of Very Great Extent = 4, Great Extent = 3, Low Extent = 2, Very Low Extent = 1. The response format for items in table two and table three were equally based on four point Likert scale of Strongly Agree = 4 Agree =3 Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1. Mean and Standard Deviation were used to answer the research questions. Any mean score of 2.50 and above are accepted while those below 2.50 are rejected. The questionnaire was validated by two NOUN

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Data Analysis & Discussion of Findings

Table 1: Extent Level to which NOUN students' are computer literate

S/N	To what extent are you proficient?	VE 4	GE 3	LE 2	VLE 1	\bar{X}	SD	DECISION
1	Booting/starting of computer	61 244	42 12 6	16 32	12 12	3.1 6	0.9 6	GE
2	Typing accurately	33 132	50 15 0	38 76	10 10	3.0 9	0.7 4	GE
3	Use of Ms Word	41 164	38 11	29 58	23 23	2.7 4	1.0 8	GE
4	Use of Ms Excel	21 84	37 11 1	46 92	27 27	2.3 9	0.9 8	LE
5	Downloading of document from the internet	50 200	33 99	18 36	30 30	2.7 8	1.1 8	GE
6	Use of search engine	46 184	40 12 0	19 38	26 26	2.8 0	1.1 2	GE
7	Printing of document	55 220	33 99	23 46	20 20	2.9 3	1.1 0	GE
8	Sending messages through e-mail	66 264	19 57	21 42	25 25	2.9 6	1.1 9	GE
9	Use of spell check	43 172	30 90	28 56	30 30	2.6 5	1.1 6	GE
10	Editing/formatting tools	29 116	27 81	41 82	34 34	2.3 8	1.0 9	LE
	Grand Mean					2.7 8		GE

Data in table 1 shows that all respondents from NOUN, Enugu Study Centre are proficient in booting/starting of computer, typing accurately, use of MS Word, downloading from internet, use of search engine, printing of document, sending of messages through e-mail

and use of spell check. They recorded a mean score of 3.16, 3.09, 2.74, 2.78, 2.80, 2.93, 2.96, and 2.65 respectively. From the data collated, it was observed that the respondents are not proficient in the use of Ms Excel and Editing tools with a mean score of 2.39 and 2.38 respectively. The table also shows that the Standard Deviation of the respondents scores are low, which signifying that they are closely clustered around the mean. The respondents recorded a grand mean of 2.78 (GE).

From the decision rule, the answer to research question one is that most NOUN students' in Enugu Study Centre are proficient to great extent in the use of computer expect for some technical packages like MS Excel and use of editing tools which in most cases, are not used frequently.

Table 2: Challenges NOUN Students' Face in Making Payment for their Course Registration

S/N	Do you regard the following as a challenge?	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	\bar{X}	SD	DECISION
11	Poor network	57 228	48 144	19 38	7 7	3.1 8	0.87	A
12	Inability of the bank to credit your e-wallet	28 112	24 72	55 110	24 24	2.4 2	1.02	D
13	Inability to pay in enough money into your e-wallet	31 124	31 93	43 86	26 26	2.5 1	1.06	A
	Grand Mean					2.7 0		

Data from table 2 reveals that NOUN students face the challenge of poor network, and inability to pay in enough money into their e-wallet with a mean score of 3.18 and 2.51 respectively. While the respondents, disagreed to inability of the bank to credit their e-wallet with a mean score of 2.42. The Standard Deviation of table two is low which signifying that their responses are homogenous. The respondents recorded a grand mean score is 2.70 (GE).

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From the decision rule, the answer to research question two is that NOUN students faced the challenge of poor network and inability to pay enough money into their e-wallet during their course registration.

three is that NOUN students agree that they experience challenges while registering their courses online.

Table 3: Challenges NOUN Students' Experience in Registering their Courses Online

S/N	What challenges do NOUN students' encounter during online registration?	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	\bar{X}	SD	DECISION
14	Variation in course code and title	37 148	31 93	40 80	23 23	2.62	1.07	A
15	Epileptic Power Supply	45 180	43 12 9	32 64	11 11	2.93	0.96	A
16	Financial constraints	46 184	49 14 7	24 48	12 12	2.98	0.95	A
17	Internet connectivity	47 188	55 16 5	25 50	4 4	3.10	0.81	A
18	Slow down of website	47 204	60 19 2	19 46	9 9	3.13	0.91	A
19	Invalid matric numbers	16 64	9 27	47 94	59 59	1.86	0.99	D
20	Inability to drop courses registered in error	50 200	29 87	34 68	18 18	2.84	1.08	A
21	Lack of frequent updating of portal	44 176	31 93	25 82	31 31	2.67	1.17	A
	Grand Mean					2.76		

From the data collated, it shows that the challenges NOUN students' encounter during online registration include: variation in code and title, epileptic power supply, financial constraints, internet connectivity, slow down of website, inability to drop courses registered in error and lack of frequent updating of portal. The respondents agreed with a mean score of 2.62, 2.93, 2.98, 3.10, 3.13, 2.84 and 2.67 respectively. The respondents however, disagreed that they do have problem of invalid matriculation number with a mean score of 1.86. The table shows that the Standard Deviation of the respondents score are low. Signify that they are closely clustered around the mean. The grand mean is 2.76. From the decision rule, the answer to research question

Discussion of Findings

Benwari & Oladunjoye (2014), noted that computer technology has become so important that students who do not have access to computers and internet are likely to get further behind their peers who do have such access. They further noted that many examinations in Nigeria such as NECO, WAEC and JAMB are conducted using the computer technology of which NOUN is one of them because they conduct e-examinations for their 100 level and 200 level students.

Poor network could be attributed to overloading of bandwidth allocated to Internet Service Providers (ISP). Students' inability to pay enough money into their e-wallet could be as a result, that majority of NOUN students' are youth and most of them are not gainfully employed. Due to financial constraints, majority of the students' find it difficult to register their courses before the closing of the portal.

Variation in course codes and titles lead to wrong course registration during examination. Most times students are not aware of changes in their course codes and titles. Due to the ignorance of checking the registrable courses before proceeding to register their courses for the semester, majority of them end up registering courses with a wrong code. The resultant effect is that during the release of results by the Directorate of Examination and Assessment (DEA), the directorate finds it difficult to release their result because they registered their courses with wrong course codes. These problems, lead to missing result which is a bad tooth that does the University no good. The issues of missing results project the University in a bad light.

Courses that are registered in error need to be dropped so that the students' money gets refunded in their e-wallet. The process of dropping a course is that the student concerned goes to their study centre and requests for dropping of courses wrongly registered. The process is not so easily honoured because once the student has been issued with a course material, he/she will invariably be denied of such course dropping.

Adepoju, (2015) in Sadiq, Momodu & Aladejuelo, (2008) opined that epileptic power supply in the country is a major challenge in the usage of internet application on which online registration depends. Majority of students' access their portal by visiting public internet centres popularly known as cybercafé. The slow speed of servers that are used by these cyber vendors are equally worrisome. This is often worst during the peak periods of course registration and exam registration. Due to the economic situation of the country not many people can afford internet services. As a result, most students end up patronizing the cybercafés. This requires transportation from one place to another as well as payment for internet usage. In an ideal situation, students' are supposed to register their courses at the comfort of their homes. The case is obviously different in a developing country like Nigeria.

From the study, lack of frequent updates of website is another major challenge. Students who made incorrect entry like mistake in their date of birth or name during online registration are often requested to write a letter to the headquarters so as to effect the changes. The resultant effect is that in most cases, such requests are hardly honoured. This is very discouraging as they kept on making such request over and over again. In a similar study by Adepoju (2015), on the Challenge of Students' Online Registration System, opined that website should be updated from time to time once the complaints are made known to the authority. He

however observed that this is not often the case as the students keep on making the same complaints over and over again.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Online registration is a welcome relief as against manual registration. The benefits cannot be over emphasized. However, the results from this study show that students' are still facing many challenges during the online registration. In order to ameliorate these challenges, the author hereby recommends the following:

1. Since NOUN is an ICT driven institution, the Management should organize a special practical orientation for fresh students at the point of admission on online course registration procedures. Currently, students engage the services of cyber vendors who do these online registrations for them. The most unfortunate aspect of it is that these cyber vendors have little or no knowledge about NOUN online registration procedures.
2. Notice on update from the University should be posted to student mobile devices (phones) through text messages. This is because majority of students' do not have easy access to internet services unlike their counterparts in the developed countries.
3. More features should be added to the students' portal to enable them drop courses registered in error.
4. Government should support the ODL system by providing steady power supply. This will go a long way in advancing the economy of the country.
5. NOUN management should partner with companies that sell computers to subsidize

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laptops at an affordable rate to enable students to purchase them.

6. Accessing of internet services in Nigeria is still costly. Government should subsidize internet subscription for higher institutions of learning.

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