

# PERCEPTIONS OF THE CONVENIENCE OF OBTAINING THE NIGERIA CERTIFICATE IN EDUCATION (NCE) THROUGH DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA

*James O. Ezema Ph.D*

## **Abstract**

The study investigated perceptions of the convenience of obtaining the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) through distance education programme in Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design employing stratified random sampling was used to sample 588 NTI-NCE distance learners from Ebonyi and Enugu States. One research question and one hypothesis guided the study. Questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire was face validated by experts in the field of education. Reliability co-efficient of 0.77 was obtained using cronbach alpha method of determining internal consistency of instrument. The research question was answered using mean and standard deviation while the hypothesis was analyzed using t-test statistic. The research revealed that the NTI-NCE programme was found to be convenient. Significant difference does not exist between the mean perception scores of NTI-NCE students in Ebonyi state and those in Enugu state regarding the convenience of the NTI programme. Recommendations were made among others that the use of multi-media approach in course delivery should be encouraged.

**Keywords:** Perception, Convenience and Distance Education.

Distance learning technologies can provide convenient locations for both students and instructors. Many of the technologies, such as the internet, videotape, and telephone, are easily accessed at home. Others such as desktop videoconferencing can be distributed from a single point (such as university) to multiple

remote sites (such as school). Satellite transmissions can be viewed at specified sites, or the transmissions can be videotaped for late viewing at home or school. Many forms of distance learning provide students the option to participate whenever they wish, on an individualized basis. For example, some students may want to review videotape in the middle of the night or read their e-mail during early morning hours. In addition one student may wish to spend so many minutes reviewing a website, while another spends an hour.

Not only is distance learning convenient, it is also effective. Several research studies have found that distance learning is equally or more effective than traditional instruction when the method and technologies used are appropriate to the instructional tasks, when there is student – student interaction, and when there is timely teacher – to – student feedback (Moore & Thompson, 2010, Verdium & Clark, 2011). A study conducted at California State University showed that students, who participated in web-based course, achieved significantly higher test scores (Schuttle, 2008).

Many forms of distance learning involve little or no cost. For example, over 99% of the homes in the United States have televisions and 65% are connected to a cable – TV service (Casey, Dager & Magel, 2008). For these homes, it is relatively easy for students to watch videotape or a public broadcast television show. In addition, almost all homes have access to a telephone, enabling the use of voicemail and audio conferencing.

One of the benefits of distance learning is that there is a wide variety of materials that can meet everyone's learning preference – at least part of the time. For example, some students learn from visual stimuli, such as video, and others learn best by listening or interacting with a computer programme. If distance learning courses are well designed, they will likely offer learners a wide range of choices, thereby providing optimal combinations of interaction and media.

Contrary to popular opinion, distance learning courses can offer increased interactions with students. In particular, introverted students who are too shy to ask questions in class will often “open up” when provided the opportunity to interact via e-mail or other individualized means (Franklin, Yoakam & Warren, 2006). Through the increased interactions, teachers can better meet individual students' needs.

Educational inequity is a major issue in this and other countries. Rural schools often have less contact with educational trends, fewer qualified teachers, and more great potential for alleviating these issues and have been employed very effectively in Canada and Australia – two countries with geographically diverse student populations.

Distance learning programmes are increasingly developing opportunity that more and more people are taking advantage of. Over the next few years there will be over 2.3 million Nigerian students taking distance learning courses. The convenience and accessibility of receiving education and training is something that a great deal of Nigerian and worldwide population have been waiting for and anyone who has internet access is capable of receiving it.

While student-instructor, face-to-face helps and interaction with other learners may seem the portion missing from distance learning programmes; most courses taken online have readily available and easily accessible aid to accompany the convenience of online curriculum.

They provide an education and training alternative in lieu of the traditional brick and mortar classroom, including the usual discussion and communication requirements comparable to that of the in-person interactive setting of classroom learning.

The vast demand to have an expanded educational background is on the rise and will only escalate with time; resulting in congested classroom environments and a profound consequential reduction in the quality and influence of the education one receives while in attendance. Students have been conducted on the outcome of successful achievement between distance learners, versus classroom attending students, and revealed over and over that in the final results of academic level variation there were “no significant differences”, they are just “effective”, and they do “just as well”.

This equally credible opportunity of education seems the answer to the individual who is currently working, a stay at home parent or just looking to further their knowledge scholastically or otherwise with the least disruption in their current life while a certain amount of work load and time management skills, maturity and technology proficiency is required to take on courses; most who are seeking to advance their education are seeking to advance their education are equipped, readily prepared for the change.

With the countless options of online learning programmes, selecting the course that is credible and appropriate for you is crucial. The intimation a majority face when choosing a distance learning programme, is that there are an abundance of misleading online programmes claiming success and guarantying achievements with the conclusion of the curriculum offered. The most essential challenge of choosing online course is the legitimacy that comes by way of completion, and how transferable it is on any school you may wish to transfer to thereafter.

To promote learning, you will want to structure online activities to encourage the kind of student interactions and active learning that fosters deep learning. Innovations like videoconferencing and automated online education will make it possible to improve quality through the use of “star” professors while cutting cost of delivery. Students in virtual classrooms need no new parking structures. What is more, courses can be packaged and marketed, generating a continuous revenue stream without further investment.

In open and distance learning system, videoconferencing allows a professor to address a large number of students in remote locations. Live videoconferencing can be supported by a two-way videoconferencing. The physical presence of teachers and students can be served without expanding existing campuses (UNESCO, 2008).

Studies have found that automation offers a more radical solution with large startup costs but promising far greater savings in the long run. Lewis (2008) has found that in an automated system, the teacher’s presence in the classroom is reproduced on CD ROM or made available over the internet. He went further to state that exciting computer based graphical materials could replace dull textbooks. He also concluded that powerful programmes for textual analysis could grade even easy tests. Lewis (2008) also found that the key to automation is to separate out informational “content” from “process”. According to him, a small number of well paid content “experts” will work as “star” performers, while the delivery process is deskilled so that inexperienced tutors can handle interaction with students. Open and distance learning offers the students to learn as much if not more, and they will be free to study at their own pace.

The theoretical basis on which instructional models are based affects not only the way in which information is communicated to the student, but also the way in which the student

makes sense and constructs new knowledge from the information which is presented. Currently, there are two opposing views which impact instructional design: symbol-processing and situated cognition (Bredo, 2011).

Until recently, the dormant view has been the traditional, information processing approach, based on the concept of computer performing formal operations on symbols (Seaman, 2011). The key concept is that the teacher can transmit a fixed body of information to students via an external representation. She presents an abstract idea as a concrete image to the learner via a medium. The learner in turn perceives, decodes and stores it. Horton (2008) modifies this approach by adding two additional factors: the student’s context (environment, current situation, and other sensory input) and mind (memories, associations, emotions, inference and reasoning, curiosity and interest) to the presentation. The learner then develops his own image and uses it to construct new knowledge, in context, based on his own prior knowledge and abilities.

The alternative approach is based on constructivist principles, in which a learner actively constructs an internal representation of knowledge by interacting with the material to be learned. This is the basis for both situated cognition (Streibel, 2012) and problem-based learning (Savey & Duffy, 2010). According to this view point, both social and physical interaction enters into both the definition of a problem and the construction of its solution.

Neither the information to be learned, nor its symbolic description, is specified outside the process of inquiry and the conclusions that emerge from that process. Prawat and Floden (2011) state that, to implement construction in a lesson, one must shift one’s focus away from the traditional transition model to one, which is much more complex, interactive and evolving.

Though these two theories are totally different in nature, effective designers fully start with empirical knowledge: objects, events and practices, which mirror the everyday environment of their designated learners. Then with firm theoretical grounding, they develop a presentation, which enables learners to construct appropriate new knowledge by interacting with the institution. To quote the AI researcher, Herbert A. Simon, "Human beings are at their best when they interact with the real world best when they interact with the real world and draw lessons from the bumps and bruises they get" (Simon, 2010).

Schlosser and Anderson (2010) refer to Desmond Keagern's theory of distance education, in which the distance learning systems must artificially recreate the teaching-learning interaction and re-integrate it back into the instructional process. And other evidences of convenience of learning at a distance have been highlights in the review of literature to support this work.

Today, the convenience of not being time-bound has become a more important factor. Distance learning students' lead busy lives and they need to be able to fit their coursework into their schedules when it is convenient for them. Students often time focus on the convenience of DE as opposed to the special nature of this type of study. DE courses are more time consuming and more demanding than traditional courses. Thus, many students drop DE course because of the same reason they enrolled in them, busy lifestyles. It is therefore, important for institutions to provide students with resources that will help them decide if DE courses are right for them (Smith, 2011). Convenience has been identified as one of the reasons why majority of adults choose to study and further their educational career and satisfy their increasing demand for new on the job skills and knowledge. Many distance learning programmes are designed

bearing in mind that adults lead busy lifestyle and so convenience is the guide for programming.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate students' perception of the NTI-NCE distance education programme in Ebonyi and Enugu States of Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Investigate the perceptions of the NTI-NCE distance learners in Ebonyi and Enugu States on the convenience of the NTI-NCE distance learning system.

### **Research Question**

The following research question guided the study

1. What is the mean perception response of NTI-NCE distance learners in Ebonyi and Enugu States with regards to the convenience of NTI programme?

### **Hypothesis**

The following hypothesis, tested at .5 level of significance guided this study.

1. There is no significant difference between the mean perception responses of NTI-NCE students in Ebonyi state and their counterparts in Enugu State with regards to the convenience of NTI programme.

### **Research Method**

The design of the study was survey. This was because the study was concentrated on discussing the events as they were without any interference on what was observed. The population for the study was 5877 students currently enrolled at the centres in the two states.

The instrument for data collection was a 7 itemed four point scale response option questionnaire, with a response format of

strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) and numerical values of 4, 3, 2, 1 respectively. The instrument was validated by two experts in the field of education, one from measurement and evaluation and the other from distance education. Based on their comments, some items were reconstructed. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach alpha formula and internal consistency reliability co-efficient of 0.77 was obtained. The questionnaire was administered on the respondents at their study centres, with the help of trained research assistants.

The research question was analyzed using mean and standard deviation, while the hypothesis was tested using t-test statistic at .5 level of significance. The decision rule for answering the research question was arrived at by finding the average of four point scale  $4+3+2+1 = 10/4 = 2.50$ . Therefore, the item with 2.50 and above was accepted which will show that the learners generally perceived the NTI distance education programme to be convenient. In respect of the hypothesis, where the calculated t – value was equal or greater than the critical value of t, the null hypothesis was not accepted, but if less than the critical value, it was accepted.

### Results

The results of data analysis were presented in tables according to the research question and hypothesis.

#### Research Question

What are the mean perception responses of NTI-NCE distance learners in Ebonyi and Enugu States with regards to the convenience of NTI programme?

**Table 1: Perception of NTI-NCE Distance Learners on the Convenience of NTI Programme**

S/N	Items	X	SD	Decision
1.	Distance learning provides flexibility, effectiveness and efficiency	2.088	1.02	Agree
2.	Distance learning technologies provide convenient locations for both students and instructors.	2.87	1.02	Agree
3.	Transmission can be videotaped for later viewing at home or school.	3.06	0.95	Agree
4.	The distance learning system provides students the opportunity of participation on individual basis	3.10	0.93	Agree
5.	There is a variety of materials that can meet everyone's learning preference	2.96	1.02	Agree
6.	Distance learning courses can offer increased interaction with students	3.02	0.97	Agree
7.	Distance learning provides many people opportunities for continuing education	3.36	0.71	Agree
8.	Grand mean	3.04	0.89	Agree

The table shows that a grand mean of 3.04 was obtained. This is an indication that the learners generally perceived the NTI programme as convenient.

### Hypothesis

There is no significance difference between the mean perception responses of NTI-NCE students in Ebonyi state and those of their counterparts in Enugu State with regards to the convenience of NTI programme.

**Table 2: t-test of difference between the mean response of NTI-NCE students in Ebonyi State and those of their counterparts in Enugu State with regards to the convenience of NTI programme.**

State	N	SD	DF	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Enugu	353	2.98	0.85	-1.56	1.96	Do not reject HO
Ebonyi	235	3.10	0.96	-1.56	1.96	

The table shows that the calculated t-value is -1.56 and the critical value of t is 1.96. Since the calculated value of t is less than the critical value of t, the null hypothesis was not rejected. This means that there is no significant difference between the mean perception responses of NTI-NCE students in Ebonyi State and those of their counterparts in Enugu State

with regards to the convenience of NTI programme.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings from the research question revealed that the respondents generally perceived the NTI programme as convenient. This finding is in agreement with Moore and Thompson (2010) and Verdium and Clark (2011) that not only is distance learning convenient, it is equally more effective than traditional instruction when the method and technologies used are appropriate to the instructional tasks.

This agrees that through the use of multimedia approach to distance education, it is effective in removing the barriers of time and space as constraints on communication. The issue of learner support has received wide attention in distance education. In addition to student support which enhances student-students convenience in learning at a distance, several ethical and administrative issues related to students are repeated in many distance education literature.

The result from the null hypothesis tested at .05 level of significance showed that significant difference does not exist between mean perception responses of NTI-NCE. Students in Ebonyi State and those of their counterparts in Enugu State with regards to the convenience of NTI programme. This finding may be as a result of some factors of distance education which is that the theoretical basis on which instructional models is based affects not only the way in which information is communicated to the student, but also the way in which the student makes sense and constructs new knowledge from the information which is presented (Bredo, 2011).

Distance learning systems should be convenient because there is a wide variety of materials that can meet everyone's learning preference – at least part of the time. For example, some students learn from visual stimuli such as video, and others learn best by listening

or interaction with a computer programme. This is usually supported by the fact that more and more people are taking advantage of distance education in completing and continuing their educational career while working as adults etc. This is so because there are new countless variations of course offerings for Bachelor, Master and Doctoral degree programmes as well as a non-credit course for adult learners and others who wish to pursue a specific skill or interest.

### **Conclusion**

The findings show that the NTI-NCE students in Ebonyi State and those of their counterparts in Enugu State indicated that the NTI programme is convenient. It also shows that the NTI distance education programme provides opportunities for working adults to pursue further and continuing educational programmes while remaining on their jobs.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Distance education programmes should be learner centred.
2. The use of multi-media approach in course delivery through the most recent media such as computer, radio, TV or the internet or the world wide web (www) are advocated.
3. The establishment of more Open and Distance learning (ODL) institutions through government – private partnership arrangements to provide more access to education for working adults are advocated.

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**James O. Ezema Ph.D**  
Department of Educational Foundations,  
Enugu State University of Science and  
Technology, Agbani