Factors Affecting The Quick Completion Of Project Research By Bachelor Of Education (B.Ed) Students Of Distance Learning In Alvan Ikoku Federal College Of Education Owerri, Nigeria

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Abstract.

This research work reports the outcome of a primary quantitative investigation into the factors responsible for the quick completion of project research by distance learners students at Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education Owerri, Nigeria. The study sets out to determine the reasons why many distance learners fail to complete their project research after the course work. Using a structured questionnaire designed on a five –point likert type scale, the researcher captured the opinions of some distance learners about the factors affecting the quick completion of their project research. The analysis of the work was done using simple percentages and it was found that many of the respondents had difficulty with statistical analysis while some others contributed the major challenges facing them. The study concluded with some recommendations on how the administration of research work   by distance learners can be improved.

Keywords: distance learning, project research completion, bachelor, education, Alvan Ikoku, Nigeria.

1.0 Introduction.

In all educational programmes, the submission of an original essay commonly referred to as project research work is an essential component of the requirements for the fulfillment of the award of a degree. Project research works are designed to be equivalent of a 4- credit hour of taught course. In the preparation of project reports, students are expected to identify a suitable research problem worthy of investigation from a chosen field. The choice of research area and formulations of a suitable problem are the most difficult task confronting research students. This is due to the fact that the identified problem is expected to meet the tripartite conditionality's of the significance, originality and feasibility. In addition to these conditionality's students writing project reports are required to consider whatever problems they identify vis - a – vis individual competence and professional experience and possible difficulties such as availability of data, financial constraints and limitations of time. Distance learners like many of their conventional counterparts are equally susceptible to these challenges. The submission of project   report at the end of a bachelor of education degree (B.Ed) program is an important component of the course. Participants are required to investigate a selected problem of their choice within the education system and discuss their experiences with their supervisors in other to present a rich and informative report which contributes significantly to the existing body of knowledge in the field. Project researchers are expected to project three kinds of merit that all disciplines value namely, ----- conceptual innovations, methodological rigor and rich substantive content. Distance learners like conventional students while writing the project research reports are confronted with a number of challenges. However the situation of distance learners is deemed as peculiar because they do not have access to all the resources human and material which their counterparts have at their disposal. The isolation of distance learners makes it more difficult for them to interact with their peers/colleagues who may have useful advice on how they can approach their research work. Thus, it is usually a challenging task to complete project research by distance learners. The use of library materials by students depended on the nature of subjects and the availability of relevant materials. Students are found to be making use of local library where it exists. The primary purpose of this study therefore is to investigate the factors that influence positively and negatively the preparation and quick completion of distance learning project research and examine ways in which the supervision of distance learning project research can be improved.

2.0 Objectives of the Study.

This study may prove insignificant in contributing to the underdeveloped area of research related to the academic influences in the area of completion or otherwise of project research by students of Bachelors in Education (B.Ed) in the distance learners capacity. The main significance of this study lies in the fact that no existing studies have explored the factors affecting students completion of project research work. Knowledge and understanding of the

factors affecting students completion of project research work may provide additional insight into the solutions as well as their motivation to keep going while experiencing the double pressure of family and employment constraints and learning from a distance. This study will make a step forward by combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches within one study. The integration will provide a deeper insight into the problems of distance learners by identifying the predicting power of selected internal and external factors contributing to and or impeding students academic success and then exploring participants views regarding the statistical findings in more depth. Methodologically, this study will add to mixed methods research by elaborating such procedural issues of the sequential explanatory design as connecting the qualitative and quantitative data within study and integrating the results of the two sequential phases of study.

3.0   Area of Study.

The study was carried out at Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education Owerri. The population for the study comprised of registered students in 22 departments in the college which formed the sample for this study.

4.0   Instrumentation and Procedure of Administration.

The instrument used consists of a two page questionnaire divided into two sections. Section A relates to details about the personal data of the respondent while the section B sought opinions about the factors that influence quick completion of the distance learning project research and the challenges confronting participants in such programs. The section sought responses to items contained on the section B part of the questionnaire which is divided into a five point scales of "Strongly Agree", "Agree", "Undecided", "Disagree", "Strongly Disagree". An open ended item seeks to identify five major difficulties faced by students in the process of project research writing. The instrument was validated by experts in educational research and statistics and the test-retest reliability of 0.05 was calculated.

5.0   Data Analysis / Presentation.

Only 170 questionnaires were returned to the researcher representing about 77.3% of the response rate. Twenty questionnaires were discounted due to factors such as completion of two different responses to the same item, more than half of the items not responded to and extreme mutilation. Thus, only 150 questionnaires were finally accepted for processing. The sample contained 68 male students and 86 female students.

Table 5.1 represents the frequency tabulation of responses of distance learners at Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education Owerri regarding the factors influencing their completion of project research.

S/N	ITEMS	STRONGLY AGREE (SA)	AGREE (A)	UNDECIDED (U)	DISAGREE (D)	STRONGLY DISAGREE (SD)
1	I had no problem identifying a research topic.	15 (10%)	51 (34%)	8 (5.3%)	31 (20.7%)	45 (30%)
2	My research topic relates to my teaching subject.	79 (52.7%)	38 (25.3%)	------	23 (15.3%)	20 (13.3%)
3	I had no problem getting resources for my work.	12 (8%)	33 (22%)	--------	69 (46%)	36 (24%)
4	My supervisor selected a research topic for me.	44 (29.3%)	21 (14%)	16 (10.6%)	41 (27.3%)	28 (18.7%)
5	My supervisor lives within my geographic vicinity.	13 (8.7%)	8 (5.3%)	38 (25.3%)	25 (16.7%)	66 (44%)
6	I wish I could meet with my supervisor very often.	124 (82.7%)	26 (17.3%)	-----	-----	-----
7	The duration of the research work is too short.	39 (26%)	42 (28%)	24 (15%)	33 (22%)	12 (8%)
8	It is difficult analyzing the research work without assistance from my	91 (60.7%)	27 (18%)	---	32 (21.3)	----

	supervisor.					
9	I had problem selecting a suitable method for data analysis.	87 (58%)	9 (6%)	24 (15%)	23 (15.3%)	7 (4.7%)
10	I always have difficulty with statistical analysis.	68 (45.3%)	54 (36%)	3 (2%)	21 (14%)	4 (2.7%)
11	I prefer to use computer aided analytical tools.	16 (10.7%)	48 (32%)	13 (8.7%)	56 (37.3%)	27 (18%)
12	I have problems getting funds for my research work.	38 (25.3%)	40 (26.7%)	-----	69 (46%)	3 (2%)
13	My supervisor is not interested in the topic I wish to research on.	19 (12.7%)	5 (3.3%)	83 (55.3%)	7 (94.7%)	26 (17.3%)

The study also provided an open ended item which required respondents to state in order of priority five major difficulties that has affected the preparation and completion of their project research reports. 37% of the respondents indicated that "Data Analysis" is the most crucial factor that affected their completing the report; 28% opined that the "Time" allocated for the completion of project rsearch report was too short. 17% and 11% responded that the "funding" and "lack of personal interest in research projects respectively are the major influences that has affected the completion of their project research reports. 8%of the respondents claimed that the "Unavailability of the necessary and relevant research materials have been the factor that affected the completion of their project research. The remaining 4% of the respondent indicated the influencing factor against completion of their project research to issues such as; inability to see their supervisor, supervisors apathy, poor training in research methods and statistical analysis and social commitments.

6.0 Discussion of Findings

The results of the structured items in the questionnaire revealed that a total of 76 respondents representing 50.7% of the sample had no problem identifying their research topics. 117 respondents which make up 78% of the total sample population agreed that their research topic is related to their teaching subjects. A major constraint is the sourcing of research materials which 70% of the respondent claim were difficult to get. 65% of the respondents reported that their supervisor indicated a research topic for them while another 69% replied negative to this. For majority of the respondents the location of their supervisor is far apart from theirs, this being the view of 60.7% of the sample. Predictably, a large proportion of the sample population (82.7%) wishes that they could meet more frequently with their supervisor. There was a generally prevalent perception by 54% of the sample that the period slated for the research work needs to be extended while another 30% opined otherwise. Generally, 78.67% of the respondent found analysis of their research work difficult without assistance from their research supervisor and consequently 64% had difficulty in selecting suitable method for data analysis. This may be due to the report for the items that 81.3% of the sample population always had difficulty with statistical analysis. When asked whether they had a preference for computer aided analytical tools the response was ambivalent as 42.7% agreed while 45.3% disagreed. The response on whether respondents are getting funds for the research work was also ambivalent as 60% agreed and the other 40% disagreed. It was found that 55.3% of the respondents could not state whether or not their supervisor was interested in their research topic while 22% disagreed and the rest agreed.

7.0 Recommendation.

The results of this research work have some major implications and recommendations for the practice of distance education. Many distance students face a lot of difficulty with statistical analysis of their research work and there is need to improve on the process of statistical instruction for them. Supervisors of distance education students need to show greater interest to ensure that they assist their students to complete their project research report. Many distance education students are part-time workers or people who have other social involvements; it is therefore recommended that research project should be a session long course to give the students ample opportunity to undertake the necessary studies for quality report writing. Distance teaching institutions need to ensure that the contract with their instructional facilitators who supervise student's project research stipulates frequent meetings with the students so as to enhance their preparation of the research work.

8.0 Summary and Conclusion.

The results of this study have indicated that research students in distance education generally experience difficulties in completing their research work. While some had difficulty identifying research topic, many had no problem identifying suitable topics. This could be due to the fact that many of the topics identified by the respondents are related to their teaching subjects. The results also showed that supervisors assisted their students in identifying research topics, probably to ensure that they are in the best position to assist them with research materials and statistical analysis of their research. A large proportion of the respondents wish to meet more frequently with their supervisors as indicated in the study. A large proportion of the respondents wish to meet more frequently with their supervisors as indicated in the study probably because of the difficulty in analyzing the statistical component of the research which the study showed that many students found very daunting. The ambivalence in the response on preference for computer aided analytical tools is essential because the understanding of the application of computer aided statistical tool requires as much mental rigor as manual statistical analysis. What is apparent is that many students could not state whether or not their supervisors are interested in their research or they are just fulfilling teaching requirements.

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