The Apprehensions of Providing Distance Education Programmes for Professional Teachers in Ghana

Adewale Aziziyana Berhani
Department of Management Studies Education,
University of Education, Winneba, Kumasi, Ghana

Khadijah Mohd Adeyemi
University of Education, Winneba, Winneba, Ghana

ABSTRACT
Distance education has become an integral part of every tertiary institution in Ghana and has made it possible for those who could not have access to conventional education to receive education close to where they reside. The study sought to examine the prospects of providing distance education to professional teachers studying at UEW, Winneba Study Center. The objectives of the study were to ascertain whether professional teachers accept distance education as an alternative to conventional education, to find out if professional teachers understand the main purpose of distance education and to find out the level of education that professional teachers on the programme ultimately like to attain. The descriptive survey design was used for the study with a sample size of 200 professional teachers. A questionnaire was the main instrument used in data collection. The study revealed that the highest level education that most of the teachers would like to attain is master's degree. The study again revealed that distance education is an alternative to conventional education and enable most professional teachers to be able to combine their professional duties or work through planning of their time. Furthermore, the study showed that distance education allows professional teachers to upgrade and update their skills and knowledge while at post.

Keywords: Distance education, Professional teachers, Ghana

Introduction
The primary aim of every country is to ensure national development and a high standard of living for its citizens. A reliable means of attaining this objective is by developing the human resource of the country. This is because human beings are the "active agent" of the productive

process (Harbison, 1973). Therefore, the relationship between education, human resource development and national development has long been established (Wattenbarger, 1971; Bowman & Anderson, 1972; Harbison, 1973). Having recognized the fact that education is the key to national development, governments are doing everything within their means to make policies that would ensure that their citizens get the best of education at all levels. The government of Ghana recognizes the critical role that education plays in national development. In view of this, government has embarked on educational reforms at all levels to make education respond to our national developmental needs (Education Reforms in Ghana, 2002). However, the increased access at the lower levels of education with the implementation of educational reforms has resulted in many qualified students applying to universities for admission but the universities could not absorb all the qualified applicants due to limited academic facilities. The result is that a large number of qualified applicants are not able to gain admission to tertiary institutions in Ghana. According to Mankoe (2006) one effective way to provide university education to thousands of qualified applicants is the distance education programme. Therefore, the study is to examine how distance education programmes can serve as an alternative means of meeting the educational needs of professional teachers in Ghana.

The study has the following objectives. (I) To ascertain whether professional teachers accept distance education as an alternative to conventional education (II) To find out if professional teachers understand the main purpose of distance education and (III) To find out the level of education that professional teachers on the programme would ultimately like to attain. The paper is divided into four sections. The first part deals with introduction to the study. The second part of the study deals with literature review. The third part discusses the methodology for the study. The fourth part documents findings of the study and the final part concentrates on managerial implications.

Review of Related Literature
Adult learning encompasses both formal and continuing education, non-formal learning and the spectrum of informal and incidental learning available in a multicultural learning society, where theory and practice-based approaches are recognized. One of such mode of education is distance education. According to Higher Education Statistics Agency (2000), In the United Kingdom, the university with the highest number of students pursuing different academic programmes is a distance education university. This indicates that distance learning is becoming an integral part of educational system in every country.

Casey (2008) defines distance education as an instructional mode in which the teacher is not in the same place at the same time as the student. In the views of Gibson (2000) distance education as education or training offered by an agency or organization with an educational mission to serve learners at remote locations via print, audio, video, computer or a combination

of these technologies. Hooper (2003) points out that distance education is the combination of face- to- face contact with teachers' independent study, and instructional support at a distance through e-mail, phone, and postal mail. According to Pecku (1995) West Africa Distance Education Association in a Newsletter sees distance education as a process that uses a combination of media to teach learners who are removed in space and/or time from their tutors. Kaufman, Watkins & Guerra (2001) see distance education as the delivery of valuable learning opportunities at convenient places and time for learners, irrespective of the institution providing the learning opportunity. Therefore, the Distance takes place where the learner and the teacher are not in the same classroom but are removed in space and/or time from each other most of the time.

According to Oliveira (1988) distance education has gained popularity all around the world in the last decade. The author thinks that it is popular and commonly upheld by many including governments, writers and educationists for reasons that are mainly economic, technological, pedagogical and socio-psychological. He postulates that distance education offers a good solution to education's most pressing problems which is due to lack of both human and capital resources. The author further notes that advance in information dissemination technology have enhanced the ability to extend educational opportunities to many who are geographically dispersed. The teaching activity itself has also seen remarkable progress. Besides these, distance education has now made life easier for people for whom access to tertiary education would be almost impossible per where they stay and work.

Paine (1988) observes that distance education removes barriers of flexible college enrolment arrangements, inaccessible courses, inappropriate or non-existence accreditation arrangements and the high costs of subsistence and substitution while employees were away on training events. The author explains that learning becomes learner-centred through modules and flexible learning systems and makes use of whatever is the best method, or methods, for meeting the learner's needs. Distance education is both a cost-effective approach, which will enhance productivity and profitability because of the large number that can enroll to pursue tertiary education.

In analyzing the target population of the Open University of the United Kingdom, Keegan and Rumble (1982) found them to include those previously deprived of higher education through lack of opportunities rather than lack of ability, those qualified school leavers who, despite expansion of conventional universities could not gain a place in such universities, those who had left school early (without gaining normal academic requirements) but who later realized they wanted or needed higher education, the many thousands of certificated non-graduate teachers who would wish to acquire graduates status and other significant groups of professional students interested in the university's course, in the number of women in further and higher education Bishop (1986) points out that distance education is more flexible than conventional education, in that the student studies in his own time, at his own time, whenever and wherever he chooses. Moreover, students are not moved from the social and economic life

of the country and workers are able to combine study with work to learn to earn without having to leave their employment and so lose income. Bishop further explains that distance education alleviates shortages whether they are of trained personnel or, of facilities (such as school places) economically and effectively. Keegan and Rumble (1992) stated that women have found distance programmes particularly attractive and that many institutions report higher proportions of housewives and women caring for young children than conventional institutions. Athabasca University, for instance, had (1990-81) 61% female to 39% male undergraduates. Distance education institutions frequently take a special interest in and are sometimes given a special mandate by society for the education of the disabled, the infirm, the hospitalized, prisoners and the aged. They teach an older age group than conventional institutions. Macintosh and Rigg (1979) also indicate that although there are a large numbers of younger students in certain specific distance education systems, it is generally the case that the students of distance education system are adults for whom education must take second or third place behind domestic and work commitments. These people are engaged in distance education for the most part either because of conventional system cannot cope with the numbers seeking education qualifications (a factor often prominent in setting up distance education in developing countries) or because their needs were not satisfied by conventional system.

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was used for this study, since the study was mostly concerned with the description of existing phenomenon. As an exploratory study, this deign best served the purpose of the study, as it helped to collect data to describe the state of affairs of distance education at UEW's Winneba study centre.

Population

The target population for the study consisted of five hundred and eight (508) Diploma students pursuing Basic Education programme by distance education at the University of Education, Winneba. In addition, these students were professional teachers who had been on the distance education programme for at least one year. This was to ensure that respondents were well informed on the topic for the study.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The researcher requested for the list of second and third year Diploma students in Basic Education, coded their names, and used the sample random technique to select two hundred (200) members of the target population to respond to the questionnaire. This sampling technique was used because it ensured that each element of the target population had an equal chance of being selected.

Research Instrument

The instrument used was the questionnaire. It was chosen because judging from the thrust of the study; it was deemed the most appropriate. The questions were carefully designed to ensure better results and the layout of the questionnaire was very clear. The rationale of the survey was explained to the respondents and information confidentiality was established. Salient point in the literature review guided the study in the selection of items for the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was structured to solicit for responses on the knowledge of distance education among professional teachers at the Winneba distance education study centre, why professional teachers patronized distance education, the level of education that they ultimately wish to attain and expectations of teachers when they embarked on the programme.

Validation

A pilot study was first of all undertaken at the UEW's Kumasi distance education study centre to test the efficacy of the instrument for the study. The questionnaire was therefore pre-tested among a total of 30 professional teachers. Churchill (2001) suggests that data collection should not begin without an adequate pre-test of the questionnaire. An analysis of the data collected for the pilot study led to the re-designing of the instrument by re-wording certain questions and deletion of others.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher sought permission from the coordinator of the Winneba distance education study centre to use his students for this research. The researcher explained to facilitators and students at the centre the purpose of the study and also established rapport with the respondents. The questionnaires were administered personally by the researcher to the respondents at the centre. The researcher was assisted by two facilitators at the centre in the collection of the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The responses elicited form the subjects of the study were tallied on tally sheets and frequencies for all the responses were determined. The frequencies were then used to interpret the information collected from the professional teachers. The total number in each category was then changed to percentages.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Results

A total of two hundred (200) respondents who were distance education diploma students of the Winneba study centre of the University of Education, Winneba, were involved in the study.

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents by gender. Out of the total respondents of 200, 96

(48%) of the total number of respondents were male while 104 (52%) were females. This indicates that both males and females were fairly represented in the sample. The dominance of female respondents in terms of numbers, confirms Keegan and Rumble's (1982) assertion that women find distance education programmes particularly attractive and that many institutions report higher proportions of housewives and women caring for young children than conventional institutions.

The statistics shown in Table 2 indicates that majority of the respondents, that is 160 (over 80%) who had taught for five years and more had now enrolled on the distance education programme to upgrade themselves. The data is in consonance with McIntosh's observation, cited in Bishop (1986), that clientele for distance education is mostly adults on the job.

Acceptance of Distance Education as an Alternative to Conventional Education

Respondents were asked if they had ever tried to pursue an academic programme through the conventional means. Table 3 indicates that only 63 (31.5%) of respondents had attempted to access university education through the conventional means, while 137 (68.5%) had not.

This is an indication that majority of respondents accept distance education as an alternative to conventional education. This view is supported by Keegan and Rumble (1992) that distance learning has become attractive and many institutions report higher proportions of housewives and women caring for young children than conventional institutions. Mankoe (2006) also puts it, 'one effective way to provide university education to thousands of qualified applicants is the distance education programme'.

Views of Respondents on the Major Purpose of Distance Education

An overwhelming majority of respondents appeared to know the purpose of distance education. From Table 4, it could be inferred that 164 (82%) of respondents indicated that in their view, the major purpose of distance education is to allow workers upgrade and update their skills and knowledge while at post. This confirms Bishop's (1986) assertion that distance education allows workers to combine study with work to learn to earn without having to leave their employment and lose income.

Ultimate Level of Education Respondent wish to attain

What level of education would teachers on the distance education programme wish to attain ultimately? This question was directed to respondents and the responses are shown in Table 5. Respondents, according to Table 5, had divergent views about the level of education they would ultimately wish to attain. 44 (22%) of respondents would wish to end at getting a diploma while74 (37%) prefer a bachelor's degree. 82 (41%) of the respondent indicated they ultimately wished to acquire a masters degree. This result indicates that higher qualifications are eating into the educational system in Ghana and a lot of students are willing and prepared to sacrifice for it.

Conclusions

Distance learning is definitely today's concept, at least to those who could not leave their jobs and attend everyday lecture. As Casey (2008) puts it, 'distance education as an instructional mode in which the teacher is not in the same place at the same time as the student'. Tertiary institutions are investing more and more in distance education to increase enrolment. Many studies have shown that distance education plays a role in delivering valuable learning opportunities at convenient place and time for learners, irrespective of the institution providing the learning opportunity (Kaufman, Watkins & Guerra, 2001). The results of Keegan and Rumble (1992) indicate that distance education programme is attractive and that many institutions report higher proportions attendance than conventional institutions and that the university with the highest number of students pursuing different academic programmes is the distance education university (Higher Education Statistics Agency in United Kingdom, 2000).

References

Bishop, G. (1986). Innovation in education. London: Macmillan Publishers.

Bowman, M. J. & Anderson, C.A. (1971). Concerning the role of educaion in development. In M.J. Bowman C.A. Anderson (eds.). Readings in the Economics of Education. Paris: UNESCO.

Casey, D. (2008). A journey to legitimacy: The historical development of distance education through technology. *Tech Trends*, 52 (2), 45-51.

Churchill, G.A. Jr. (2001). Basic marketing research. Ohio, South Western: Thomson Learning.

Education reforms in Ghana (2002). *Report of the Education Reform Review Committee in Ghana*, Legon-Accra: Adwinsa Publications GH, Ltd.

Gibson, C. C. (2000). Distance education for lifelong learning. In A. L. Wilson & E. R. Hayes (Eds.), *Handbook of adult and continuing education* (pp.423-437). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Harbison, F.W. (1973). Human resources as the wealth of nations. Oxford University.

Higher Education Statistics Agency (2000). *Higher Education Statistics for the United Kingdom, 1998/99,* Cheltenham: HESA, Table 1, 8.

Hooper, R. (2003). Assessment challenges in supported distance learning: How the ABE Distance Learning Project is implementing the Massachusetts ABE assessment policies and procedures. In M. Cora (Ed.), *Adventures in assessment: Learner– centered approaches to assessment and evaluation in adult literacy* (vol. 15, pp.5- 10). Boston: World Education.

Keegan, D. and Rumble, G. (1992). The distance teaching universities: An Appraisal. In G. Rumble and K. Harry (Eds.) The Distance Teaching Univerities. London: Croom Helm.

Mankoe, J.O. (2006). Policy analysis in education. Kumasi; Payless Publication Ltd.

McIntosh, N. & Rigg, M. (1979). Employers and the open university. Milton Keynes. Open
University Survey Research Department.

Mensah, F. & Mensah, S. (2002, August), Strategies for sustainable open and distance
learning. Available www.col.org/worldreview/volume6.htm (2012, September
18).

Oliveira, J. (1988). Trends in distance learning; A new wave. In Development
Communication   Report,   1988/4,   No.   63.   Clearing   house   on
Development Communication, US. Pp. 1-5.

Paine, N. (1988). Open learning in transition. London: Kogan Page, Ltd.

Pecku, N.K. (1995). Concept and relevance of distance education. Paper delivered at
Distance Education Awareness Creation Workshop, UVV 1995.

Wattenbarger, J. L. (1971).   Students fees and public responsibility.   In M.D.   Orwig
(ed.).

Financing Higher Education: Alternatives for the Federal Government.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Sex	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	96	48.0
Female	104	52.0
Pairwise (N)	**200**	**100.0**

Table 2: Distribution of Teaching Experience of Respondents

Year	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Less than 5	39	19.5
5-10	60	30.0
11-15	16	8.0
16-20	47	23.5
Above 20	38	19.0
Pairwise (N)	**200**	**100.0**

Table 3: Distance Education Alternative to Conventional Education

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	63	31.5
No	137	68.5
Pairwise (N)	**200**	**100.0**

Table 4: Purpose of Distance Education

Purpose	Frequency	Percentage (%)
To complement formal education	4	2.0
To allow worker upgrade and update their skills and knowledge while at post	164	82.0
To provide way for people to further their education	28	14.0
To cut down the cost in the provision of tertiary education	4	2.0
Pairwise (N)	**200**	**100.0**

Table 5: Level of Education to Attain

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Diploma	44	22.0
Bachelor's degree	74	37.0
Master's degree	82	41
Pairwise (N)	**200**	**100.0**